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Kemp, Alison (2019). Land of Song- How Was Welsh Identity Articulated Through Popular Music: 1990-2000. Student dissertation for The Open University module A329 The making of Welsh history.

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BA (Hons) History

EMA for A329: The Making of Welsh History

Dissertation

May 2019

The Open University

Land of Song- How Was Welsh Identity Articulated Through Popular Music: 1990-2000

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6191 words

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my dad Nick, for whom, after hearing Rock Around the Clock, music was never the same again. Also, to Mark, my rock, and to Romy and Bea; for always believing in me and for allowing me the time and space I needed.

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Abbreviations:

Manics- Manic Street Preachers

NME- New Musical Express

Oxford DNB- Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

QMU- Queen Margaret University

The Land of Song- How was Welsh identity articulated through popular music: 1990- 2000?

Introduction

As the Land of Song, Wales has long been synonymous with music and singing. It is a reputation that has been acknowledged and appreciated both within and without Wales. The nomenclature was established during the mid-nineteenth century and as the modern incarnation of the ancient literary and musical Eisteddfod was established (Credo, 2019a). The endurance of this reputation can be seen in publications such as *The Musical Times*, which used the term in various articles across the twentieth century. In 1909 its report on *The National Eisteddfod of Wales*, uses the soubriquet and takes time to highlight the traditions of the event which, interestingly, took place at the Royal Albert Hall in London (Anon,1909). Its report in 1951, of the Swansea Festival comments on an ‘almost entirely instrumental’ festival, but again highlights Wales’ reputation for being a land of song (Reece-Evans, 1951). The reputation for lyrical and musical talent was confirmed also with the Cymanfa Ganu (singing meeting) festivals that took place during the same era (Credo, 2019b). Having established the tradition for musical endeavour within the Welsh cultural sphere, this paper will examine how popular music impacted on Welsh national identity between 1990 and 2000.

In 1846 the British Government commissioned the infamous ‘*Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales*’ (Proquest, 2019). The report commented on far more than the education in Wales and had a legacy that Geraint. H. Jenkins describes as being a ‘seminal event, that shaped political and cultural life in Wales for several generations to come’ (Jenkins,2008, pp.213). This essay will discuss, briefly, how far the legacy of ‘*Treachery of the Blue Books (Brad y Llyfrau Gleision)*’ stretched and in what way it affected the national consciousness, (Williams ,1848). Whilst Jenkins and others such as Ioan Gruffydd and Gareth Elwyn Jones concur that the report was a fair assessment of the state of education in Wales, the accompanying derogation and character assassination of the Welsh population caused outrage and helped fuel a nascent national identity (Gruffydd et al, 2019).

Whilst the Eisteddfod and the Cymanfa Ganu continue to this day, albeit in their twenty first century manifestations, the focus of this essay will be on to what extent modern popular music, and specifically that of the 1990s, contributed to Welsh identity. It will explore the Cool Cymru movement established in the late 1990s and compare it with the Cool Britannia phenomenon that was encouraged by the United Kingdom’s media loving, New Labour government. It will ask if the music was an organically acquired component of Cool

Cymru or if it was grafted onto it by the media. Were the popular bands of the 1990s willing participants in the movement or was it simply a cynical exercise in media manipulation? Additionally, it will examine how Cool Cymru sat alongside Cool Britannia, itself a carefully constructed movement that sat neatly with Tony Blair's New Labour ideology and his vision for a new Britain. This piece will use the thesis of Rhian E. Jones' 2017 work, *Music, Politics and identity: from Cool Britannia to Grime4 Corbyn*, to assess reactions to Welsh popular music during the period. The article first appeared in *Soundings*, which debates political and cultural matters and was published by Lawrence and Wishart. Both the publication and publishing house have solid, Left-wing credentials (Lawrence & Wishart, 2019). The article interlinks music and class (specifically the working class) and explores the dynamics between the two. Jones' political leanings are revealed in this article as they are in later examples of her work. To place in context the Cool Cymru movement, this essay will comment on Hugh Aldersey-Williams' cynical stab at Tony Blair's New Labour government's commitment to the Cool Britannia movement and how he sought to be the 'hippest prime minister in history' (Aldersey-Williams, 1998). As these populist movements played out, the backdrop, for Wales at least, included the referendum for devolution in 1997 followed by the First National Assembly elections in Wales in May 1999. These events, or processes, as described by Secretary of State for Wales, Ron Davies, in 1999 will be borne in mind when examining the movements (National Assembly, 2019).

The Cool Cymru thread will be continued with case studies of bands such as the Manic Street Preachers, the Stereophonics and Catatonia. How far (if at all) were they willing participants of the Cool Cymru movement? It will also examine the groups' individual personas and how each group presented their version of Welsh identity. The appeal to a young, modern audience was evident and Rebecca Edwards discusses how they contributed to the modern concept of Welsh identity and helped to firmly place Wales on the map within an industry, at a point in time, when national and youth identity were being re-fashioned on the world stage (Edwards, 2007). Some reference will be made to Meic Llewellyn's, *'Popular Music in the Welsh Language and the affirmation of Youth Identities'* (Llewellyn, 2000). Llewellyn concentrates primarily on Welsh language singers and discusses Welsh language popular music of the 1980s and 1990s, but for the purposes of this dissertation, his comments on the 1990s will be examined. Llewellyn's is a highly politicised view and the piece has a barely concealed rage towards London.

The Manic Street Preachers can perhaps be described as having a political identity as much as a Welsh identity. Their work has been a comment on class as much as it has been an attempt to promote Welsh identity. There is a 'chippiness' and well documented combativeness about the Manic Street Preachers, which has been demonstrated by their words and actions. In 1991 *Melody Maker* carried an interview with the band in which they proclaim 'you are only this hateful and angry once', (Reynolds, 1991). In 1999 they displayed their youthful, anti-establishment credentials when they refused to an invitation to the Voice

of Nation, National Assembly gala concert in Cardiff, at which the Queen was due to attend (NME, 2019a). In contrast Catatonia, specifically the lead singer Cerys Matthews, appears to have moved more easily between their Welsh and British identity. Singers in both Welsh and English languages, they had confidence in their Welsh identity and promoted it with charisma and assurance. They had moments of controversy, their track '*Londinium*' released in 1999, prompted criticism for its anti-London sentiment (NME, 2019b). Cerys Matthews could be described, though, as very much part of the British establishment, having received an MBE in 2014. (Cooper, 2014).

Does popular music, usually performed in English, induce an identifiably different effect on the perception of Welsh national identity from within and without Wales? This dissertation will demonstrate the value of the popular music of 1990s in maintaining Welsh identity, particularly for the youth of the day. Whilst writers such as Llewellyn appear to despise such contributions, it will be shown that the music has perhaps created a new dimension to the Welsh musical tradition.

Chapter 1- Land of Song

The sense of nationality is, according to Kenneth O. Morgan, as 'old as the Welsh themselves' (Morgan 1980, pp.90). That song has long contributed to the sense of Welsh nationality is perhaps indisputable. The resurgence of the Eisteddfod in the nineteenth century (particularly the mid-century) provided a platform from which the Welsh could demonstrate their affinity with the sung word. The well documented pseudo-traditions of the Gorsedd, introduced in the late eighteenth century by Iolo Morgannwg (Jenkins, 2008, pp.3-5), established a device with which the Welsh could proclaim their identity. This sits well within Eric Hobsbawm's theory of 'invented tradition', where emerging nations justified their aspirations with an often romanticised, invented past (Hobsbawm,2015). The reputation for lyrical and musical talent was confirmed also with the Cymanfa Ganu (singing meeting) festivals that took place during the same era. Both the Eisteddfod and Cymanfa Ganu helped to cement the Land of Song pseudonym (Credo,2019b).

It can be argued that the enthusiasm for overt demonstrations of Welsh musical prowess was just one response to the highly defamatory outcome of the 1846 '*Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales*' (Proquest, 2019). Otherwise known as the 'Treachery of the Blue Books' (*Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*), the report was a landmark moment, with far-reaching consequences, that affected the political and cultural landscape for several generations (Jenkins, 2008, pp.213). The derogation of the Welsh by the report, prompted a fiercely proud and patriotic attitude that was taken up within the cultural sphere. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Land of Song label was still in use and the Eisteddfod continued to fly the flag for Welsh identity. The presentation of the National Eisteddfod at the Royal Albert Hall, (Anon, 1909) presents an interesting dichotomy of Welsh identity. It would, of course, have been an affirming demonstration of the principality's self-identity but, in taking place at such an iconic British venue, it can be seen as an assertion of the Britishness of Wales. The dynamic between the Welsh and the British (and for British, often read English), is a question that, through the prism of late twentieth century popular music, this dissertation will return to.

It is a conundrum that Martin Johnes addresses in his 2011 work, *Wales, History and Britishness* (Johnes, 2011, pp.604-605). He argues that the relationship between Wales and Britishness is complex, interwoven and the two cannot be entirely separated. Whilst much opinion has been based on studies of the political sphere, Johnes looks to the everyday for a more nuanced understanding of Britishness- one that is not only synonymous with England. As a Welsh historian with a particular interest in identity and popular culture, Johnes is well-placed to comment on this facet of Welsh identity. Johnes states that, except for the political sphere, post-1945 Welsh history is underdeveloped and 'skewed away from ordinary life' (Johnes, 2011, pp596-619). Johnes supports his argument about the importance of the mundane with reference to 'key theorist on national identity', Michael Billig. Billig argues that

nationalism is embedded within individuals through repetition of 'symbols, signs and language', so as to be unnoticeable (Johnes, 2011, pp.610). This rings true in terms of the Welsh association with music and singing. Certainly, for the post-war generation, it would seem to be innate. Bridgend local, Siriol Davies, recalls how in the 1980s, 'all of my grandparents, aunts, uncles and my parents sang and played an instrument.' (Davies, 2019). The history of the every-day has not been completely ignored, however. In *Rebirth of a Nation*, Morgan covers what he describes as a 'social revolution', particular in South Wales, during the post war period and there is extensive reference to the development of Welsh popular culture. In the chapter entitled, *The New Society*, he relates how, in 1947, a new International Eisteddfod was established in Llangollen. The festival encouraged a resurgence of traditional Welsh art, including music. International in its form, it served the dual purpose of imbuing a sense of Welsh national identity to the indigenous population and also asserting Welsh identity to its international visitors Morgan, (1980, pp.373-374).

Welsh historian and broadcaster, Peter Stead conducts a broad survey of post-war popular culture in his 1995 work, *Post War Wales, Popular Culture*, (Stead, 1995), which is useful but makes some generalisations, which weaken the strength of some his arguments. He asserts that in 1945, as the world emerged from the onslaught of end of two world wars and the Depression on the 1920s, the Welsh expected a 'resurgence of traditional and distinctive culture' (Stead, 1995, pp.1). Popular music as we know it had not, as yet, developed, but the tradition of singing continued in a rich cultural environment of chapel, choir, cinema and sport. Chapel and choir were ahead of activities such as cinema and sport in the cultural hierarchy and male voice choirs, in particular, dominated the sphere (Stead, 1995, pp.2). The Treorchy & District Male Voice Choir was re-established in 1948 and became an exemplar of the genre. From humble beginnings it grew its stature and in 1951 had its first performance at the Royal Albert Hall for the Festival of Britain (treochymalechoir, 2019). Here, then, a demonstration of a popular music of the time, achieving the dual purpose of firmly asserting Welsh identity, both within and without Wales.

Stead and Morgan both refer to inter-village competitiveness that helped the cultural traditions, including singing, to thrive (Morgan, 1980, pp.96). Stead cites an extract from the *Western Mail* in August 1964, which gives commentary of the Eisteddfod that took place at Singleton Park in Swansea (Stead, 1995, pp.10). The narrative describes a scene reminiscent of a battlefield and one senses quite how significant such events were. The piece, entitled *Land of Song and Instruments*, acknowledges the growth of musicianship, but also the continuation of the import of singing. Welsh identity could be seen in communal, inter-village events such as this. Community, by definition, is the shared experience of location, interests and attitudes (Oxford, 2019a) and eventually becomes a shared identity. The micro perspective of the villages later becomes the macro perspective of the Welsh, national identity.

As the traditions of choral singing and Eisteddfodau continued, the advent in the 1950s, of rock and roll music changed the course of popular music. An import from America, it was a seminal moment for popular music. One song in particular, *Rock Around the Clock*, by Bill Haley and the Comets, was the catalyst for change. Stead sees it as a turning point for Wales, yet the change cannot be viewed in solely Welsh terms as the impact of the song was not limited to Wales. There was a seismic shift away from the traditional to the modern and the song's influence cannot be understated. It is still the best-selling *rock and roll* record of all time (Wikipedia, 2019a). As Comets' bass player, Marshall Lytle stated, 'it took the world by storm' and some described it as a Road to Damascus moment (Black, 2007). Its success was due to its use as an opening track for the 1955 film, *Blackboard Jungle*. The film, about a teacher struggling to control an unruly class of New York teenagers caused consternation amongst authorities who would not originally a certificate for the film to be shown. The combination of controversial subject matter and new music proved irresistible for young people (BFI, 2019). In 1957 Bill Haley and his Comets caused chaos as they arrived Cardiff for two concerts. Appealing to a predominantly young audience, the Capitol Theatre received 60,000 requests for tickets (Anon, 1957a). Popular music would never be the same again and South Wales began to spawn performers such as a young Tom Jones, a forerunner to the groups discussed in this dissertation. Rock and Roll's influence continued to grow but it did not entirely eclipse traditional genres such as male-voice choirs. In 1957 an edition of the *Western Mail*, advertising a Rock and Roll spot on music hall performer, Max Wall's (1908-1990) (Oxford DNB, 2019a) theatre show (itself an interesting juxtaposition of the old and the new), also reported that Wales was gaining cultural publicity through the efforts of the British Council. Together with books and films, recordings of male voice choirs were being considered for dissemination through the organisation [(Anon, 1957b) (Rossier, 1957)]. Still the Land of Song, then, despite new genres and fashions in music and in place now were the roots from which the popular music of the 1990s grew.

Chapter 2-Cool Cymru

Popular music is often linked to the zeitgeist of the day. This chapter will examine the affect it had on identity amongst the young Welsh during the late 1990s. As England was experiencing its Cool Britannia moment, Wales was similarly labelled with the phrase, Cool Cymru. It first appeared in 1998 in an article in *The Times*, which reported that the Secretary of State for Wales, Ron Davies (Parliament, 2019a), wanted to 'create a new symbol for the nation', (Anon, 1998). It reported that Davies, together with Labour MP for Neath, Peter Hain (Parliament, 2019b), he was seeking to replace the Welsh flag with a new design. According to Hain, Wales was no longer about 'women in shawls and rain sodden valleys' and he was attempting to establish modern, cultural signposts with pop groups such as the Manic Street Preachers, the Stereophonics and Catatonia (Anon 1998). It was a mood reflected across British politics; Tony Blair was intent on consigning to history John Major's image of a Britain of 'cricket grounds, warm beer (and) invincible green suburbs' (John Major, 1993).

The article in *The Times*, and its invented soubriquet of Cool Cymru, appears to be a considered attempt by the English press to replicate the model of the Cool Britannia movement and Britpop. Britpop was a brand of popular, rock music associated with English groups such as Oasis and Blur and consisted predominantly of young, white males (Britannica, 2019). The connection between politics and popular music is one that has been seen across the decades. From the protest songs of the 1960s to the wave of British punk music in the 1970s, the relationship has endured. In her article, *Music, politics and identity: from Cool Britannia to Grime4 Corbyn*, Rhian E. Jones looks at the dynamics between the two and the 'construction and contestation of the class and national, British identity' (Jones, 2017, pp.50). Jones' personal politics and loyalties are evident across the piece. As a writer on the interwoven subjects of class, politics, popular culture and gender studies, she is eminently qualified to comment. She is highly critical of Blair and his determined adoption of Britpop to help serve his cause. Having abandoned its original guise of 'relative diversity and eclecticism' (Jones, 2017, pp.52), Jones contends that it then became associated with a 'chauvinistic and exclusionary ideal of British identity', where the middle-class, predominantly white male, appropriated working-class culture (Jones, 2017, pp.51). There is some contestation of Jones' claim, though, regarding the strength of the relationship between Blair and Britpop. In 1998, Aldersey-Williams wrote satirically that the love affair was thawing and the performers were no longer happy to be associated with Blair and his New Labour government (Aldersey-Williams, 1998). This view is reinforced by a contemporary article in the *Guardian* commenting on an editorial from the *New Musical Express* (NME). Conversely, the NME criticises Blair, particularly his youth policies, claiming they were adversely affecting its middle class, predominantly white male readership (O'Hagan, 1998). It would seem that Sociologist Anthony Giddens' middle of the road, 'Third Way' politics, which spurned the traditions of both socialism and capitalism, were not achieving the consensus Blair sought (Heywood, 2007, pp. 136-138).

As Cool Britannia's association with Britpop waxed and waned, the British media's label of Cool Cymru was regularly linked to Welsh popular music. Following the Welsh referendum in May 1997, which resulted in Wales achieving devolution (albeit by a very small margin of 50.3%), Wales came to the forefront of British consciousness. The 'process rather than an event' described by Ron Davies (Parliament, 2019), had begun. Jenkins describes the results of the referendum as 'nothing short of remarkable' (Jenkins, 2007, pp.297) but, given the small majority, his Welsh roots perhaps produce a bias as appears to ignore the almost equal number of the population who voted against it. This reveals the complexities of Welsh and British identity. In 1999 the think tank, the Runnymede Trust, produced the Parekh Report, which examined the 'Cool Britannia climate' (Huq, 2016, pp. 138). The report examined multi-ethnicity in Britain and did not examine the relationship between the Welsh and wider Britain per se. Yet its inclusion of Social Theorist Stuart Hall's statement, 'identities are never unified (or) singular, but multiply constructed' (Hall, 2011, pp1-17) echoes Martin Johnes' sentiments and encapsulates very well the multi-layered identity that many Welsh clearly felt (Johnes, 2001, pp.609).

Cool Cymru hype appeared in media headlines, which were almost exclusively from Anglo-centric publications. Evidence of it in Welsh publications is difficult to find until post 2000, when one could say the moment had passed. Its link with popular music is demonstrated with articles such as that in *The Times* in May 1999. As the National Assembly of Wales opened in Cardiff, the accompanying gala concert produced a 'who's who of Cool Cymru'. The concert was due to finish with a line Catalonia's anthemic *International Velvet*, 'Everyday when I wake up, I thank the Lord I'm Welsh' (Sherwin, 1999). In July of that year, the *Financial Times* linked Cool Cymru again to Cardiff, reporting on the city's popularity among office workers. The piece reflects an optimism and vibrancy about the city following the political events of the past two years and on the cusp of the opening of New Millennium Stadium (Groom and Jowitt, 1999). In her book, *Blerwytirhwng* (where are you between), which takes its title from a track by the Welsh speaking/singing pop group Super Furry Animals, Sarah Hill, senior lecturer in the School of Music at Cardiff University, comments on the association of Cool Cymru with popular music. She acknowledges the convenient timing of the arrival of the label- as Wales' national identity was being raised through devolution and the new, National Assembly. Yet she contends the validity of linking the term with what was effectively four, main players in the arena. That Catatonia, Super Furry Animals, the Manic Street Preachers and the Stereophonics raised the profile of Welsh popular music, is indisputable. Hill, however, argues that the grouping provides a rather homogeneous view of Welsh music traditions (Hill, 2016, pp.192). There was an arrogant assumption that all Welsh pop groups were producing a particular, identifiably Welsh sound. This was not necessarily the case and, for example, whilst the Manic Street Preachers and the Stereophonics hailed from the South Wales Valleys, their approaches to promoting Welsh identity varied. Hill's view is replicated by Rebecca Edwards in *Everyday, When I Wake Up, I Thank the Lord I'm*

Welsh, who states there was nothing in the music 'distinctly Welsh...in origin' (Edwards, 2007, pp.145).

There was, for some at least, the shared Welsh language; groups such as Super Furry Animals, Catatonia and Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, who variously performed and recorded in both Welsh and English. The convergence of the Welsh music scene with Cool Cymru came just after Radio Cymru underwent significant changes to its broadcasting format. Geraint Ellis describes how, in 1995, it was relaunched in a new format that resembled strip programming and was more akin to local radio than its sequence programming parent, BBC Radio 4 (Ellis, 1999). It was an attempt to increase its audience and to widen its listeners to include a younger demographic, that was not universally accepted. Hill, too, comments on Radio Cymru's relaxation of its language policy (Hill, 2016, pp193). Groups singing in English received significant airtime via a Welsh medium and this posed a dilemma for Welsh identity. Justification for their inclusion by Radio Cymru was found through their Welshness rather than their Welsh language, but it was not enough to please all of station's audience. Many protested at what they saw of an 'over- Anglicisation' of a hard won and much-loved Welsh institution (Ellis, 2000, pp.193). Welsh poet, Twym Morys, led a 'boycott of the bards' (Llewellyn, 2011, pp.330), in protest at the changes. Students, too, made their disquiet known, walking out during a Welsh language music quiz when asked questions about Anglo-American music (Llewellyn, 2000, pp.335). It was an argument that that was seen again in 1997 when Super Furry Animals were refused permission to sing in English at the National Eisteddfod in Llandeilo (Hill, 2016, pp.193-194). The Welsh language was at the heart of the festival and it was insulting for a band, once considered local (Welsh), to expect to be able to sing in anything but the vernacular. Groups such the Stereophonics and the Manic Street Preachers were noticeable by the absence from such events, falling short in their Welsh language ability. (Hill, 2016, pp.194).

Chapter 3- Y Triawd (Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics and Catatonia)

Performers such as the Stereophonics and the Manic Street Preachers may not have sung in Welsh, but they displayed no desire to be considered an off-shoot of Britpop brand or be associated with the Cool Cymru label. Kelly Jones from the Stereophonics was very keen to distance himself from those 'twats in [London] bars' (Huq, 2016, pp.138). In her article, *Everyday I Wake Up, I Thank the Lord I'm Welsh*, Rebecca Edwards cites a 1996 article from the New York Times as being the catalyst for bringing the Welsh groups to the attention of the British press. The New York Times article compared Welsh groups such as the Super Furry Animals to the grunge scene of Seattle, (Strauss, 1996). This was far removed from Britpop and immediately distinguished the Welsh from the English music scene and gave them some legitimacy on the world stage. The Welsh, though, could not always avoid the Cool Cymru tag and were often grouped together, suggesting a homogeneity that simply did not exist. In 1999, Curig Huws from Murry the Hump complained that journalists were trying to find 'connections between bands that are not connected apart from where they come from' (Edwards, 2007, pp.148). This gives some veracity to Edwards' assertion of the same (Edwards, 2007 pp.145) as well as that of Hill (Hill, 2016, pp.192). Whilst there appears to have been a general disregard for the label, Cool Cymru could perhaps be seen as having a positive impact on raising awareness of Welsh popular music. This is not to credit the media's creation with the groups' success. Rather, that at time when the public's attention had been caught by Blair's spin, Cool Cymru provided a mutually beneficial hook for Welsh identity and popular music, with which to hold that attention.

Whilst Cool Cymru may have been used beyond Wales to sign-post Welsh identity, Hill views this as problematic. Inherent in national identity are shared traditions, cultural references, geography and, usually, a shared indigenous language. That the main players shared a physical locality has been established, beyond this, what did they share? Hailing from South Wales the Stereophonics, Catatonia and Manic Street Preachers presented very different personas. The Manic Street Preachers, from Blackwood in South Wales slowly developed their brand from the early 1990s. There was a political edge to their music and their Welsh identity is tightly bound in their working class identity. In a 1991 interview, which appeared in *Melody Maker*, band member Nicky Wire stated:

'Where we come from, it's very working class, but there is a tradition of bettering yourself...Self-education is a really big thing. The work ethic is massive' (Percival, pp139).

They would refer to this again in their 1998 with the first line of their anthemic, *A Design for Life*, which begins with the line, 'Libraries gave us power', and harks back to the libraries established in the 1920s and 1930s within Workmen's Halls and Miners' Institutes and which facilitated the miner's self-education (Hogenkamp,2018). The track was taken from the

album, *This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours*, a quote attributed to (but difficult to substantiate) NHS founder and Tredegar native, Aneurin Bevan (1897-1960), (Oxford, 2019b). The album was described as being 'like a hymn to Old Labour values: moralistic, class conscious and, in its own way, conservative (Stubbs, 1998). A rejection of New Labour and their catchall Third Way policies.

In the 1991 interview, Wire argued that the band did not crave popular success. He claimed that he was 'happiest...with my mum and dad. Watching telly and stuff', (Reynolds, 1991, pp. 28). Their first album, *Generation Tourist*, was about to be released was also due to be their last. They were hoping to achieve myth like status, reluctant participants in the mainstream and, it seems, enjoying being rebels of the moment. Reluctant as they may have been to enter into the mainstream fray the album was released through Columbia, a major American record company. Their next single, *Stay Beautiful*, was produced by über pop group, Wham's, ex-producer (Reynolds, 1991). It is hard to reconcile these elements with Wire's protestations. There does seem to be an element of the band protesting too much and the anger and hatefulness they professed to feel, sometimes feels a little too studied. Yet, it certainly held some appeal for their fans. In *Triptych, Three Studies of Manic Street Preachers' The Holy Bible*, Simon Price calls it not just the 'Manics' greatest album, but probably one of the greatest albums ever made' (Price, 2017, pp.9-10). The book, an assessment of the album, is partly written by Rhian E. Jones and she describes how the album resonated with her angst filled teenage self during the long Summer of 1994. She describes how the album 'dropped into the Summer of 1994 and split it open with the force of a depth charge' (Jones, 2017, pp.18-21).

In contrast to the Manic Street Preachers, the Stereophonics from Cwmaman in the Cynon Valley, can perhaps be described as less complicated. As J. Mark Percival writes, 'it has been rather too easy to dismiss the significance of the Stereophonics', (Percival, 2016, pp.136). The group formed in 1992 and served a long apprenticeship before appearing in the public's consciousness in 1997 with the release of their first album, *Word Gets Round*. Percival, a senior lecturer in Media at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, with a special interest in the popular music industry (QMU, 2019), writes that together with their contemporaries, the Stereophonics had time and space to develop, removed as they were from the 'English centre of the UK music industry' (Percival, 2016, pp.137). It allowed them, according to music industry journalist Ian Fortnum, to enjoy a 'Beatles-in Hamburg apprenticeship... hon(ing) their craft'. Fortnam also cites the group as having 'all the anthemic hugeness of the Manic Street Preachers, but none of their over-intellectualised nihilism' (Fortnam, 1998). This is a fair and succinct assessment of both groups. Stereophonics' lead singer Kelly Jones' lyrics had a leanness that nonetheless commented on hard-hitting subjects such as bereavement (*Local Boy in a Photograph*) and the destructive power of rumour [(*A Thousand Trees*), (A-Z, 2019, a and b)]. The band never overtly promoted their Welsh identity and Jones cheerfully admitted in 1997 the absence of politics in his writing. Yet in Cardiff in

1997, as the worlds of popular music and politics momentarily collided, Jones promised MP Peter Mandelson his vote for an Assembly stating, 'our music isn't particularly political, but Wales needs a voice of its own', (Heath, 1997). Jones had been keen to escape drudgery of factory buildings sites and the group did not hide their hunger for success (Fortnam, 1998). They happily accepted the Brits Best Newcomer award in February 1998, a showcase for mainstream, Pop. It was here that Welsh stalwart, Tom Jones, appeared in a precursor to the launch of his highly successful *Reload* album in 1999 (Glaister, 1998).

The Manic Street Preachers and the Stereophonics presents two quite different examples of Welsh popular music groups within the 1990s. The third in *y triawd* (the trio), Catatonia combined aspects of both groups and introduced other dimensions too. Catatonia was formed in 1992, its lead singer, Cerys Matthews was a Cardiff girl, but the band included two ex-members of Welsh language group, Y Cyrff. The Welsh singers, originally from North Wales, were important to the Welsh pop scene and the loyal Welsh language press had high hopes for them in terms of Welsh culture (Hill, 2016, pp194). Where the Manic Street Preachers and the Stereophonics had cut their teeth on the 'toilet circuit' performing at pubs and clubs, Y Cyrff were regularly featured at Eisteddfodau (BBC, 2019). From their conception Catatonia were starting from a different mindset and one that was overtly Welsh. The group, though, were able to successfully straddle the two strands of their Welsh and British identity without relinquishing any of their Welshness. Something that the Manic Street Preachers seemed reluctant to do and which the Stereophonics seemed unconcerned with, undefined as they were by their national identity. The three groups present a microcosm of the eternal conundrum that is the Welsh/ British identity. Cerys Matthews moved seamlessly between her two identities singing in both Welsh and English and retaining and, indeed, increasing her credibility. Other Welsh language groups such as the Super Furry Animals saw Catatonia as trailblazers for their own entry into an arena that is termed Anglo-American. Lead singer Gruff Rhys commented about their transition from Welsh to English in 2003:

'...it is our first language so it was a natural thing to do...we thought we could take our music and audience further. It was made easier for us because people like Catatonia had gone before us. We weren't the first to jump' (Percival, 2016, pp.140).

Rhys' statement reveals two points; in one sense it reveals the limitations of only performing in the Welsh language. These were, after all, young people with aspirations and ambitions. Their loyalty to their Welsh identity was at times perhaps tested by an understandably selfish desire to succeed. Secondly, the convergence of the of the English-speaking acts with the Welsh speaking acts, 'suggests a fluidity' to Welsh identity (Hill, 2016, pp192).

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Having examined the concept of Cool Cymru it seems clear that it was entirely a British media construct that, in part, provided an opportunistic umbrella with which to label Welsh popular music. It is easy to be cynical about the label and, given that it did not originate from within Wales, one can understand why it was never going to be embraced by an Anglo-weary and newly devolved Welsh. Part of the backdrop for Cool Cymru was the previously discussed changes at Radio Cymru. The disillusioned students sum up the mood with their statement, 'I'd like to make it clear to the top nobs...there's no justifications for their obsession with equation, cool = English' (translated from Welsh. Llewellyn, 2000, pp.335). None of the music acts assessed appear to have shown a particular enthusiasm for participating in the Cool Cymru charade, but neither did they overtly condemn it. As noted, outside of Wales, it did not harm their careers and there is no such thing as bad publicity (taking the Cool Cymru at its most basic level). Within in Wales, there may have been a perceptible difference in how some of the groups were received, but this was more to do with the language they sang in rather than Cool Cymru.

This dissertation has examined several scholarly articles and they have presented a range of opinion and bias. Some such as Peter Stead, who was writing in pre-devolution 1995, offer a balanced view and acknowledge the value of both the Welsh and English-speaking population. It is an optimistic opinion that recognises the principality's cultural successes since 1945. Jones, Hill and Edwards have more of a political edge and, naturally, a Welsh bias, but seem to recognise equally the part the various bands played in raising awareness of Welsh identity. For Meic Llewellyn it is more difficult for him to recognise that value and for him to acknowledge the widely held view that Welsh and British identity is a multi-faceted entity that cannot be delineated in black and white. Contributors to his work such as Twym Morys claim that they cannot consider those that sing in English (such as the Super Furry Animals) as Welsh bands. Director of Welsh record company Recordiau Crai (Raw records), uses the term struggle and says that 'individuals...must decide if they are part of the Welsh struggle or not' (Llewellyn, 2000, pp.329). It has been difficult to establish the credentials of Llewellyn beyond that he has written several journal articles on popular music. That he was writing in 2000 and had perhaps observed or experienced, close hand, the effects of the Thatcher years perhaps explains his highly politicised piece (but this is purely conjecture).

That popular music raised the profile of Wales during the 1990s is evident. It was seen as good thing. As a young adult, Siriol Davies remembers being excited by the emergence of a young, successful Welsh music scene, 'I can remember thinking, this good, this is exciting. It had always been okay to be Scottish or Irish and now it was okay to Welsh.

It gave young people such a sense of confidence'. As a Welsh and English speaker, she was not overly concerned which language she listened to, but a rousing rendition of Catatonia's *International Velvet* (in Welsh) always made her feel good about life (personal

communication, 2019). The word anthemic has been used several times in this dissertation and in the academic sources that have contributed to it. An anthem is defined as a rousing, uplifting song identified with a particular, group, body or cause (Oxford, 2019b). That one word perhaps sums up best the power of Welsh popular music in the 1990s and the impact it had on Welsh identity. Eric Hobsbawm's theory of invented tradition not only encompasses traditions that are 'formally constructed', but also those that 'emerge...within a brief and dateable period- a matter of a few years perhaps' (Hobsbawm, 2015). This phrase, too, encapsulates that time in Welsh, musical history.

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