

DAWE, CHARLES (DAVIES) (1886 - 1958), choral conductor

Name: Charles (Davies) Dawe
Date of birth: 1886
Date of death: 1958
Spouse: Edith May Dawe (née Evans)
Child: Charles Gounod Dawe
Parent: Elizabeth Dawe (née Davies)
Gender: Male
Occupation: choral conductor
Area of activity: Music
Author: Rhidian Griffiths

Charles Dawe was born on 16 March 1886 in Taibach, Port Talbot, the second of three children of Elizabeth Dawe (b. 1848/9). His father, whose name is not known, died when Charles was a young child.

Dawe worked in local industries while taking an interest in music in his leisure time. Early in 1912 he married Edith May Evans (1891-1987), a singer from Cwmafan who had enjoyed considerable success at eisteddfodau. Their only child, Charles Gounod Dawe (1912-1961), was born in Port Talbot on 9 September 1912; before the end of that year the family sailed from Liverpool on the *Carmania* to New York, and made their home in Cleveland, Ohio, where Dawe was appointed choirmaster of Calvary Anglican church. He served in the British armed forces during World War I and returned to Cleveland to pursue a career as a music teacher and voice coach. He became an American citizen in 1927. At some point after emigrating to the U.S.A. he adopted his mother's maiden name Davies as his own middle name. The spelling 'Davis' is found in American sources.

In 1921 he founded a male choir, the 'Orpheus Male Chorus', in Cleveland; the choir gave its first concert in March of that year. Two years later, in 1923, the choir travelled to Mold to compete at the National Eisteddfod, winning the Second Competition for male choirs. They enjoyed success again on their visit to the National Eisteddfod at Swansea in 1926, where they won the Chief Male Voice competition. In 1935 they embarked on a tour of Russia. Dawe conducted the choir for 36 years until his retirement in 1957, and also conducted several other choirs in Ohio: at one time he was directing 450 choristers in eleven different groups every week. He occupied his leisure time breeding pigeons and collecting Staffordshire china.

He would regularly cross the Atlantic to attend the National Eisteddfod. He adjudicated in the music section of the National Eisteddfodau at Cardiff (1938), Denbigh (1939) and Bridgend (1948), and was strongly opposed to the introduction of the all-Welsh rule in 1950, because he felt that it imposed excessive limitations on the festival, although he and his wife were both Welsh speakers. When the National Eisteddfod visited Ystradgynlais in 1954, Dawe conducted the singing at the unveiling of a plaque on the birthplace of his friend and fellow Welsh American musician, **Daniel Protheroe**.

Another friend was the Cleveland-based Welsh businessman **Edwin S. Griffiths**: it was Griffiths who paid the expenses of the Cleveland Orpheus Choir when they visited the Swansea Eisteddfod in 1926. Dawe acted as music consultant to the Edwin S. Griffiths Foundation, and it was his influence that secured thousand of pounds in prize money from the Foundation to the National Eisteddfod. The Charles Dawe Memorial Cup is awarded every year to the winners of the female choir competition at the Eisteddfod.

During the last years of his life Dawe lived in St Petersburg, Florida, and it was there, in St Anthony's Hospital, that he died on 27 August 1958, shortly after returning from a visit to Wales. His body was transported to south Wales for a funeral service at the Wesleyan chapel in Taibach, Port Talbot, and he was buried in Goytre cemetery on 18 September 1958.

Author

Rhidian Griffiths

Sources

Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, Case Western Reserve University

The Biographical Index of W. W. Price, Aberdŷr

1891 Census

Ancestry website

Y Drych, 15 September 1958, p. 6

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