

## Beyond Borders: The Female Welsh Pop Voice

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For all its reputation as a musical culture, the number of women pop stars to have emerged from Wales can be counted charitably on two hands, with some fingers to spare. Wales is a small country, host to two rich linguistic cultures, each with its own musical heritage and traditions, yet very few musicians of either gender have crossed over from one tradition to the other. The rarity of a female singer making such a border crossing is marked, allowing for a delicate lineage to be traced across the decades, from the 1960s to the present, revealing certain commonalities of experience, acceptance, and reversion. With this in mind, I would like to draw a linguistic and cultural connection between two determinedly different Welsh women singers. In the 1960s, when women's voices were the mainstays of Motown, the folk circuit and the Haight-Ashbury, in Wales only Mary Hopkin managed to shift from Welsh-language to Anglo-American pop; thirty years later, Cerys Matthews made the same journey. These two women bear certain similarities: they both come from South Wales, they are both singers whose first, or preferred, language is Welsh, and they both found their niche in the Anglo-American mainstream market. These two women faced the larger cultural problems of linguistic and musical border-crossings, but more importantly, they challenged the place of the female pop voice in Wales, and of the female Welsh pop voice in Anglo-America. 1

The subtext of Welsh-language popular music has always been the urgency of community formation, without cultural hierarchy or any deference to fame, local or national. Welsh pop evolved for the benefit, and furtherance, of the Welsh-speaking community.<sup>1</sup> The Welsh pop music 'industry' is not driven by financial reward. Critical acclaim and public exposure in Wales are fairly easy to attain, but the trappings of fame in the Anglo-American market are antithetical to the cultural and political purposes of Welsh popular music and are, therefore, not worth acknowledging. It is fair to say that a Welsh musician's place is in the home, and the home is Wales. 2

A Welsh musician's relationship with the dominant Anglo-American culture is largely determined by the linguistic tradition from which she emerged. For monoglot Anglophone Welsh musicians, the drive to succeed in the larger, mainstream market is a given; for bilingual Welsh musicians, the drive to cross over is a compromise, linguistically and culturally. Though the process of domestication – the adoption of a 'foreign' cultural product, Anglo-American 3

popular music, into the vernacular language – is common to a multiplicity of cultures, the adoption of a ‘foreign’ language – English – is much more perilous to Welsh popular music, and effectively reverses the domestication process. Indeed, this linguistic crossover has historically been seen as particularly damaging to the future of Welsh pop and, by extension, the Welsh community. A successful attempt at this type of crossover meant that a Welsh musician would abandon her roots for recognition in Anglo-America, and that other musicians would be similarly swayed from enriching the Welsh language for what amounts to a negligible financial reward. While many musicians protest that they maintain a sense of ‘home’ culture – some essential ‘Welshness’ – while singing in language many consider to be foreign, this is a problematic idea and very difficult to sustain.

In his article, ‘A Theoretical Model for the Sociomusicological Analysis of Popular Musics’, John Shepherd writes that 4

when the social, political and economic environment is given, unchangeable and experienced by all in much the same way, there is no need to spell it out and explicitly discuss it. One simply reproduces it, and communicates personally and intuitively within it. The communication is from within the person, and is in continual tension with the superimposed abstract framework, whether social or musical.<sup>2</sup>

Though Shepherd was referring specifically to the blues, there are some important parallels to draw here with Welsh popular music and the idea of an essential ‘Welshness’. For the majority of Wales’s modern cultural history, the Nonconformist chapel was the focus of Welsh social life. The chapel was the spiritual and social home of the Welsh speaking communities scattered throughout Wales, and as such it exerted a powerful influence over the modernization of Welsh cultural life. It was, to use Shepherd’s words, given, unchangeable, and experienced by all Welsh speakers in much the same way. Even after the first Welsh ‘pop boom’ in the mid-1960s, the chapel was still a primary sponsor of cultural production. It is therefore impossible to think of the development of Welsh-language popular music in the same chronological terms as its Anglophone counterpart. Of course, Anglophone popular music existed in Wales in the post-war years, but the process of creating a popular culture in the Welsh language was very slow, and ultimately influenced by a longer, culturally-specific musical tradition. This tradition had been nurtured in local, regional and national Eisteddfodau – cultural festivals in which poets and musicians compete in strictly ruled metrical and musical forms such as *cynghanedd*<sup>3</sup> and *cerdd dant*,<sup>4</sup> respectively – and in local and national organizations aimed at the preservation of the Welsh language, such as the omnipresent Nonconformist chapel and the Welsh League of Youth (*Urdd Gobaith Cymru*).<sup>5</sup> Within this cultural framework, original songs written in the Welsh language were, generally speaking, based on existing folk melodies (British, American or Welsh), and lyrical themes tended toward the patriotic, the pastoral, and the chaste.

When contemporary Welsh pop music emerged in the mid-1960s it was 5

inextricably linked to a period of intense and sustained language activism. If musicians or bands wished to sing covers of popular Anglo-American songs they did so in the Welsh language, thus providing a 'native' alternative to what was at that time the steadily encroaching Anglicisation of a very fragile linguistic culture. This domestication was a political act and a powerful statement of community ethos. Musicians' membership in the Welsh Language Society (*Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*) was safely assumed, from its founding in 1963, and most pop concerts from the late-1960s until very recently were organized by, and in order to promote, the *Cymdeithas*. But for those first few years there was no network of small venues for Welsh pop concerts, and most were therefore held in town halls or chapel vestries. Because of this latter patronage, as it evolved, Welsh pop lagged several decades behind its Anglophone parent. It was, until 1973, primarily acoustic, and remarkably innocent.

Against this background, a particular kind of vocal style emerged which was central to the Welsh pop-musical aesthetic:<sup>6</sup> unadorned, uninflected, much like the physical spaces – chapels, Eisteddfod fields – which gave rise to its practice. The reproduction of this central and learned aesthetic is a primary marker of membership in Welsh cultural life, and it is common across gender and genre boundaries. Following on from Shepherd I would like to suggest therefore that there is inscribed in the Welsh pop voice the connection to a cultural history which has been set, for the last several hundred years, in opposition to the dominant cultural paradigm of the larger geopolitical area: Anglophone, Anglican, Anglo-American. A departure from this understood 'Welsh vocal style' necessarily involves a kind of cultural compromise, and it goes back to what I suggested earlier, that there is a multi-step process involved in the domestication of Anglo-American popular musical style. And here is where I would like to problematise the female Welsh pop voice.

For Welsh women singers there is often an additional step in the crossover process outlined above, that of adopting a 'masculine', 'rock' voice. This raises issues not only of cultural acceptance or rejection, but, more simply, of image and (re-) interpretation. There are certainly examples of the female Welsh pop voice in the late-1960s, for example, in groups such as *Perlau Tâf* (Taff Pearls), *Y Diliau* (The Honeycombs) and *Y Pelydrau* (The Rays), and in the popular duo *Tony ac Aloma*. But 'pop' in the Welsh sense is notoriously all-inclusive, and these early female Welsh pop voices were firmly rooted in the acoustic 'folk' tradition – never utilized in a forceful, 'non-feminine', 'rock' manner. I was reminded of this point while reading Sheila Whiteley's book *Women and Popular Music*, in which she ends the chapter 'Repressive Representations' by stating that 'Mary Hopkins [*sic*], the Welsh folk singer, was a Paul McCartney discovery. She was frequently described as the epitome of the passive feminine role – England's sweetheart.'<sup>7</sup>

On the surface, this is a harmless remark, and it is basically accurate. Mary Hopkin was a Welsh folk singer; she developed a working relationship with Paul McCartney; she could be seen as epitomizing the 'passive feminine' role, both in her physical appearance and in her vocal production. It is that term 'England's sweetheart' which causes concern. Whiteley no doubt intended to

group Mary Hopkin with other late-1960s British female pop singers such as Cilla Black, Lulu, and Sandie Shaw, whose music enjoyed success in the UK pop charts, whose hit singles were attributed to male songwriters, and who enjoyed fruitful business and personal associations with powerful male musicians. A suggestion of commonality between these singers is understandable. But there is a deeper significance here, one which Whiteley touched with her term 'England's sweetheart', and it has to do with balance of power and cultural encoding.

Whatever stylistic or vocal similarities may have existed between Cilla Black, Lulu, Sandie Shaw and Mary Hopkin, their place in British pop culture was determined by their 'otherness' – that is, their gender, and their roots. If in the 1960s London were to be considered the centre of British cultural production, then the four singers just noted represent the margins of that culture: Cilla Black was born and raised in Liverpool, Lulu came from Glasgow, Sandie Shaw from Essex, and Mary Hopkin from Pontardawe in South Wales.<sup>8</sup> London could be interpreted as the metaphorical dominant, or 'masculine' figure, and the four provinces, the four singers, the passive, or 'feminine' presence: 'England's sweethearts'.<sup>9</sup> Taking this argument one step further, in Mary Hopkin's case, this generalization can be extended to a much larger political construct, whereby her presence is not only passively feminine, but, more specifically, passively Welsh.

In her article, 'On Musical Performance of Gender and Sex', Suzanne Cusick writes that

all voices, but especially singing voices, perform the borders of the body. They perform those borders' relationship both to the body's interior and to the exterior world, a relationship that in late twentieth-century culture can be gendered in terms of the borders' relative penetrability. [...] [T]he act of singing a song is always an act that replicates acceptance of patterns that are intelligible to one's cohort in a culture. ... Most often taken as a sign of something like passionate, non-verbal, even mystical inner life, our ability to use our bodies to make this 'music' – our ability to sing – also communicates to our cohort the depth to which we have allowed cultural norms to penetrate and discipline our bodies' interior spaces and interior actions.<sup>10</sup>

'Borders' are central to the understanding of the Welsh psyche. The geographical borders of Wales and England are notoriously wonky, and the linguistic borders between the two nations are similarly, and endlessly, problematic. In considering certain 'passive' stereotypes, Cusick's term 'penetrability' is useful to the idea of linguistic borders, Welshness in general, and Mary Hopkin in particular. The penetration of foreign cultural influence – the passive acceptance of a dominant foreign language – is a particularly violent metaphor, but by applying it here to the development of a female Anglophone Welsh pop voice that multi-layered crossover process becomes much more than a mere stylistic shift; it becomes a battle to retain linguistic cultural norms in an otherwise hostile environment. Furthermore, it suggests that regardless of crossover, traces of a 'home' culture will still be evident to

other members of that culture.

Cusick believes that girls are taught at puberty not to adapt to changes in their physicality, that the continuation of vocal production in their prepubescent register is, in essence, a denial of change. That Mary Hopkin generally sang in her upper register is significant, for it suggests that the tradition which shaped her early vocal production – chapel, Eisteddfod – remained somehow embedded in her voice. Taking this one step further, the high, ‘sweet’ manner of Welsh folk singing based on the determinedly Welsh chapel and Eisteddfodic traditions is unsullied by linguistic impurities; it denotes, for want of a better description, cultural virginity. By contrast, an altered voice – a voice which has gone through a natural and audible change – is somehow transgressive, culturally despoiled. The masculine ‘rock’ voice is therefore as far removed from the female Welsh ‘folk’ voice as can be imagined. 11

Cusick suggests that

[o]ne’s choices about participation in Song [...] can be understood as choices about the relative openness of an orifice. Thinking of the throat as an orifice through which Culture might penetrate the body’s borders (and occupy some of its most interior spaces, shaping its potentials for expressivity) illuminates the background cultural practice ‘women sing, men do not’ [...].<sup>11</sup> 12

If the body is a border, the kind of ‘extraterritorial penetration’ at issue here is, to return to an earlier metaphor, linguistic.<sup>12</sup> In attempting to cross over to Anglo-American culture, it was necessary for Mary Hopkin to allow the English language to penetrate her throat, as it were. By assuming a passive cultural position – Welsh deferring to the dominant English – Mary Hopkin was allowed a modicum of success in the Anglo-American market. And this brings us back to Sheila Whiteley, for Mary Hopkin’s career was ultimately mediated by Paul McCartney, a dominant English musical presence. Mary Hopkin, sheltered by McCartney’s worldly experience, becomes the passive Welsh feminine presence: England’s sweetheart.

The term ‘sweetheart’ also suggests chronological immaturity. Mary Hopkin was still in school when she released her first singles on the Cambrian label, many of which, in the spirit of domestication, were cover versions of familiar songs. Among these early singles was ‘Tro, Tro, Tro’, a translation of ‘Turn! Turn! Turn!’,<sup>13</sup> which was the song that in 1968 introduced Mary Hopkin to the wider British public on the television show *Opportunity Knocks*.<sup>14</sup> Her first appearance on *Opportunity Knocks* brought her to the attention of Twiggy, who suggested to Paul McCartney that he sign Hopkin to the recently-founded Apple Records label, which he did almost immediately. McCartney suggested a number of songs for Mary Hopkin to record, among them ‘Those Were the Days’, which became a worldwide hit, bumped ‘Hey Jude’ off the number one spot in the UK charts, and helped make Mary Hopkin’s first English LP, *Post Card*, a commercial success. Mary Hopkin was thus ‘discovered’ in many senses of the word, and accepted by a national British audience: the first successful crossover of a Welsh-language singer. 13

With Cusick in mind, it should be possible to use Mary Hopkin's career as a blueprint for the development of successive feminine negotiations of 'Welshness'. Though difficult to quantify such things, it is important to begin by highlighting a few basic differences between Mary Hopkin's performances in Welsh and English.<sup>15</sup> On the superficial musical level, she maintains a strict adherence to tempo in 'Tro, Tro, Tro'. 'Turn! Turn! Turn!' is much freer rhythmically, but I would argue that the Welsh version actually *swings*. It seems to move along much more fluidly, and much more quickly; the English version seems lumbered down by its own vowels. Granted, Welsh here holds a fundamental linguistic advantage over English: the word 'tro', with the long 'o', is much more conducive to the 'swing' feeling than the more awkward English 'turn'. Even singing with a Welsh accent, that unforgiving 'ur' rather puts a damper on the refrain. The differences in accompanying guitar patterns are also interesting to note. While neither departs from its initial arpeggiated outline, the Welsh version maintains a straight-quaver pattern, providing a forward propulsion; the 3+3+2 pattern in the English version, while potentially lending the performance rhythmic interest, when paired with Hopkins' almost obscene *rubato*, causes it to lose all momentum. 14

But the more important distinctions to note are performative. The listener would discern immediately a difference in production values. First, the Welsh version sounds much more vibrant, more resonant with what one assumes is the chapel in which the performance was recorded;<sup>16</sup> the English version is dampened by studio walls and filters. Mary Hopkin's voice soars in the Welsh version with a kind of grace not captured on the English version, tempting one to infer that the 'home' environment allowed her a type of vocal comfort which the 'foreign' environment did not. Second, the Welsh version retains something of a learned interpretation, and this is apparent in her voice. Welsh popular music was nurtured in the chapel, the chapel was one of the primary locations for the performance of early Welsh popular music, and the subject matter and instrumentation were limited by that location. The same is true of the method of singing. The Welsh chapel informed all manner of popular song, from the traditional, to folk, through skiffle, well into the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> Words were sacrosanct, seldom subject to personal inflection, and songs – of whatever kind – were generally unadorned, save for a rather fast and unassuming kind of vibrato. A very sweet type of vocal production, for lack of a better term, can therefore be interpreted as evolving from the chapel tradition, and regardless of musical genre – from folk to pop – that type of vocal production rarely altered. It was, in Cusick's words, the cultural norm intelligible to the cohort of Welsh speakers. When a singer – of either gender – moved from one genre to another within the framework of 'Welsh-language popular music', the application of that particular vocal quality was perfectly natural, perfectly understood, *within the culture*; when this genre shift happened in tandem with a shift into Anglophone culture, that stylistic 'otherness' – 'Welshness' – prevented complete acceptance *into the foreign, Anglo-American, culture*. In other words, a singer such as Mary Hopkin may have crossed over into the Anglo-American market, but the musical tradition which had informed her manner of singing forever relegated her, in the ears of the wider Anglophone public, to the categories 'folk', 'sweet', and 'Welsh'. 15

Sheila Whiteley's phrase 'England's sweetheart' now has a particularly patronizing overtone to it.

The iconography of early Welsh pop provides an important dimension to the projection of Mary Hopkin's image. 1969 was a year of significant events in Wales: the investiture of Charles as Prince of Wales took place at Caernarfon Castle amid much local protest; the first independent Welsh record label, Sain, was founded; and the first Welsh pop magazine began its initial run. That magazine, *Asbri* (literally, 'vivacity'), had on its first cover a picture of the singer and Sain founder, Dafydd Iwan; the second issue had on its cover a picture of Mary Hopkin (fig. 1). 16



Fig. 1: *Mary Hopkin on the cover of Asbri, 1969.*

In this picture she is demure, looking away from the camera, dressed very conservatively, her hair pulled neatly into two ponytails.<sup>18</sup> Yet it is a much more complicated photograph than it appears. On the one hand, it is an image of youthful innocence, as well as an acknowledgment of her successful crossover from Welsh to English; on the other hand, it is a territorial means by 17

which the Welsh audience could contain Mary Hopkin in the wake of her growing fame, of keeping her Welsh, familiar, 'in the home'. It was a means of highlighting her purity, of keeping her in her (cultural) place, of denying her 'pop star' status. To emphasize this, the accompanying article in the second issue of *Asbri* is not an interview with Mary Hopkin herself, but rather a series of remembrances of Mary Hopkin, written by her childhood friend, Menna Elfyn, who subsequently became a noted poet. Whether in an effort to embarrass the poor pop star or just to keep her grounded in the world of Eisteddfodau and the Welsh League of Youth, the picture incorporated into the article shows Mary Hopkin as *the Welsh want her to be remembered* (fig. 2).



Fig. 2: *Mary Hopkin in Asbri, 1969.*

This is no 'local girl makes good', no 'local girl hangs out with the Beatles'; this is 'local girl used to dress up in national costume and win chapel singing competitions'. Those were the days, indeed.

Volumes have been written about the Welsh national dress and the invention of tradition;<sup>19</sup> what is important here is the equation of the *image* of Welshness with the *sound* of Welshness. How Welsh was Mary Hopkin? According to the pictures in *Asbri*, for the Welsh audience, she was Welsh enough never to have submitted to the English language; her throat had not been penetrated; she was *essentially* Welsh. But beyond the borders of Wales, how was that Welshness received? In an era of ethereal soprano voices, what distinguished Mary Hopkin from other British singers in the 1960s? And how much control did she have over the way her voice was used? 18

It has been well documented that Mary Hopkin was not overly fond of some of the songs Paul McCartney suggested she record for *Post Card*,<sup>20</sup> that some of his choices were made in order to emphasize that quality of her voice 19



which had been cultivated back in Wales. This touches on the notion of being 'passively Welsh'. Perhaps because of her age, perhaps because of her nature, perhaps because of her relative lack of cultural capital, Mary Hopkin's early Anglophone career was controlled by someone whose musical taste was not always beyond reproach. Indeed, the direction in which Paul McCartney sent Mary Hopkin was as surprising as it was occasionally embarrassing.

Although 'Those Were the Days' sold in its millions, in retrospect it is a song singularly unsuitable for a young woman of nineteen. The lyrics alone are telling: 'Once upon a time there was a tavern / Where we used to raise a glass or two / Remember how we laughed away the hours / Think of all the great things we would do. / Those were the days my friend, we thought they'd never end / We'd sing and dance for ever and a day / We'd live the life we'd choose / we'd fight and never lose / For we were young and sure to have our way.'<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Sandie Shaw released her own version of the song at exactly the same time as Mary Hopkin. This might suggest that it was bound to be a hit for someone, but it seems an odd coincidence nonetheless. Two young women singing a song about lost time and lost hopes and, heaven forbid, going to taverns to drink – the kind of nostalgia pervading the song would seem to be for lost youth.<sup>22</sup> But both versions were released in 1969, the end of a momentous decade, the middle of a protracted and controversial military conflict, the cusp of a new musical era. To Paul McCartney's ears, and to the ears of millions of other people, Mary Hopkin's was a voice simply dripping with innocence, reminiscent of a simpler time, of old-fashioned music, just like the stuff they must sing over there in Wales. In her recording, she expresses all that lyrical regret, with a voice itself steeped in nostalgia – but a nostalgia born of uncounted years of subservience to the English state; a nostalgia for a different way of life; a nostalgia for a language on the verge of extinction. Nostalgia is purely subjective, of course, but given certain earlier metaphors, I feel it must be stated that the recording of Mary Hopkin singing 'Those Were the Days' was undoubtedly heard differently in Wales than it was in England. 20

So here we have a young singer being groomed for success by one of the most successful songwriters in pop history; yet *Post Card* is really a missed opportunity. Paul McCartney could have written a song for the album, perhaps tried to move Mary Hopkin in the direction of contemporary folk-rock, if not a bit further; but he filled the album with show tunes and pop standards. With the exception of two tracks written for her by Donovan, the songs on *Post Card* were cover versions of songs McCartney knew and loved, with the token Welsh-language song added for a touch of the down-home. Surprisingly, despite its lack of stylistic continuity, *Post Card* was reviewed favourably in *Rolling Stone*.<sup>23</sup> Though not entirely enamoured of Mary Hopkin's voice,<sup>24</sup> reviewer John Mendelsohn nonetheless gives 'imaginative producer' Paul McCartney full marks for creating an 'ambitious exploration of the Pop medium'. Mendelsohn appreciates Hopkins' suitability to the album's Donovan tracks, though the songs themselves tend to be 'ponderous and over-long'. Most problematically here, however, Mendelsohn states that '[e]thnic balladry is represented by "Y Blodyn Gwyn" (which is Welsh and 21

sounds like a hymn)', and applauds McCartney's choice of 'revived late-Forties-type numbers':

'Those Were the Days' is, of course, a knock-out (particularly the banjo, little kids' chorus, and Mary's pose as a dowdy and discarded old pub lady), and what better ending could such a program have than Irving Berlin's 'Show Business' ("there's no business like...")? Paul should win some sort of award for his choice of what Mary would sing and for what he has happening behind her singing.

As an indication of the cultural capital that the Beatles obviously had in 1969, Mendelsohn's review ends by practically ignoring the artist at hand: 'An absolute must for Paul McCartney people, Mary Hopkin fans will also like it.' In other words: Mary Hopkin, accessory.

Considering *Post Card* at a 35-year distance and from a purely aesthetic standpoint, it is anyone's guess what 'Y Blodyn Gwyn' (The White Flower) and 'There's No Business Like Show Business' had in common. It certainly remains a mystery why Paul McCartney felt that Mary Hopkin could out-sing Ethel Merman on the latter. And no matter what people *think* Mary Hopkin listened to in her spare time, chances are that, as a young woman of nineteen newly relocated to London, it wasn't 'Inch Worm'. Nonetheless, the music needed to match the image, and the image was imposed by the industry: passively female, passively Welsh.<sup>25</sup> This sense of stricture brings to mind a more recent example, again involving a young singer from Wales, initially dubbed an 'angel' by the media and her own marketing machine. Charlotte Church made her first recording in 1998 at a considerably younger age than Mary Hopkin was in 1968. She too was given material singularly unsuitable for a girl of her age, to sing in a manner which many people might argue should have been nurtured under professional tutelage. Unlike Mary Hopkin, Charlotte Church eventually began to assert her identity, personally and musically, and she embraces her celebrity in a way that Mary Hopkin never did. But there is an important point to make here, for Charlotte Church has not had to cross the border from Welsh to Anglophone culture. On a musical level she has followed in well-trod territory: 'classical' to 'pop' is by now a bit of a cliché. But like Mary Hopkin, Charlotte Church began her career – and established her vocal identity – before she hit puberty. All things considered, for Charlotte Church, a shift in register now would be more shocking than any shift in genre or language. 22

Perhaps Charlotte Church's crossover success more closely reflects that of another 'other' Welsh female voice, whose sense of entitlement to the Anglo-American audience was firmly established in the 1960s. Yet Shirley Bassey's position in Welsh popular culture is problematic on a number of levels: she came from a large family on the rougher side of Cardiff; her father was a Nigerian seaman; she is unabashedly flash, the mark of the Anglo-American reward culture, the antithesis of the reserved and unassuming Welsh culture.<sup>26</sup> Her voice carries with it an openness of experience or, in Cusick's terminology, her throat has been penetrated: her vibrato is as wide as the Bristol Channel, all sense of subtlety hidden in its depths. She wears her 23

Welshness proudly<sup>27</sup> and the Welsh audience embraces her; but, like Mary Hopkin, Shirley Bassey's otherness is acute. Not only is her voice forceful and deep, it was not a late-1960s 'pop' voice. Indeed, Shirley Bassey's voice would have been the more appropriate vehicle for some of the material Paul McCartney chose for *Post Card*: capable of cabaret numbers as well as Broadway standards, capable of inflecting world-weariness and irony into even the most trite of nostalgic lyrics, and capable of meeting the metaphorical gaze of the dominant English culture with defiance and sexual confidence. Capable, in other words, of subverting definitively the Welsh stereotype.

The Welsh stereotype was alive and well in the late 1960s British media, and Mary Hopkin was its embodiment. But the discomfort Mary Hopkin felt with her public – and musical – persona is palpable, and exploited, in a clip from the BBC show *24 Hours*, broadcast on the eve of the 1970 Eurovision Song Contest.<sup>28</sup> Eighteen months after her success on *Opportunity Knocks*, Mary Hopkin was chosen to perform the British entry, 'Knock, Knock, Who's There?', and was duly presented to the British television public, yet again, as 'the shy Welsh girl'. The item lasts about ten minutes, and only once is any mention made of the British Eurovision entry, for the more interesting story seems to be how simple and unassuming Mary Hopkin is, how sweet and naïve, and how many times a day she used to go to chapel. However true some element of it might have been, this projected image did not allow for Mary Hopkin to express an opinion, or to develop musically. The *24 Hours* exposé exposed little more than unfortunate (passive) cultural stereotyping; 'England's sweetheart':

[*In the background, 'Turn! Turn! Turn!'. We see Mary walking through London.*]

Voiceover: Mary Hopkin walked from school to stardom without changing pace, personality or hairstyle. She's Welsh, shy and protected by a cast-iron innocence that brought her childhood dolls from a council house to the London Palladium. She's prim as a Welsh Sunday, and as her grandmother Blodwen says, 'show business can't change a good chapel upbringing.' She sings more than she speaks. Show business lightning struck Mary Hopkin eighteen months ago, when Beatle Paul McCartney heard her sing, brought her to London and rapidly called a tune to the first of three hits....

[*Cut to clip from Opportunity Knocks, and interior, with Hughie Green*]

Q. Hughie Green, what is it about [Mary's] voice that had star quality and such appeal?

HG. Well I think one of the main things is it's a plaintive voice, and I think as far as Mary herself is concerned, she is recognizable as the girl next door with a lovely voice.

Q. How much of a fluke was it in the first place that opportunity knocked for Mary Hopkin?

HG. Well I ... can tell you that on this very same tape here... we

recorded two other girls who were on a par with Mary as far as talent was concerned. And to a certain extent we needed someone from Wales, and it was out of the three girls and we didn't know which one really was the best. And the other two boys and myself, we said, 'ok, we'll take Mary'. And of course then her next good piece of luck was Twiggy.

*[Twiggy is interviewed about her postcard campaign for Mary Hopkin. The voiceover returns]*

Voiceover. With the Beatles' Apple organisation pulling the strings, Mary slipped into stardom easily and coolly. A girl simply starting a new job, she'd insist. It brought her up to £1000 a week. She bought herself a dog, called Barnabus. She couldn't think of much else to buy. She's made no concessions to the pop industry and its people, who know her as an isolated girl and hardly one of their own. *[cut to exterior shots of Pontardawe]* Mary was born and brought up in the Welsh speaking town of Pontardawe near Swansea, where singing is a way of life. She's the daughter of the town's housing officer and has two elder sisters. Her parents still live in Pontardawe, where it's fashionable to claim to be Mary Hopkin's cousin, and where Mary first played her guitar at Eisteddfods – and never won a prize.

*[Cut to interior, flat. Mary Hopkin sitting on sofa facing the interviewer.]*

Q. Mary, it's a long, long way from that Welsh valley to this beautiful house in Maida Vale where you're now living. But could you start by telling me a little bit about your childhood in Wales? Tell me what of a typical Sunday. How did it go?

MH. Well usually I went to chapel about once every Sunday. It was the thing to do, you know. *[cut to exterior of chapel looming overhead]* Um, a lot of my friends went three times every Sunday, so every Sunday is taken up with chapel.

Q. What about Sundays now? Do you go to church here?

MH. Um, no, I'm even lazier now I think. I just laze around all day or go out. If it's a fine day I'll go for a walk or something.

Q. Well do you think you've changed, if in Wales you went to chapel two, three times a day? And now you're in London – it's only 18 months later, and you don't go at all. Is it you that's changed?

MH. Um, no. It might be because there's nobody here to tell me you ought to go to church. Because when you're that age you sort of have – you're sort of told you've got to go at that time, and then later on you just decide for yourself.

Q. Well, you're in London now. You're nineteen. You've got fame, you've got fortune, full of what every nineteen year old girl dreams about. What's it like for you?

MH. It's nice to be famous, but I don't like sort of other people looking up to me, because there's no reason for that. It's lovely to hear from people, though, and have letters and things.

Mary Hopkin was by this point fully integrated into Anglo-American culture, and it is clear from her Eurovision appearance that her voice was on the cusp of a real change. Having allowed English to assume the dominant role in her musical life, Mary Hopkin was poised to explore the possibilities of an Anglophone Welsh pop voice in the mainstream market. But following the release of her second LP, *Earth Song/Ocean Song*, in 1971, Mary Hopkin left Apple Records and married American producer Tony Visconti. Her primary concern in the ensuing years was raising her family. She did, however, make an appearance on David Bowie's *Low* (1977), singing backing vocals on 'Sound and Vision'. While this might be considered 'crossing over', it took a husband with influential contacts (and a production credit) to enable it to happen; and on an album notoriously light on lyrics, one would be forgiven for not recognizing Mary Hopkin in the mix.<sup>29</sup> But most importantly, this allowed Mary Hopkin's voice to be used without the burden of imposed cultural baggage.

Mary Hopkin's voice signifies a particular point in Welsh musical life, a referent embraced by subsequent generations of musicians, yet left determinedly unrecognized in mainstream Anglo-American culture. Her occasional 'comeback' gestures – appearing on the Future Sound of London's *Dead Cities* (Virgin, 1996), in Sara Sugarman's 2000 film *Very Annie-Mary* and, perhaps more improbably, collaborating on Dolly Parton's 2006 EMI release, *Those Were the Days* – suggest a certain cultural currency, though one which invariably returns her to her late-1960s incarnation. There is a particular place in Welsh culture reserved for Mary Hopkin, the 'local' crossover success, but despite her many and varied experiences of these last forty years, she is still the unchanged girl on that *Asbri* cover, the local girl whose career – despite *Opportunity Knocks*, the Eurovision Song Contest, the Beatles, Donovan, Tony Visconti, David Bowie and Dolly Parton – remains *essentially* Welsh. 25

Following Mary Hopkin, there was a handful of Welsh women singers who, while successful only in their 'home' culture, similarly serve as musical antecedents to Cerys Matthews. Heather Jones attempted a similar transition from folk to rock, and light entertainment mainstay Caryl Parry Jones attempted different vocal styles to suit different genres – folk, rock, and even disco – all in the Welsh language. In contrast to Mary Hopkin, both of these women suffered from excessive prior exposure to the Welsh pop audience. For years they were known for a particular style of singing – acoustic folk – at a time when Welsh popular music was beginning its first halting steps toward amplification. When they attempted to change their musical image and sing with predominantly male bands, they were generally kept in their place by the Welsh press. This could mean poor record reviews, but it also occasionally meant the public dissection of the singer's private life, as though the Welsh press felt threatened by a previously 'harmless' folk singer asserting herself in a more masculine, newly 'rock' context. It was not until the 1980s that the first 'natural' female rock voice was cultivated in the Welsh language. By way of contrast to these earlier women, Rhiannon Tomos had not been a member of any earlier group – indeed, she had seemingly emerged from nowhere – and therefore benefited from not being associated with a particular genre or style 26

of singing. Although by that time the 'forceful' female voice was a central and uncontested component of many notable Anglo-American pop groups, Rhiannon Tomos was a trailblazer for women in Welsh popular music. More particularly, because she did not emerge from any obvious Welsh musical background, her own vocal delivery could bear the distinct influence of earlier American singers such as Janis Joplin, thus allying her much more closely with the Anglo-American tradition than with the Welsh. It is this adoption of a 'masculine', 'rock' voice, which provides the strongest link between Mary Hopkin and Cerys Matthews, with one crucial qualification: Mary Hopkin never made a successful crossover into 'rock', and Cerys Matthews is having difficulty being accepted in any other context.

When in 1993 Cerys Matthews began recording with Catatonia there were a number of female musicians fully integrated into Welsh pop groups – Datblygu, Fflaps, Ectogram, Melys – and accepted on their own musical terms. Whatever their individual contributions to the bands, it is significant that women had finally begun to be accepted as agents in the contemporary Welsh pop movement. But when Catatonia crossed over into the Anglo-American market the tendency in the mainstream press was merely to equate Cerys Matthews's position with those of earlier Anglo-American frontwomen such as Debbie Harry and Chrissie Hynde, although her voice bears little resemblance to either. Cerys Matthews's voice in fact seems to seek a balance between the sweetness of her Welsh antecedents and the more dynamic style of her Anglophone contemporaries. I would argue that this kind of playful search for an Anglo-Welsh female 'rock' voice is actually a metaphor for the search for an Anglo-Welsh identity. This may be understood in terms of what John Fiske calls 'excorporation' – 'that process by which the powerless steal elements of the dominant culture and use them in their own, oppositional or subversive, interests'.<sup>30</sup> In the case of Cerys Matthews, this process moves in two directions. From one direction comes the (domesticated) tradition of Welsh popular music – codes were adapted from the Anglo-American model to suit counter-hegemonic, contemporary cultural needs; from the other direction come certain Welsh women singers – adhering, along with their male counterparts, to a natural, national 'otherness', before adapting the codes of male 'rock' practice. In this regard, for a Welsh woman to turn 'rock' was in fact more subversive than Welsh pop was itself.

As in the case of Mary Hopkin, it is possible to differentiate the qualities of Cerys Matthews's voice in recordings of English and Welsh versions of the same song.<sup>31</sup> 'New Mercurial Heights' and 'Gyda Gwên' (With a Smile) were released on Catatonia's first EP, *For Tinkerbell*.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Mary Hopkin's 'Turn! Turn! Turn!' and 'Tro, Tro, Tro', 'New Mercurial Heights' and 'Gyda Gwên' are absolutely identical, apart from the lyrics; Cerys Matthews simply recorded a new vocal track on the existing instrumental backing. The song titles themselves are telling: 'New Mercurial Heights' could be interpreted as alluding generally to the mid-1990s soprano pop voice, or to Catatonia's intended rise to the top of the UK pop charts; 'Gyda Gwên' could be interpreted as a kind of cultural inside joke, wherein the vocally encoded message to the 'home' audience is more important than any Anglo-American pop posturing.

Though the melody remains unchanged in the two versions, there is a palpable sense that Cerys Matthews is more comfortable singing in Welsh. To these ears, the Welsh words are much more clearly enunciated than the English. There are residual traces of that chapel-singing tradition in the Welsh version – the clarity of enunciation, the lack of inflection – and the sense again that words are more important than emotion. One would need to understand Welsh to infer this, of course, but a few generalizations can nonetheless be made about the English version. There is a quality to ‘New Mercurial Heights’ which is reminiscent of the vocal stylings of Natalie Merchant – wandering vowels, disappearing consonants; or of a kind of cross between (Anglo-Welsh star) Bonnie Tyler’s late-1970s/early-1980s rasp and the more contemporary fey soprano voice of Beth Gibbons of Portishead, or even Enya, all similarly concerned with overall vocal shape and affect rather than lyrical message. The Welsh version, though in exactly the same key, sung at exactly the same tempo, sounds much more grounded, earthier, like the Welsh language itself. Of course, all of this might merely suggest that Cerys Matthews is more comfortable singing in Welsh, but it seems also to suggest that the development of a female Anglophone Welsh ‘rock’ voice was not an effortless process. 29

Cerys Matthews certainly improved her English diction by the time Catatonia recorded their breakthrough album, *International Velvet*, in 1997, but it is significant that she exaggerated her South Wales accent throughout – the rolled r’s, the awkward syllabic placement of some of the lyrics. This was one means by which she remained rooted in her ‘home’ culture, of trying to cultivate a relationship with the Anglo-American market without actually losing her linguistic identity. This willful ‘otherness’ was carried out in the visual as well as the musical, as can be seen from a selection of early publicity photographs. In the first photo (fig. 3), taken in London around the time of Catatonia’s first EP, the caption on Cerys Matthews’s shirt refers to a 1995 record review in which the reviewer calls her voice ‘an angelic choir girl one moment and fast-rising, beer-soaked, rip-roaring poptart the next.’<sup>33</sup> 30



Fig. 3: *Cerys Matthews, mid-1990s.*

This picture offers the image of Cerys Matthews as vulnerable, childlike, shrinking against the wall, playing with her hair; but the message on her shirt, and her masculine, even sexually inviting, posture suggests otherwise. By way of contrast, a picture from 1999<sup>34</sup> shows Cerys Matthews as though she had never left Wales (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: *Cerys Matthews, 1999.*



The vision of her donning a tiara in a shabby dressing room is, of course, deeply ironic, but so is that first image. The one major difference between Mary Hopkin and Cerys Matthews is that Cerys Matthews actually embraced the contradictions in her public image. She played up her Welshness on both sides of her geographical border, allowing for a multitude of interpretations as to what exactly she represented. Wales could invest her with the mark of royalty; England could wonder at her otherness.

Just as Mary Hopkin evoked a particular time and sense of place, Cerys Matthews embodied a very important moment in Welsh cultural history. The release of *International Velvet* coincided with the period of campaigning for devolution. She was pictured in the press wearing a bilingual 'Say Yes to Wales' t-shirt, in an attempt to increase voter numbers; she was interviewed on live television on the night of the referendum, in an advanced state of inebriation, speculating about the possibilities of sexual conquest that a popular (Welsh-speaking) ITV weatherwoman might later be enjoying. She spoke her mind, she was unabashedly 'laddish', and she was, in manner and in style, the opposite of the 'passively female', 'passively Welsh' stereotype. For the Welsh press, Cerys Matthews personified Wales's newfound cultural strength, but for the mainstream British press, Cerys Matthews was the convenient female counterpart to a particular new breed of 'lad'. Cerys Matthews matched the rampant masculine Britpop posturing and excessive alcohol consumption, and was captured in the daily and popular press with great regularity in varying degrees of intoxication, both on stage and off. What this suggests is that the British press needed to justify the appeal of Catatonia, to highlight or question their sexualized central character. To paraphrase John Shepherd, Cerys Matthews was simply reproducing her social and political environment, enacting 'Welshness' for a mystified Anglo-America. 31

But all such things must come to an end. Having submitted to cliché and been treated for 'exhaustion', Cerys Matthews fled to Tennessee to record a solo album, *Cockahoop*.<sup>35</sup> Submitting perhaps to another cliché, she fell in love with an American,<sup>36</sup> got married and pregnant, and is now quite a different front woman.<sup>37</sup> But this altered 'Welshness' seems to have lost some of its power. *Cockahoop* was generally well received by the British press, but not without constant mention of a 'kinder, gentler' (read: sober) Cerys Matthews. This accompanied a more general musical shift: where she had once challenged the 'passive Welsh' stereotype, where she had transgressed the asexual norm of Welsh musical tradition, Cerys Matthews began to attempt something altogether more 'feminine'. Disregarding her previous quasi-rock incarnation, she attempted a crossover to Americana. This, while baffling to her former fan base, has, oddly enough, brought her closer to her cultural roots. 32

One of the central tropes of Welsh culture is *hiraeth* – nostalgia, longing, homesickness. One could certainly claim that the occasionally mournful quality of some country music approaches this kind of universal emotion. When country music meets Welsh culture, the possibilities for interpretation are many and varied.<sup>38</sup> One particular song on *Cockahoop*, the hymn 33

'Arglwydd Dyma Fi' (Here I Am, Lord), is worthy of mention, not only because it is the album's sole concession to the Welsh language, but because it serves to re-enforce some of the ideas I posited earlier. It brings the modern female Welsh pop voice full circle to the Nonconformist chapel, and it returns the female Welsh pop star to her home.

'Arglwydd Dyma Fi' serves the same function on *Cockahoop* as 'Y Blodyn Gwyn' did on Mary Hopkin's *Post Card*: first and foremost, it is a reminder of linguistic belonging. But 'Y Blodyn Gwyn' ('The White Flower') also stood as a metaphor for Mary Hopkin's image. That song may have been a grounding exercise, returning her to her Welsh roots, but it was also a projection of innocence: a young woman in an uncomfortable new musical world. 'Arglwydd Dyma Fi' is similarly about a stranger in a strange land, and it serves to confirm Cerys Matthews's background in the Welsh musical tradition, but in a repentant kind of way. The song is a plea for recognition and remembrance – *dyma fi*, *here I am*, older and wiser, no longer in thrall to the excesses of fame in the Anglo-American world, down home with my new country folk. More importantly, Cerys Matthews here adopts a heightened, almost caricatured, childlike vocality. Her audience knows the troubles she's seen, so gone is the invented Anglo-Welsh rock voice of *International Velvet*, and here to stay is the newly feminized, yet oddly prepubescent, vocal presence. 'Y Blodyn Gwyn' and 'Arglwydd Dyma Fi' are both, in their own ways, attempts at regaining cultural virginity. 34

The appearance of both of these Welsh songs on otherwise Anglophone albums is significant, for it suggests the type of relationship Mary Hopkin and Cerys Matthews retained with their home culture. Mary Hopkin had been sheltered by the Welsh community and in some ways exploited by the Anglo-American pop industry. While her voice and her image might have suggested that indefinable Welsh 'innocence', the inclusion of 'Y Blodyn Gwyn' amidst the musical morass of *Post Card* seems in retrospect a plea for help. 'Arglwydd Dyma Fi', on the other hand, is much more self-assured. Cerys Matthews had exploited her own image; she had adopted a kind of exaggerated Welshness as a badge of membership in the Welsh community and to mark her as a rebellious interloper in the Anglo-American mainstream. 'Arglwydd Dyma Fi' is a kind of return to cultural normality, from a respectful distance. *Post Card* and *Cockahoop* were both recorded deep inside Anglo-America – London and Memphis, respectively – and homesickness is a natural side effect of geographical displacement. *Hiraeth* may have inspired the inclusion of 'Y Blodyn Gwyn' and 'Arglwydd Dyma Fi', but the manner in which those songs were delivered is nonetheless firmly rooted in a shared musical tradition. These feminine negotiations of Welshness, recorded thirty-five years apart, may expose the effects of Mary Hopkin's and Cerys Matthews's linguistic border-crossings, but home is still inscribed in their voices. 35

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of concision, 'Welsh popular music' refers to popular music sung in the Welsh language; 'Anglophone Welsh popular music' refers specifically to popular music originating in Wales and sung in the English language. This is in no way to suggest that Anglophone Welsh popular music is not inherently 'Welsh', or that 'Welsh popular music' is by its nature only applicable to music sung in the Welsh language. The terms are much more easily delineated in the Welsh language itself, but for obvious reasons of linguistic access, these less satisfactory English equivalents are here preferred.

<sup>2</sup> John Shepherd, 'A Theoretical Model for the Sociomusicological Analysis of Popular Musics', *Popular Music*, Vol. 2: Theory and Method (1982), 145-177.

<sup>3</sup> *Cynghanedd* is defined by the University of Wales Dictionary as 'harmony, agreement, concordance', as well as 'a system of consonance or alliteration in a line of Welsh poetry in strict metre with internal rhyme; the metrical craft or technique of Welsh poetic art in the strict metres'.

<sup>4</sup> *Cerdd* (poem), *tant* (string). Traditionally, impromptu singing with harp. The harpist begins by playing a traditional melody, and the singer improvises his or her own countermelody. The two musicians are meant to finish at the same time. The singer should sing clearly and illustrate the mood and meaning of the verses chosen; the countermelody should complement the natural rhythm of the verses, as well as the rhythm in the harp's melody.

<sup>5</sup> The *Urdd* is Wales's largest youth organisation. It was founded in 1922 with membership open to children under the age of eighteen; today the *Urdd* has over fifty thousand members.

<sup>6</sup> Again, it needs to be stressed that 'Welsh' in this instance refers specifically to 'Welsh-language'. The vocal style of contemporary Anglophone Welsh artists was decidedly different, and based upon a separate tradition. For more on the Anglophone Welsh pop voice, see Trevor Herbert and Peter Stead (eds.), *Hymns and Arias: Great Welsh Voices* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001) and Ruth Shade, 'Direct Activists: The Roots of Welsh Rock', *Planet* 145 (February/March 2001), 25-35.

<sup>7</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Women in Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 41.

<sup>8</sup> In the case of Cilla Black and Lulu, their position within 'marginal' yet *urban* Britain is an important distinction to make here. Liverpool and Glasgow had their own popular music traditions; Lulu's recording of 'Shout' (1964), for example, must be considered as a direct result of local exposure to early American soul music. This places her in somewhat different company to Mary Hopkin, whose potential early exposure to American soul music is nonetheless imperceptible in her contemporary recordings. I am grateful to Edinburgher Ken Gloag for making this point.

<sup>9</sup> Suggesting here that London was the center of cultural production is merely to establish a mainstream industrial locus. It could rightly be argued that the British Invasion, led by four young men from Liverpool, effectively shifted the balance of cultural power away from London and into the 'provinces', and that their popularity allowed other British artists, male and female alike, to succeed in the US charts. Two women in particular, Dusty Springfield and Petula Clark, broke through to the US market in the wake of the British Invasion in spite of their gender and in spite of their 'otherness' – Dusty Springfield for her indeterminate sexuality, Petula Clark for the palpable vestiges of a classical training; yet their later careers did not follow the same trajectory as their contemporary male counterparts. It could also be argued here that the registral similarities between Dusty Springfield and Petula Clark – both women tended toward their comfortable, middle-range chest voice – were also markers of some sort of 'otherness', or halfway point between the popular contemporary 'folk' voice (high, feminine) and the contemporary 'rock' voice (low, masculine).

<sup>10</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, 'On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,' in Barkin, Elaine and Lydia Hamessley (eds.), *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity and Music* (Zurich and Los Angeles: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 29, 32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>12</sup> This is a somewhat problematic construct for the consideration of male Welsh crossovers into the Anglo-American market. I would argue that the male Welsh voice has inscribed in it its own set of codes, and that the adoption of the foreign language is in its own way an act of submission; but I can think of no examples of the successful bilingual male Welsh band which does not maintain – and exploit – its 'otherness' within the Anglo-American culture. This, I believe, represents a shift in the balance of power, and it is an idea that I explore further in '*Blerwytirhwng?*' *The Place of Welsh Popular Music* (Ashgate, forthcoming).

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<sup>13</sup> 'Turn! Turn! Turn!', music by Pete Seeger, lyrics taken from the book of Ecclesiastes. Though many versions were recorded in the 1960s, it is perhaps best known by the Byrds' 1965 recording.

<sup>14</sup> *Opportunity Knocks* was an ITV talent show hosted by Hughie Green, and could be considered the forerunner to current 'instant fame' shows such as *Pop Idol*.

<sup>15</sup> 'Tro, Tro, Tro' was originally recorded for Cambrian in 1967 and released as the B-side of 'Those Were the Days'. It was re-released on *Mary Hopkin: Y Caneuon Cynnar – The Early Recordings* (CD, Sain SCD2151E, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> The state of the Welsh recording industry in the mid-1960s did not allow for advanced studio technology. Many, if not most, of the seminal recordings of the Welsh pop canon were recorded either in chapel vestries or town halls.

<sup>17</sup> That is to say, all manner of popular song – traditional, folk, and skiffle – would have been performed in chapel vestries. Listening now to early recordings by close-harmony groups such as Hogia Llandegai and Hogia'r Wyddfa, it must be said that their attempts at skiffle fall somewhat closer to the 'light entertainment' mark than to the alternative 50s rock'n'roll sound of their contemporary, Lonnie Donegan.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Hopkin's dress and demeanor on the cover of *Asbri* calls to mind the character of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. It is interesting to contrast this image with a contemporary picture of Janis Joplin, on the cover of *Rolling Stone* no. 29 (March 15, 1969), which is accompanied by the strapline, 'A Report on Janis Joplin: The Judy Garland of Rock?'. I am grateful to Laurie Stras for making this point.

<sup>19</sup> In particular, see Prys Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period', in Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 43-100.

<sup>20</sup> See in particular Mark Lewisohn's interview with Mary Hopkin in *Record Collector* 108 (August 1988).

<sup>21</sup> 'Those Were the Days', lyrics by Gene Raskin.

<sup>22</sup> An important parallel to make here is Fairport Convention's recording of 'Who Knows Where the Time Goes?', from *Unhalfbricking* (LP, A&M SP-4206, 1969). When she wrote the song, singer Sandy Denny was not much older than Mary Hopkin, and the sense of lost youth, of regret and nostalgia, is just as powerful in that song. While it is tempting to interpret all such contemporary songs as reflecting the political and social uncertainties of the time, it is enough here to note the two singers' similarities of vocal range and affect, though shaped by different cultural influences.

<sup>23</sup> John Mendelsohn, review of *Post Card*, in *Rolling Stone* (17 May 1969), 17.

<sup>24</sup> 'Mary's voice, a smooth vanilla soprano, isn't going to win an MBE for its flexibility (she seems to lack the inclination or technique to express different feelings through different vocal nuances, and winds up sounding like a hybrid of mechanical Joan Baezes and Marianne Faithfull).'

<sup>25</sup> There is another connection to be drawn here between Mary Hopkin and Sandy Denny of Fairport Convention. By some accounts the image Sandy Denny portrayed in the press was in contrast to her actual nature: while she was often pictured wearing conservative, 'feminine' clothes, her penchant for heavy drinking and her complicated personal life were perhaps not as well known to the folk-rock audience who may have imposed upon her an interior life more in keeping with the sweetness of her voice. Sandy Denny's effective duet with Robert Plant on 'The Ballad of Evermore', from *Led Zeppelin IV* (LP, Atlantic SD-19129, 1971), offers another dimension to her voice, perhaps more reflective of her 'actual life', and the distance between folk-rock and hard rock (or 'cock rock') is lessened considerably as a result. Listening to 'The Ballad of Evermore', in fact, one is reminded of Grace Slick from the Jefferson Airplane, whose similarly intriguing personal life contrasted sharply with her external, often exaggerated, feminine image. All this suggests that women in Anglo-American culture were better able to assert their individuality than their Welsh counterparts, and that the era of sexual liberation had not quite filtered through to the Welsh-speaking community, whether in Wales or elsewhere.

<sup>26</sup> Shirley Bassey recorded her debut single, 'The Banana Boat Song', in 1957, when she was twenty years old. She had left school to work at a factory, but left for London to pursue fame. Early singles played on a kind of knowing sexuality: 'Kiss Me, Honey, Kiss Me', 'As I Love You', 'As Long as He Needs Me'; but it was the release of the theme tune to the 1964 film *Goldfinger* which established her reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. A cursory listen to the opening verse alone is enough to hear the determination, grit and self-confidence that so contrasts with contemporary Welsh-language recordings in general, and Mary Hopkin in particular.

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<sup>27</sup> Sometimes literally so. At the outdoor concert held in Cardiff Bay to celebrate devolution, Shirley Bassey appeared onstage wearing the Welsh flag, the red dragon adorned lavishly with sequins.

<sup>28</sup> *24 Hours*, 20 March, 1970. Mary Hopkin ultimately finished second in the Eurovision Song Contest, behind the Irish singer, Dana; amongst her fellow competitors was a young and surprisingly sweaty Julio Iglesias, who finished fourth.

<sup>29</sup> David Bowie, 'Sound and Vision', *Low* (CD, Ryko RCD 10142, 1991 [LP, 1977]). Mary Hopkin can be heard from 1:14 -1:21; it should also be noted that she is credited on the *Low* liner notes as 'Mary Visconti'.

<sup>30</sup> John Fiske, 'The Popular Economy', from *Television Culture*, anthologized in Storey, John (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (London: Prentice Hall, 1998), 510.

<sup>31</sup> Catatonia were formed from the wreckage of two earlier Welsh-language bands. In an effort to cross over into the Anglo-American market, they switched the medium of their music to the English language, but inter-band communication was generally in Welsh, and their mainstream recordings made the occasional concession to the Welsh language, most notably on the title track from their album, *International Velvet* (CD, Blanco y Negro 20834, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Catatonia, *The Crai EPs 1993/94: For Tinkerbelle & Hooked* (CD, Crai 064, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Liz Catermole, reviewing a Catatonia live performance for *Heaven Up Here*, quoted in David Owens, *Cerys, Catatonia and the Rise of Welsh Pop* (London: Ebury Press, 2000), 116.

<sup>34</sup> Picture courtesy of jasonlock.co.uk.

<sup>35</sup> Cerys Matthews, *Cockahoop* (CD, Blanco Y Negro 60306, 2003). Her most recent recording, *Never Said Goodbye* (CD, Rough Trade 227, 2006), was released too late for consideration here.

<sup>36</sup> Some press accounts branded Matthews's husband, Seth Riddle, alternately her record producer, Bob Dylan's record producer, or one of Bob Dylan's 'country' musicians. While it would provide a convenient parallel to Mary Hopkin's marriage to Tony Visconti, Matthews's husband is, in fact, none of the above.

<sup>37</sup> One notable photograph published to promote *Cockahoop* showed Cerys Matthews, baby on hip, standing in front of an enormous store of corn cobs. See *Observer Music Monthly*, November 2003, 39.

<sup>38</sup> The many and varied possibilities for the Dolly Parton/Mary Hopkin duet remain, however, unrealized. Had Mary Hopkin been asked to sing a Welsh song, or a country standard, rather than 'Those Were the Days', the potential for interpretation here would have been much greater, and the parallels between Mary Hopkin and Cerys Matthews still stronger.

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