



NEWiD Reviews

The Living Tradition, Issue 117, Andy Piper

“...There’s a small (and some might say perfectly formed) portion of Britain called Wales, that once seemed to want to keep its own traditional music to itself; once upon a time, little was heard in these isles beyond the border. Allan Yn Y Fan, a multi-instrumental and vocal sextet, has been in the forefront of the local folk scene for decades, doing its part in bringing Welsh music to the world’s attention.

The band’s most recent album, their sixth to date, is entitled NEWiD, which is a Welsh word for change, and also strangely appropriate in English considering the new-ID/line-up, as the band is sporting two new members; joining Geoff Cripps et al are Alan Cooper on violin and Catrin O’Neill on lead vocals.

Being home-recorded, NEWiD has a gentler feel than some productions, just as crafted but less pressured as might come from a professional studio recording. This album comprises 12 traditional and new song and dance tracks, ranging from lively to sublime, and almost all are derived from Wales.

Most of the instrumentals are arrangements of traditional tunes, including Dwr Glan, Sbaen Wendydd, and a smattering of slip jigs, whereas original pieces include lively musical tips of the hat to folk ‘celebrity’ Kairdiff’s Frank Hennessey and the quickstepping Bishop of Llandaff. Tune For Lillian is also original, a haunting tribute to a former landlady, and there are even two inevitable pieces dedicated to new musical implements!

Songs on the album are mostly traditional, including the almost magical Dafydd Y Garreg Wen, performed a cappella by Catrin alone, and jointly on Cân Merthyr, a bilingual warning about the fierce wives of Merthyr.

Allan Yn Y Fan is well known to those of us living in and around the counties and borders, hills, valleys and dance-floors of Wales. It's with good reason hands clap and feet tap for them, and if you could bottle it, this vintage would be labelled NEWiD."

• ***Songlines, Issue 122, November 2016, Nathanel Handy***

"...This sixth album from the traditional Welsh outfit also sees the unveiling of a six-piece line-up and a new singer. In the world of Celtic music, Wales is often overshadowed by its cousins Scotland and Ireland, despite the fact that the Welsh language is the best preserved of all the Celtic tongues in the UK. This is reflected in this set of traditional songs and new compositions.

The album title means 'Change' in Welsh and can also be interpreted as 'new identity' in English, reflecting Allan yn y Fan's changes as the band marks its 20th anniversary. But the foundations of this leading twmpath (the Welsh form of ceilidh) band are still intact. Founder members Geoff Cripps (guitar, bass and bouzouki), Chris Jones (accordion, flute and whistle), Linda Simmonds (mandolin, mandola and bodhran) and Kate Strudwick (flute, recorder and whistle) are joined by fiddler Alan Cooper and singer Catrin O'Neill. These significant additions add another dimension to the distinctive flute and whistle sound on both tune sets and ballads...."

• ***Shire Folk, October 2016, Lisa Avenell***

"...Allan yn y Fan ('out in a bit!') are a six-piece Twmpath (a sort of ceilidh) band with their roots firmly planted in a strong Welsh tradition. Their sixth album, NEWiD (a neat play on newid, the Welsh word for change) is both a cementing and a celebration of the band's new six-piece line-up, or new identity.

Comprising a balance of songs and instrumentals, both traditional and original, this is unmistakably Welsh. As an ex-pat, born and bred in Pembrokeshire, NEWiD invokes a strong sense of nostalgia, taking me back to the Eisteddfods of my youth. And in a good way.

Instrumental tunes and sets are the mainstay of the album, with the band making good use of their comprehensive array of instruments - with all six members bringing multiple instruments to the line-up. There is plenty to get your toes tapping ('Sbaen Wendenydd', 'Bishop of Llandaff's & Frank Hennessey's Kairdiff Quickstep'), and a good dose of gentle beauty ('Tune for Lillian', 'Dafydd y Garreg Wen').

Whilst I personally don't find NEWiD as exciting as some of the more contemporary offerings from the current Welsh folk scene, Allan yn y Fan competently demonstrate that the Celtic tradition is alive and well in Wales - reminding us that it's not all about Scotland and Ireland!

• ***FATEA Magazine, September 2016, Paul Rawcliffe***

“...Traditional Celtic music is one of the greatest joys of the British Isles and I for one cannot get enough of the great diversity in Celtic music that we see in the current market. Traditions from England, Ireland, Scotland and even the Isle of Man all have their unique features and elements that make them what they are.

When thinking about the Welsh traditional, Allan Yn Y Fan are likely to be one of the first names that people will put forward. The band has been operating since 1996 and has nicely slotted itself as the cornerstone of traditional Welsh Music.

Their latest album, NEWiD, has been long wanted and certainly does not disappoint. The album just shows us that Allan Yn Y Fan will never disappoint and will give hungry Celtic fans a full banquet to enjoy.

What I have always enjoyed about Allan Yn Y Fan is that they have never tried to create

their own 'Unique' sound and base every track around that sound. Allan Yn Y Fan treats every single piece of music they create as an entirely separate entity. The use of instruments and vocals throughout the entire album are different for every single piece of music. This also shows us that as a group they are the definition of working together. We clearly feel a group of people have come together to create beautiful music.

We are introduced to the album with 'Marwnad yr Ehedydd'. This track opens up with a slow and soothing guitar to ease you up before powerful and magical vocals pull through to give you goose bumps and really starts the album on a complete high. Celtic songs are notoriously difficult but sound like something from another world when done with the kind of talent and work that we have in this track. Shivers.

Allan Yn Y Fan are not a one trick pony. Celtic songs are a challenge in their own right but are just one branch on the tree of Celtic variety. 'Sbaen Wenddydd' gives us a great instrumental piece that is everything you want from Celtic music. The music is fast paced and with a great variety in instruments that really gets your foot tapping.

One thing in particular that stuck out about this album is the variety in instruments throughout the entire album. It helps to keep the music as fresh for listeners. Allan Yn Y Fan are on their sixth album now all thanks to the way they can give every piece of music its own spark of life.

'Gorthrwm y Gweithiwr' is a particular track that stuck out for me. I don't speak any traditional Celtic languages but this song is one that was sung with such rhythm and passion that you can feel that there is a story being told. I have always regarded the best singers in any tradition to be those who are story tellers. Similarly the band's lead singer Catrin gives this same feeling on the a capella track 'Dafydd y Garreg Wen'. A story is being told and you don't even need to understand the words to feel that.

Allan Yn Y Fan are a true roots band, they keep the beauty of Celtic music alive and relevant in a world with such musical diversity. I for one hope that I get to hear at least

another six albums.....”

• ***folkwords.com, September 07, 2016, Charlie Elland***

“...‘**NEWiD**’ from *Allan Yn Y Fan* - **strikingly beautiful music played by accomplished musicians**. There’s a new album from Welsh band Allan Yn Y Fan, called ‘NEWiD’, which serves its purpose in both Welsh and English (Newid is a Welsh word for ‘change’, and although it stretches the point somewhat, it could in English NEWiD album coverstand for ‘New ID’ because there’s new musicians in the Allan Yn Y Fan line-up - told you it was stretching the point.) Semantics aside, ‘NEWiD’ is a fine example of folk music from the land of the red dragon with a combination of tradition and original tunes and songs, delivered in both Welsh and English - and worry not if you don’t have the Welsh language, the beauty of its sung word demands nothing more than to listen to its poetry.

So what do you get on ‘NewiD’? There’s traditional Welsh songs like ‘Marwnad yr Ehedydd’, ‘Can Merthyr’ and ‘Dafydd Y Garreg Wen’, folk dance and ‘tune tradition’ represented by ‘Sbaen Wenddydd’, ‘Dwr Glan’ and ‘Pibddawns Y Mwnci’, with originals including Kate Strudwick’s delightful ‘Tune for Lillian’ and ‘Bishop of Llandaff’s and Frank Hennessey’s Kairdiff Quicksteps’ from Chris Jones. All in all, an album of strikingly beautiful music played by accomplished musicians and capable of touching your soul, making you dance with joy - or both.

Allan Yn Y Fan are Catrin O’Neill (lead vocals, bodhran) Chris Jones (accordion, flute, low whistle, vocals) Alan Cooper (fiddle) Linda Simmons (mandolin, mandola, bodhran, vocals) Kate Strudwick (flute, alto flute, recorders, whistle, vocals) and Geoff Cripps (guitar, bass, bouzouki, vocals) with on selected tracks Diane Esplin (cello) and Robert Idwal Jones (drums)....”

• ***fruk folk & roots music webzine, 20 September, 2016, Helen Gregory***

“... **ALLAN YN Y FAN: NEWID – FEATURED REVIEW** - Allan Yn Y Fan mark their twentieth anniversary year as one of Wales’ top purveyors of what the band succinctly describe as “Celtic music for the 21st century” with their sixth album, NEWiD (‘Change’, yn Saesneg), a collection of twelve (mostly) traditional tunes arranged by the sextet and reflecting their strengths as a live act.

‘Marwnad Yr Ehedydd/Tune for a New Bought Accordion’ combines the traditional (‘Marwnad Yr Ehedydd’) with the new (Kate Strudwick’s ‘Tune for a New Bought Accordion’) with a quiet confidence that underlines the band’s deep love of their cultural heritage as well as their skill as musicians. Alternating between a sparse melancholy (well-suited to Catrin O’Neill’s crystal voice) and a more uptempo passion, the set makes a fine opener which paves the way nicely for the instrumental ‘Sbaen Wenddydd,’ a celebration of Spanish connections to Wales, with Alan Cooper’s nimble fiddle-playing to the fore.

Sung unaccompanied and alternating between the Welsh and English languages, ‘Cân Merthyr’ displays not only a keen sense of dry wit but also showcases how well the ensemble’s disparate vocals mesh together. A shortish piece, it makes a well-placed bridge between the previous track and the album’s fourth tune – or, more accurately, set of two tunes, both instrumentals – ‘O’Connell’s Extension/Cooper’s Bow,’ written by Chris Jones and Alan Cooper respectively. ‘O’Connell’s Extension’ celebrates what the CD’s liner notes refer to as the “hypermarket wars” between two shops in the small village of Brideswell, County Roscommon, in the Republic of Ireland. Chris’ accordion captures the mood of the moment perfectly before stepping back for the fiddle showcase that is ‘Cooper’s Bow,’ a tune which “came out of Alan’s spontaneous delight at the purchase of a new ‘implement.’”

Tradition has it that ‘Dafydd y Garreg Wen’ (‘David of the White Rock’) was composed by the 18th-century harpist David Owen on his deathbed. With lyrics added nearly a century later by the poet John Ceiriog Hughes, it’s since become one of Wales’ most

famous airs and Catrin's a capella rendition is, I think, one of the most haunting versions of the composition that I've ever heard.

'Slip Jigs' tips its hat to the Irish step dancing tradition with a set of three tunes – 'Jig Pultague/Taflwn yr Hosan/Diferion Arian' – which serve as a reminder of the long-standing historic links between two of the most ancient nations of the Celtic diaspora. In the first tune, 'Jig Pultague,' Geoff Cripps' intricate fingerstyle guitar provides the springboard for some gorgeous, airy multi-layered flutes before a deceptively simple chord progression modulates into the fiddle-powered 'Taflwn yr Hosan.' The sequence is completed by the graceful 'Diferion Arian,' where the interplay between Geoff's guitar and Linda Simmonds' mandolin, as delicate as faded lace, ties the ensemble together as the flowing accordion of Chris Jones intertwines with Kate's flute. The set is one of the finest of its kind that I've heard and is a definite highlight of the album.

Described as "a song of longing to be free from work", the CD sleeve notes add that it's unclear if 'Y Gaseg Felen' ('The Chestnut Mare') is a traditional tune or whether it was composed by the historian and activist Meredydd Evans, from whom it was collected in the 1960s. This ambiguity is reflected in the band's skilful arrangement which sets the melody to a very contemporary folk backing. Underpinned by a circular chord progression, Catrin's vocals soar above gently undulating flute and string lines to create a dreamy and imaginative soundscape. The reflective mood continues in the instrumental 'Tune for Lilian', which was composed by Kate to commemorate an unexpected legacy from her former landlady from 35 years ago. The sense of empathy which pervades the arrangement is truly touching and the piece is one of my favourite tracks.

The set 'Dŵr Glan/Russian Reel/Pibddawns Y Mwnci' sandwiches two traditional tunes between a new composition by Kate and the mix works very well indeed. 'Dŵr Glan' ('Fresh Water') refers to the New Year's custom in which Calennig singers would sprinkle water on the doors of houses for good luck in the coming year and powerfully portrays the sense of being outdoors beneath cold, whirling snow flurries. Kate's

'Russian Reel' offers a more uptempo take on the wintry theme, setting the scene for the celebratory 'Pibddawns Y Mwnci' ('The Monkey's Hornpipe'), which provides a fittingly raucous conclusion.

An abrupt change of mood is heralded in the a capella opening to 'Gorthrwm Y Gweithiwr' ('Oppression of the Workers'), a mid-19th century protest ballad collected in Ebbw Vale at a time when it was becoming abundantly clear that the financial and material rewards of the Industrial Revolution were not finding their way to the workers in the mines and ironworks. My Welsh is a little too rusty to follow the lyrics exactly, but the sense of injustice transcends language in this slow-burning arrangement.

The penultimate 'Bishop of Llandaff's and Frank Hennessy's Kairdiff Quick Steps' is a product of a 2014 commission to write music inspired by the people and places of the city of Cardiff. The idea of a dancing clergyman is mind-boggling enough on its own, but accompanied by a nod of appreciation to the near-legendary folk singer and radio presenter Frank Hennessy – "the professor of real Kairdiff speak" – takes the tune into the realms of the positively surreal. Nevertheless, there's a sense of fun at play here which is a pleasure to hear expressed so clearly in this gloriously unhinged arrangement. The album closes with 'Ym Mhontypridd Mae'n Nghariad,' a traditional Welsh love song about a young farmer hoping to impress his beloved with his prized speckled cows. It's a slow and stately performance and, combined with the nuances of the story, brings the record to an emphatic and emotional conclusion. Watch the video premiere for Ym Mhontypridd Mae'n Nghariad below:

NEWiD captures Allan Yn Y Fan at a specific moment in time and finds this long-established and well-regarded band still at the top of their game and clearly enjoying the music they make. Combining a mix of original compositions and their arrangements of traditional music and song, NEWiD is as fine a showcase as you'll find of their unique vision of "Celtic music for the 21st century" and is sure to become a firm favourite of long-term fans and newcomers alike...."

• **Sonic Bandwagon, September 2016, Mike Ainscoe**

“...‘Newid’ being the Welsh for ‘change’ – signifying maybe a change in direction for Welsh music as it make inroads into the mainstream, particularly in the folk area. Sera Owen and 9bach have been on the radar recently, while Alln Yn Y Fan’s sixth album continues to promote a strong identity with the Welsh language, culture and history playing a formidable part of the record.

It’s a rustic folk sound if there ever were one, with the blend of the Welsh language giving the songs an ethereal feel. Rustic too as in providing a soundtrack straight from the greenwood – the ‘coeds’ – where you can picture lively frolics and romps, particularly early doors with ‘Sbaen Wenddydd’.

Merges into a medieval feel and combined with the acapella harmony work they combine interpretations of traditional tunes as well as the first recording of a mid 19th century protest ballad – beware 19th century iron masters! The use of the Welsh language might alienate some listeners in terms of accessibility but kudos to anyone who remains true to their own culture and especially to a band who remain dedicated to sticking a Welsh flag firmly on the folk map....”

• **R2 Rock'n'Reel Magazine, 4* Review, September 2016, Dai Jeffries**

“...Having suffered the enforced retirement of Meriel Field, Allan Yn Y Fan have taken time to regroup, recruiting vocalist Catrin O'Neill and fiddler Alan Cooper, who just happens to own a studio. NEWiD is their sixth album and the title means 'change': most appropriate. The blend of instruments remains as before with Chris Jones's accordion, flute and low whistle and Kate Strudwick's array of aerophones over the strings of Linda Simmonds and Geoff Cripps, now joined by Cooper's fiddle. Although Robert Idwal Jones plays drums on two tracks, the main percussion is still bodhran — played by both Linda and Catrin. The majority of the material is traditional although Chris, Kate and

Alan contribute tunes. The band's music has mellowed and matured over the last couple of years although they still find room for a jokey piece like 'Can Merthyr'. The opening track, 'Marwnad Yr Ehedydd', a song attributed to the death of Owain Glyndwr is paired with a new tune by Kate and sets the mood for the album. 'Y Gaseg Felen' is a particularly lovely song, graced with Diana Esplin's cello, and Catrin's short a cappella solo 'Dafydd Y Garreg Wen' is delightful. The playing is as excellent as ever but Allan Yn Y Fan don't kick the cachu quite so much these days....”

• ***fRoots Magazine, September 2016, Simon Jones***

“...Scrubbed down, suited, booted, extra personnel, more democracy, wider repertoire, Allan Yn Y Fan you might think are different people these days. There is an air of confidence which, while not missing from previous albums, was never so obvious as on NEWiD. In fact as they point out, split the title and despite the Welsh meaning of change, then the band have a newiD. Recorded in fiddler Alan Cooper's home studio, there was clearly a more relaxed way of working about these sessions and a confidence which means they've taken chances which have paid off handsomely.

One is to leave things out as much as put them in, so there's a spinetingling Dafydd Y Garreg Wen from new singer Catrin O'Neill, leaving just box and fiddle to play a selection of the tunes. In fact while they've always been strong on melodies NEWiD has a much broader, potent collection of jigs and reels which vary in pace and setting from Kate Strudwick's majestic Tune For Lillian to a commission the band received to write about the places and people of Cardiff, thus Bishop Of Landaff's & Frank Hennessy's Kairdiff Quickstep. Blimey, those titles are complex enough! Nice touch too that the album is a tip of the hat to the late Dr Meredydd Evans, who passed on songs to Catrin. Nor are they above doing some digging of their own, Gothrwm Y Gweithiwr is a workers' rights ballad that's over 150 years old, threatening all kinds of hellfire and damnation if the iron masters didn't treat their workers fairly.

With everything kept as in-house as possible not only have they progressed on most

fronts but they've created a modus operandi which'll stand them in good stead. What next? Well they're touring and festivals are missing a trick if they haven't the open ears to book them sharpish. Known to be believers in Welsh trad, it'd be great to see if they could write more songs in the idiom.

Album six, Allan Yn Y Fan wear their hearts on their sleeve, an undeniable force in Welsh music, NEWid their compelling calling card and convincing new face. Bright, brave and dazzling stuff....”

• ***folk.wales/magazine, 4* Review, September 2016, Mick Tems***

“...The album’s Welsh title translates as Change; two years have gone since the departure of the lovely Meryl, and Allan Yn Y Fan have recruited in her considerable gap the sparkling silver voice of Catrin O’Neill and veteran fiddler Alan Cooper, an inspiring musician who has gathered many admiring compliments under his belt. This album, enclosed in the wonderful artist Chris Neale’s painting of the spectacular Brecon Beacons, is a total joy; both Catrin and Alan have contributed new ideas, new songs and new tunes, and the band are ready and willing to show their exciting revitalised mettle.

Newid comes after the band’s 20-year musical odyssey, with four albums, one EP and Cool, Calm And Collected, a 2014 compilation; Allan Yn Y Fan’s portfolio is a heady mixture of well-known songs, dressed up with strong and proud arrangements, and traditional and written tunes from the rich, overflowing welsh folk scene. Catrin takes the lead on ‘Marwnad Yr Ehedydd’ (Elegy for the Lark), her beautiful voice just brimful with emotion, female harmonies and the instruments just taking off; the song is generally attributed to Owain Glyndŵr, the last native Welsh person to hold the title Prince Of Wales. The track segues into Kate Strudwick’s ‘Tune For A New Bought Accordion’, her writing blossoming and maturing on a wondrous, dancing jig. ‘Sbaen Wendydd’ offers two gems from the Welsh Folk Dance Society collection Blodau’r Grug marking Welsh and Spanish tune connections, and a macaronic ‘Can Merthyr’ bemoans a demanding

wife from hell. Chis Jones' 'O'Connell's Extension' celebrates supermarket wars in Brideswell, County Roscommon; between them, they offer anything from bars to burials in this tiny hamlet. 'Cooper's Bow', by the aforesaid Alan, is brilliant fiddle mastery and a workshop for fiddle scholars everywhere.

'Dafydd Y Garreg Wen' is one of Wales' most famous airs, composed by the 18th-century harper David Owen with lyrics added nearly 100 years later by John Ceiriog Hughes; Catrin copes admirably with a whole regiment of classical divas, who had claimed this song as their own. The band thank the amazing Robin Huw Bowen for pointing out the slip-jigs 'Jig Pultague' and 'Taflwn Yr Hosan' to them; and Catrin interprets the unusual and utterly lovely 'Y Gaseg Felen', collected by Merêd Evans, as the high point in Allan Yn Y Fan's repertoire on this album.

The songs and the enticing tunes keep flowing until the end of the album; Kate composed the serene 'Tune For Lillian', as the result of a very unexpected legacy from her landlady who she hadn't seen for 35 years, and the haunting 'Dwr Glan' – a custom of the New Year's Water, which Calennig singers would sprinkle on the doors of the houses for good luck in the coming year. 'Gorthrwm Y Gweithiwr', a song of Beaufort in the Gwent Valleys, tells about the oppression of workers and warnings what will happen to the masters come Judgment Day. Chris composes 'Bishop Of Llandaff's' and the band pays respect to 'Frank Hennessy's Kairdiff Quicksteps'. The whole album goes out on a high in 'Ym Mhontypridd Mae'n Nghariad'; Linda Simmonds keeps the energy flowing, and Geoff Cripps solidly anchors the whole shebang with his guitar and bass. All in all, it's a very positive album, overflowing with confidence and sheer vitality – for God's sake, buy it!..."

• ***Buzz Magazine, 4* Review, 31 August 2016, NG***

"...this, the sixth album by Allan Yn Y Fan, marks their 20th year active as a band. While not an extraordinarily long time to be playing this style of deep-rooted folk music,

the sextet's experience is reflected in their expertise - I doubt there's an ensemble in Wales who could beat AYYF at their own game. That being Welsh-language tunes, variously rollicking and tender, with richly Celtic instrumentation and subject matter including oppressed workers, former landladies and professional Cardiffian Frank Hennessey...."

• **Morning Star, 31 August 2016, James Miller**

"...While Scottish folk music may be as healthy as it's ever been, very little from Wales seems to make it east of Offa's Dyke.

So it was refreshing to lay hands on NEWiD (Steam Pie Records) by Allan Yn Y Fan, 20-year veterans of Welsh folk who are doing their best to put that to rights.

This ranges from a traditional lament for Owain Glyndwr through harp airs and slip jigs to a 19th-century protest song sending a dire warning to the ironworks bosses of Ebbw Vale.

It's an intriguing glimpse of the riches of Welsh folk and its place in the Celtic tradition, which both whets the appetite for much more and makes me painfully aware of what an English-language monoglot loses through ignorance of the other languages of Britain...."

• **Liverpool Sound and Vision, 4* Review, 24th August 2016, Ian D. Hall**

"...Change is in the air, it is how we deal with it that separates us from the rest of humanity. Not always a good thing, change happens regardless, it is the slow tune played out by time to keep us on our toes, it is the steady march which beats out against the rust and decay and whilst it might not be considered a good thing, it is inevitable.

Change though for Welsh Celtic band Allan Yn Y Fan obviously works and in their latest album NEWiD, the sound of the fiddle is refined and the experience of the production a

joy to behold; change may be a word that put fear into the hearts of some but for this Welsh six-piece, change is the next stage of evolution and the sound is harmonious bliss.

NEWiD spells out a dynamic shift that previously had been under closely guarded Irish and Scottish hands. When people think of Welsh music in the 21st Century, unless they have the wherewithal to go searching in the most hidden tunnels for a new sound, they perhaps quite rightly think back to the bands that closed the old century, the likes of The Alarm, Stereophonics and The Manic Street Preachers; the aggression, the extreme bounty that comes with such bands always pushing the heart along in the right direction.

Allan Yn Y Fan though add a certain discretion to the popular culture, once the preserve of the other Celtic voices, and whilst some may say it plays into the hands of national ideals, rather it should be seen as just conformation that to be immersed in your roots is to understand where you came from.

In tracks such Sbaen Wenddydd, O' Connell's Extension/Cooper's Bow, Tune For Lillian and Bishop of Llandaff's and Frank Hennessy's Kairdiff Quickstep, Allan Yn Y Fan showcase the very best of Welsh/Celtic traditional music and the art of the brand new song over 12 exhilarating pulses of the fiddles bow coupled with the theatrics and exuberance of the other instruments on show.

Played with dexterous agility and sublime mastery of their instrument's subtle voice, Allan Yn Y Fan roar in a new regime and it is one that embraces change...."

• **folking.com, Tony Birch 24th August 2016**

"...Music has a rare ability to stir deep emotions in us. One of the best is happiness and that is exactly what NEWiD, the latest album from Allan Yn Y Fan, does. It's a glorious celebration of music performed with a buoyancy and lightness of touch that only good musicians who are having a good time can produce.

Newid is the Welsh word for change, but it also works in English as new id and both of those apply to this band. The addition of Alan Cooper and Catrin O'Neill to the existing quartet of Geoff Cripps, Chris Jones, Linda Simmonds and Kate Strudwick give them an enormous range. Between them they can summon five vocalists and more than a dozen different instruments.

The majority of the twelve tracks on the album are traditional Welsh tunes, sung in both Welsh and English, opening with the traditional song 'Marwnad yr Ehedydd' or 'Skylark Elegy'. Catrin O'Neill's wonderfully clear voice certainly soars in response.

In an album full of absolute gems it can be difficult to pick out just a few tracks to give the flavour of the whole but Chris Jones' 'Bishop of Llandaff's and Frank Hennessey's Kairdiff Quickstep' deserves mention not just for the title length but for showcasing the range of instruments the band can play at such a high level.

'Can Merthyr', sung a capela, show another facet. This story, as old as time, of a man thinking he can get the better of his better half is a salutatory warning to husbands everywhere but also an example of the vocal abilities of the band, which they use to such good effect here.

The final stand-out track to mention is Kate Strudwick's beautiful and moving 'Tune for Lilian' which has a back story involving her University landlady, a legacy and possibly a dead cat. She tells the story far better than I could so it's the final inducement you need to see the band live at the first opportunity.

The album is released on the 16th September and is available to pre-order now on Propermusic...."

NEWID – Steam Pie Records SPCD10185. Released 2016

