

ALLAN YN Y FAN : LIVE REVIEW / By Mick Tams Folk Wales online magazine February 2012

Allan Yn Y Fan exploded onto the stage with a charged-up version of Morgan Rhatlar and the well-known song Hen Ferchentan, segueing into Pat Shaw's Coleg Y Prifysgol Abertawe. Fiddler and vocalist Meriel Field took charge over the band's Mari Lwyd song, Canu Cwnsela, which melted into the album's title track, Pwnco. Meriel's a very able and fine singer, her clear voice riding high over the urgency of the instruments, and she contributes much Welsh-language material to the band's repertoire.

Allan Yn Y Fan's trick is a highly original take on some well-known chestnuts, carefully arranging them to give a whole new lease of life (I particularly like Fernhill's catchphrase of "deconstructing" the Welsh tradition!) Dacw 'Nghariad, the song collected in Whitchurch, Cardiff, Meriel's lovely setting of Tra Bo Dau and even the Victorian poem-turned-nursery rhyme Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star must have got musicians thinking: "Why couldn't I have composed that?" That's one's easy – because Allan Yn Y Fan thought of it first!

Geoff Cripps anchored the set with solid guitar and bass, while the ever-grinning Chris Jones lit the blue touchpaper on accordion and Meriel played the dancing fiddle. Kate Strudwick supplied some beautiful, spine-shivering harmonies on recorder, flute and voice, and Linda Simmonds filled out the band's sound on mandolin, octave mandola and bodhran.

The whole atmosphere in the Morgan Room was charged with feel-good anticipation, and the heartening thing is that the monoglot Newport audience really took to Welsh music and tradition. Sue Oates deserves a plaudit for chairing the Festival and steering it down the right road.

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