

EVANS, Sir GERAINT LLEWELLYN (1922 - 1992), singer

Name: Geraint Llewellyn Evans
Date of birth: 1922
Date of death: 1992
Spouse: Brenda Evans Evans (née Davies)
Child: Alun Evans
Child: Huw Evans
Parent: William John Evans
Parent: Charlotte May Evans (née Thomas)
Gender: Male
Occupation: singer
Area of activity: Music; Performing Arts
Author: Rhidian Griffiths

Geraint Evans was born on 16 February 1922 in William Street, Cilfynydd, the son of William John Evans (1899-1978), a coalminer, and his wife Charlotte May (née Thomas, 1901-1923). His mother died on the birth of a second child, and Geraint was raised by his mother's parents until his father remarried, and moved to Hopkinstown near Pontypridd when Geraint was ten. He left school at fourteen to work in a clothes shop in Pontypridd. At that time he also took singing lessons in Cardiff and took part in local amateur performances.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 he volunteered for service in the Royal Air Force, training as a radio engineer and taking part in concerts. At the end of the war he joined the British Forces Network, which broadcast from Hamburg, and he took advantage of the opportunity to take professional singing lessons with Theo Herrmann. After leaving the forces, he decided to embark on a singing career, and gained the (albeit reluctant) support of the local authority to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. It was there in 1948 that he made his first appearance in opera, as Don Alfonso in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and shortly afterwards he appeared at Covent Garden in a small part in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. His natural gift for acting and for characterization meant that he was very much at home in opera - he claimed that he liked to develop a character 'from the feet up' - and he mastered 73 roles in 53 operas in the course of his career. Some of these portrayals, such as Figaro in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Leporello in *Don Giovanni* and Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, and especially *Falstaff* in the opera of the same name by Verdi, are acknowledged classics. He was also honest enough to acknowledge the occasional failure: he sang the principal role in Verdi's *Rigoletto* only once and decided that it did not suit him.

He performed widely in Europe and North America and paved the way for other singers from Wales. He sang for 24 consecutive seasons in San Francisco, and performed regularly at the Vienna Staatsoper, Chicago, La Scala Milan and Salzburg. He also sang regularly at Covent Garden, appearing there for the last time on 4 June 1984 in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. Some directors found him a difficult colleague, but he was a perfectionist. It was the source of some disappointment to him that he was not given more opportunities as a director.

Geraint Evans was a patriotic Welshman who gave much support to other Welsh people in the opera world in Europe. He was deeply touched on the night of his farewell performance at Covent Garden when chorus, soloists and audience joined in the singing of 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau' to close the evening. He had also performed a farewell concert at the National Eisteddfod in Swansea in 1982. Since 1966 he had had a summer home at Aberaeron, and he retired there completely at the end of his career, being very much at home in the community and on good terms with the townspeople.

He married Brenda Evans Davies (1920-2010) from Cilfynydd on 27 March 1948, and they had two sons, Alun and Huw; in his autobiography Geraint Evans praises his wife for her support and her ability to give constructive criticism on his performances.

He was invested CBE in 1959 and knighted ten years later. He also received the white robe of Gorsedd Cymru. Geraint Evans claims a special place among Welsh singers, especially as a pioneer in the world of opera.

Geraint Evans died of a heart attack at Bronglais Hospital, Aberystwyth on 19 September 1992, and his ashes were buried in the cemetery of Llanddewi Aber-arth near Aberaeron. A memorial service was held at Westminster Abbey on 27 November the same year.

Author

Rhidian Griffiths

Sources

Geraint Evans, *Sir Geraint Evans: A Knight at the Opera* (London 1984)

The Times, 21 September 1992

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Geraint Evans](#)

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