CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

The Composer David Wynne talks to A. J. Heward Rees

AJHR: I feel it a marvellous experience and privilege to chat with you, not only because you are in such obvious respects Wales's senior composer (having been born in the first year of this century), but also in a more special sense because your own personal 'breakthrough ' as an artist seems to have coincided very largely with the mature flowering of twentieth century music m Wales itself. Let's go back to the beginning however. How did it all start for you?

DW: By accident, almost! Nowadays when I look back on my career it seems rather uncanny the way things have turned out. I have had some extraordinary pieces of good luck and at difficult moments there often seems to have been somebody or something around to give me a nudge in a positive direction. Well, anyway, it all began when I went to Tom Llewelyn Jenkins for a few piano lessons. You may remember him. He became a university piano tutor, years later, at Aberystwyth.

AJHR: Yes, I do, he was there when I arrived in the early fifties.

DW: Now that was my first piece of good luck (although I didn't realise it at the time. Tom Llewelyn was an exceptionally alert and enterprising musician, holding the diplomas of LRAM (piano) and FRCO (organ), which fifty years ago were considered very distinctive qualifications. He was organist at Moriah Chapel, Cilfynydd, where I was a member. One of his closest and most interesting friends was Cyril Jenkins, who by the standards of Welsh music in those days was a very modern composer indeed.

AJHR: He was well known for castigating Welsh musicians for being backward, wasn't he? He had an extraordinary career, too, it seems. You must tell me more about him later. What made you turn to music, and to Tom Llewelyn, as you call him?

DW: Quite simply this: my sister bought a piano. I was twenty years old at the time and, with typical youthful exhibitionism wanted to entertain my friends by being able to accompany them at the piano in the popular ballads of the time, such as *Yes, we have no bananas*, *My little grey home in the West*, and so on. I had no idea then that I would eventually become a professional musician. Although (like most people of my time) I was a member of the chapel choir and read sol-fa reasonably well, I can't recall that I was especially interested in music.

At that time I was concerned about finding a way to get out of coal-mining, and with this purpose in view was studying electrical engineering at night-school and by correspondence. But there was one great difficulty: I had no practical experience of the mechanics of this subject. I managed the mathematical and theoretic problems without too much difficulty, but had I been faced with an electric motor of even the simplest design I should probably not have recognized one end from the other. From the first lesson with Tom Llewelyn, music absorbed my attention as nothing else had ever done. As a youngster I had played the mouth-organ a lot and was fond of making up tunes and playing variations on old tunes, without being conscious of any particular musical talent. I started my musical career shadowed by an incredible amount of musical naivety. When my teacher started me on my first 'Tutor' I remember thinking: "When I get through this I shall know all about music." Such was my ignorance. I was so carried away by enthusiasm for my newly found activity that I had got through my first 'Tutor' by the end of the first term. I was still unaware that there was any music other than the popular music of the time, and when my teacher told me that we would follow the tutor with a study of the Six Sonatinas by Clementi, I was both astonished and disappointed to find that the pieces were for piano solo. I diffidently asked when we were to start playing popular music. Tom Llewelyn's face clouded over and I immediately realised I had made a bloomer. "It's usual to do Clementi after the 'Tutor'," he said, and proceeded to play the first Sonatina in C. And as he played I realised why; for something extraordinary was happening to me, as though some chemical change was activating an aesthetic reorientation. From that moment I was hooked on classical music, and from then on couldn't get enough of it.

AJHR: How extraordinary! But surely you must have heard some music of this kind before, somewhere - on the chapel organ perhaps?

DW: I must have, of course. But I can't have been consciously or actively aware of it; certainly not at the level of comprehension which listening to the Clementi Sonatina communicated to me. At the age of 20 a new world of experience was opening up for me.

From then on, apart from my piano studies, I went on to study the theory of harmony and strict counterpoint and progressed rapidly through classical procedures to a stage where I came to understand, through practice, the principles of classical forms. There was more to it however; for Tom Llewelyn was also interested in contemporary musical trends, and our discussions and examinations of contemporary musical techniques were taken by me to be something perfectly normal. Actually, such discussions were unusual, although it was only much later that I realised this. One of the books which we discussed and which at that time influenced me a good deal was *Modern Harmony* by Eaglefield Hull. It was a very controversial book for the time and was the cause of a good deal of heated discussion among musicians. Had I gone for lessons to another teacher in the locality it is quite likely that I should have ended up like them in the private-teaching – local Eisteddfod – Gymanfa Ganu syndrome, with a compositional ambition confined to the writing of hymn tunes and anthems. And this is where Cyril Jenkins comes into the picture again. Cyril Jenkins's family were Cilfynydd people and I knew his family well – but Cyril had left the village when I was quite a young boy and consequently I only met him casually once or twice through my teacher, T. Ll. Jenkins. I gather they had many ideas in common. Both were especially critical of Welsh contemporary music and the restricted repertoire of Welsh choirs at that time – both insisting on a broader-based outlook and a more up-to-date approach to musical problems.

In terms of personality, Cyril seemed a less reliable man than Tom, but he had considerable talent and was the complete professional; an accepted establishment figure in the National and local Eisteddfodau and a man of much influence in Welsh musical circles between the period of the First World War and the end of the 'Twenties', when he left England to work abroad. He was undoubtedly for his time the most advanced of Welsh composers and musical thinkers, and in my early days he proved an example to follow and emulate. Perhaps the fact that he was a Cilfynydd man also influenced me. He eventually ended up in Salt Lake City, where he continues (as far as I know) to practise his profession. Although by now almost forgotten in Wales, I gather his music is still in demand in various parts of the world.

AJHR: One of the 'might-have-beens' of Welsh music, would you say?

DW: Probably, yes. There was so much talent in Cyril, and he had to get out of Wales to be able to use it to his own advantage. Had he been born much later, who knows what might have happened? All Welsh musicians were terribly tied down by their background in economic and artistic terms in those days. I was extremely fortunate in being able to get out of the worst aspects of our native predicament, just at the time when change was in sight. You see, it was a question of breaking through a kind of vicious circle caused by the pure chance of the time-circumstances of one's birth. My parents were good and intelligent people, who gave me every encouragement, but obviously they had no more idea than I had at that time as to what real standards of attainment were.

AJHR: Were your parents and family musical?

DW: Only in the general way as everyone was in those days. Strangely enough, I've four brothers, three of them musical – and so are their children – but my sisters show little interest in music.

AJHR: With your teacher you prepared for University Matriculation with your sights on Cardiff and the music department there and in the following year, 1925, gained a Glamorgan

B.Mus Scholarship. What were your first contacts and impressions with the 'official' academic world of music?

DW: Well, for 'Matric' I submitted two pieces of composition (the first time such a thing had happened, according to Dr David Evans, the professor) and had aural tests. I hadn't the faintest idea what they would be, but Tom had told me they would be nothing to worry about. I wrote down the tests the first time, and ticked them as being correct on the second hearing, much to the examiner's annoyance, who interrupted me and said that it was *his* job to do that!

AJHR: You have absolute pitch, by the way, I imagine?

DW: Yes; or rather I did have. You know, during the course of many years of teaching, in which one is constantly transposing things, I find one loses it. When composing, however, I still seem to have it, curiously enough. Professor David Evans suggested to me at that time that he thought sol-fa was a better system for identifying pitch than relying on a rigid fixed sense of pitch. As a schoolmaster, I later came to agree with this and always used sol-fa for pitch identification in my teaching. A good sense of general pitch is, of course, very important to the musician, and I have found in my students many with absolute pitch who were musically distinctly inferior to others with a good sense of relative pitch. After all, 'recognition' is only the first process – the second process, the reception and clarification by the musical mind, is far more important.

AJHR: Were you bored by the course itself, as Grace Williams had been?

DW: Oh, yes - it was deadly dull. I left college very frustrated and uneasy about things. First of all because the so-called compositional procedures taught were so obviously different and inferior to those met within the works of the great masters. The emphasis was on rules, whereas it should have been on idiomatic principles and style. Thus there were two uncompromising standards – the academic (as taught) and the creative as experienced in the music of the masters. The one the deadwood of barren theory, the other the quick of vital experience. Musicology and aesthetics were non-existent; and most of our time was spent on fabricating exercises over sterile *canti fermi* – writing unmusical canons and working academic puzzles under the heading *Examination Fugue* by Kitson.

However, I must record that both Professor David Evans and Senior Lecturer John Morgan Lloyd were kindness itself to me, and at no time did they discourage me from taking my own direction in composition. They were both fine musicians, but their outlook was conservative if not backward-looking. However, Professor Evans saw to it that all scores of new music by leading contemporary composers were placed in the library. I found this department of the library very exciting, and with two friends who were specializing in French and English respectively, but who were also doing a subsidiary course in music, managed to examine, study and play (very badly) many of the most recent scores of that time. I remember we had many furious discussions on the merits of such composers as Scriabin, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Bartók, Stravinsky and Schoenberg, and attempted analyses of many of their works. Fortunately I cannot remember what our conclusions were, but they must have been appallingly naïve, as our experience of such music was confined solely to our own activities, as, except for *Modern Harmony* by Eaglefield Hull, there was no literature (that we knew of) available to help us in our assessments. Some scores we found incomprehensible, and I remember well reducing Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* to a piano score, that we might the better study their structure.

AJHR: In your essay in that fascinating first volume of *Artists in Wales* you say that Bartók impressed you most, of all modern composers.

DW: Oh, yes, undoubtedly so.

AJHR: His music seems to have receded a little into the background in recent years, don't you think?

DW: Yes, that's true, and it's quite wrong, in my opinion. However, one can be certain that he'll soon regain his distinctly high position again, and come to be regarded as the most outstanding composer of the post-traditional era. In the 1950s total serialization was all the rage, as far as the *avant-garde* composers were concerned. The academic rigidity of this system was abandoned round about 1960, to be replaced on the part of its practitioners by the proportional method, as illustrated in the music of composers like Nono and Berio. The proportional method was less academic than the total serialization method, but in its general form It suffered from a lack of rhythmic vitality, as in the strict application of this method there is no pulse; the rhythm, such as it is, relying on the distance of one quaver from another, so that a metronome indication might specify that ten millimetres equal sixty. Much of the serial music of the period 1950-65 was based upon purely mathematical concepts, with the original score marked out (or measured) first of all on graph paper. Thus the first concept would have been based on an equation of relative number-values rather than on pitch, pulse and rhythm. I had many arguments at the time with composers using this system (like Bernard Rands) about its pseudo-scientific basis, and I still believe that many gifted composers were then beguiled by the ingenuities rather than by the creative potential of the means which formed the bases of the systems. For me, the start of musical thinking is the ear itself. Then musical intelligence takes over. There's no reason why one should not use the serial technique, provided one thinks in aural terms rather than in verbal – or number – terms. In other words, the basis of musical composition lies in pitch and pulse; both might, under disciplined musical thinking, be abandoned at certain points in a composition to heighten musical conclusions, or to anticipate them. But the ear and the musical impulse must be the dominating factors. In fact, this point is one which I am sure Schoenberg himself would concede, although his music sometimes suggests that creatively the point evaded him.

AJHR: But Berg, one of Schoenberg's most successful pupils – and, according to Sibelius, his most successful 'work' - was aware of this point, surely?

DW: Exactly. If his ear wasn't satisfied, Berg would abandon strict adherence to serial theory. He seems to me to have been a truer artist than Schoenberg, although I think Schoenberg had superior intellectual ability. Schoenberg seems to have made a fundamental error when devising his system. He ignored the constant force of harmonic thinking in Western music which has prevailed over a period of nearly ten centuries. The method of composition he devised is in reality a purely melodic one – any harmonies are short-lived and unrelated, since the music itself stems from a continuous variation of a basic tone-row. The important point that seemed to have eluded Schoenberg is that once you strike two notes together you have harmony and, therefore, a special relationship which is not melodic. It is easy to criticise this method with hindsight, but Schoenberg is, I think, still one of the most important musical thinkers of the twentieth century. His method has made composers and musicians re-examine the procedural elements of composition, with the result, which is now becoming established, that many new devices have become available which, when used sensitively, open up a new field of musical experience. The basis of communication between the composer and the listener lies in the ability of the composer to establish relationships between all aspects of the constituent parts, so that the resulting music will be acceptable and comprehensible. Thus, any system must be capable of establishing comprehensible relationships of a most diverse kind.

AJHR: In fact, Schoenberg himself came back to a form of tonality in the end, didn't he?

DW: Yes. I once discussed this point with Erwin Stein, who had been a pupil of Schoenberg's. Stein maintained that he might have allowed the term ' tonal centre ' but would have denied the term 'key'.

AJHR: It is on the grounds of communication, then, that you place Bartók's achievement as the highest in this century?

DW: Yes, even though Schoenberg's was the greater intellect. I myself don't think Stravinsky is of the stature of Bartók, although I believe that both of them will be regarded in the future as the best of the twentieth-century minor composers. We haven't any twentieth-century major composers, don't you agree?

AJHR: I presume you are disregarding Debussy because of his earlier dates.

DW: Yes, precisely; but I'm glad you mentioned him, because I would put him above them all – that is, among 'modern' composers.

AJHR: In your essay, which I mentioned before, you refer to a kind of struggle in musical Wales earlier this century between a sort of pro-Teutonic camp versus a pro-Celtic one. Debussy having been named, don't you think it a pity that in the modern era more influence has not come from, let us call it, the 'Gallic' aesthetic, with its love of clarity and lightness, and at times a certain sensuousness as well? Would not this have been a viable alternative, in Wales in particular?

DW: Yes. The French have always aimed for clarity, and they've been basically anti-Teutonic for centuries. The result has been a different kind of sophistication. You see, in my mind the Welsh musician is temperamentally closer to the French than to the Germans. In my own case, I must admit that Debussy's textures interest me more than Schoenberg's, or even Berg's. Apart from that, one could claim that Holst and Vaughan Williams, not to mention Moeran and Bax, were closer to Debussy or perhaps Ravel than anybody else – a mixture of Gallic with some Teutonic elements.

AJHR: Of course, on the other hand, pursuing the same argument, there's little in the way of Bartókian folksiness in the Gallic approach to offer us.

DW: No, indeed, but it's difficult to pin a thing like that down; because when we talk of Welsh folk-music there's little that's distinctive enough for a composer to assimilate or come to grips with, and much of what there is is also harp-orientated. Because of their extreme sophistication, the French emerged from folk-influences on their music in about the seventeenth century. On the other hand, Wales is only just now emerging as a recognised musical nation. The reputation she has in the popular mind relates to the Welshman's love of singing, and his ability to sing simple tunes in harmony. True, this ability to sing in harmony is mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis as early as the twelfth century; and it is also true that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Wales had a wide reputation for harp-music and performers on that instrument; but this by comparison with continental nations hardly justifies the title of a 'musical nation '. The Welsh are no more nor less musical than other peoples.

AJHR: Were there any other composers who influenced you as a young man, and later?

DW: As a student of course one is conscious of a lot of influences. I remember being fascinated by Scriabin, and then by York Bowen (who was a kind of off-shoot of Debussy), John Ireland, Bax, Moeran, and so on. They all seemed fresh and exciting at the time. However, those who have shaped my aesthetic most are Beethoven, Bach and Bartók.

AJHR: Would you claim, incidentally, that you can discern any Welsh folk- or other influences? I know that you like to set the early poetry of the *Cynfeirdd*, for example, and that certain cadences of traditional oratory have interested you.

DW: Like other composers, I have used the idioms of Welsh folk-music in such works as my *Fantasia No. 1, Cymric Rhapsodies* Nos. 1 and 2, and the *Welsh Folk-song Suite* (all works for orchestra). I have also set poems by Taliesin and other early poets for solo voice, and for chorus – and there are the *Six Songs for Tenor and Harp* which contain settings of strict metre poems from Dafydd ap Gwilym and later poets. These poems have strict metres governed by the four types of *cynghanedd*, where however the stressed words are often found at irregular intervals – suggesting verbal rhythms quite different from those found in English poetry. There is a distinct advantage in this, as far as a musical setting is concerned, for one can fashion more interesting melodic lines where the rhythms are irregular.

Regarding oratory – I heard as a child a large number of Welsh preachers who were considered masters of the *hwyl*; and although I was unable to follow the language I was very impressed with the melodic rhapsodies they extemporised when the spirit enveloped them. They always used a pentatonic scheme based on the following sol-fa notes: $m_{|}$ $l_{|}$ $t_{|}$ d r m a were very skilled in varying the length of their phrases and rhythmic structures.

AJHR: Apart from the teachers you have already mentioned, was there any personality, or personalities, who loomed large in your musical life?

DW: Undoubtedly, Sir Walford Davies. Quite apart from anything else, I consider that he transformed Welsh musical life by sheer drive and personality. I came into contact with him first when I was given the job of secretary of the Choral Union at the College, which meant co-ordinating student activities, finding artists for concerts and so on. I found myself on various high-powered committees, and 'in on things' in general. When Walford came to conduct the smaller choir I found myself involved with his plans, and spent much time in the National Council of Music which was based in the University Registry. I learned a tremendous amount from him about choir-training. He was an absolute perfectionist, and a strict disciplinarian, a man of tremendously wide experience and many talents. He would never tolerate the second-rate. We were virtually a specialist choir, of course, about 30 in number, which was just as well, for as a conductor Walford's beat was very unreliable, but as a choir trainer he was first-class.

AJHR: Many people couldn't stand him, apparently, whereas others (such as one of my own teachers) practically worshipped him.

DW: I must say I myself found him helpful and extremely approachable. It is true that he could be arrogant and had many prejudices. He hated Wagner, and didn't care much for modern music, especially Stravinsky. It is also true that most of what you might call the older Welsh musical establishment were extremely jealous of him and disliked him intensely. He sometimes seemed very eccentric and enigmatic by local Welsh standards, and artistically rather an isolationist. Nevertheless, judged by the highest standards he was a very fine musician, there can be no doubt about that. He certainly did more for Wales, as far as the professional aspect of music is concerned, than all the rest of them put together. Practically all the musical developments which have followed in this century can be traced back to one or other of the things he initiated. His influence was greatest from the time he went to Aberystwyth as professor till the end of the twenties, and he was still associated with Wales in some capacity or other up until the war. (As a matter of fact, it was he, not the professor, who presented me for my doctorate in 1938.) His work through the schools had the greatest effect of all, I think. As president of the National Council of Music he persuaded local authorities to engage string tutors in both junior and secondary schools, and saw to it that lecturers visited some of the more remote towns to take classes in the appreciation of music. The university ensembles were established and visited schools regularly, giving concerts of classical music. Eventually, these activities led to the formation of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales. Since the last world war there have been enormous changes in musical thinking among our young people. Their musical standards are much higher, and their outlook extends far beyond national boundaries. Two of our best-known middle-aged composers, Alun Hoddinott and William Mathias are products of the events that I have just mentioned, and there are a number of younger composers who are likely also to leave their imprints on the progress of Welsh music. It was Walford who directed my own generation to pursue the ideal of professional achievement instead of associating their activities continually with the perpetual grind of amateurism, which in the past had such a discouraging influence on earlier Welsh musicians. Think of talented musicians like Joseph Parry and Vaughan Thomas whose horizons were limited by the amateur traditions in which they had to participate to survive. In my opinion, their talents were denied fulfilment as a consequence. Largely because of Walford's efforts, the whole scene was transformed, so that from the 20's to the 30's it was like moving into a new world. I went to the university with the vague idea of becoming a local private teacher like my predecessors; by the time I left, like Grace Williams who was a year or two ahead of me, I was determined to become a fully professional musician or nothing. A fellow-student in the music department persuaded me from the outset to get a proper teacher's certificate – yet another lucky nudge in the right direction, you see.

AJHR: As you've mentioned his name, let me ask you whether you think that in effect we lost an important figure in David Vaughan Thomas, on account of Walford's ascendancy.

DW: That's a difficult question to answer, as he was attached to no academic post in Wales, and his standing in the community was therefore that of a free-lance musician – albeit a brilliant one. He was certainly a very intelligent man and musician, and a good pianist, I believe. Had he been born twenty-five years later, who knows? It is after all a matter of the influences brought to bear on one, first of all by one's own disposition and then by the kind of music one hears (I embraced the concept of modern music before I'd heard any – but that was, I suppose, just a sort of cussedness in me!). I certainly think Vaughan Thomas was at his best in his *Saith o Ganeuon ar Gywyddau*. The one mistake he made, in my opinion, was to adapt the English strophic measure to the free cywydd style; it's a more narrative style than strophic. However, he was the first in that field, and it proved, in any case, to be a notable achievement.

AJHR: After getting teaching qualifications at Bristol you came back virtually to your native heath and gave very many years of service as a well-known teacher at the Lewis School, Pengam – as, indeed, several of your distinguished old pupils will testify. Were you ever tempted to head for London or another more musically active sphere?

DW: Oddly enough, I only applied for two teaching posts, one in London and the other at the Lewis School, Pengam. Both applications were successful, but the London post was in an East End junior school, and after weighing up the pros and cons I decided that teaching in a school like Pengam would be far more rewarding than teaching in a junior school. I am not sure whether or not I might have benefited more as a musician had I accepted the London post.

AJHR: Did you (as Grace Williams told me she did) keep your composing life apart from your work as a teacher?

DW: Well, I did write a few things for school performance, and, like most people, made many arrangements of classical music for class use, but I did tend after school to forget the classroom, and to spend at least part of an evening on composition. I think I did all that was required of me and to the best of my ability as a schoolmaster. Nowadays, I concentrate wholly on advanced work at university level, and find the experience absorbing and exciting. There is a surprising amount of talent among young musicians today, and I am always pleasantly surprised at the speed with which some of my students pick up and demonstrate a really professional compositional technique in the space of three years. They are lucky at Cardiff to have a modern and exceptionally well equipped department. The style of composition varies from student to student, and from the pure modal to the serial systems. As a teacher I see my task as one of encouraging the young composer in the style which suits him best, and I try to help him clear his mind by discussing with him current compositional problems which might need clarifying. Technique is of paramount importance, and this is continually stressed.

AJHR: In spite of all this, you yourself are basically self-taught as a composer, aren't you? Did you seek or get advice in the longlean years when you were struggling to establish yourself as a serious composer?

DW: Well, as I mentioned before, I learned mainly on my own by studying scores, which are still the best textbooks for students, especially when used with radio programmes and records. I did, however, submit my *Songs of Solitude* to Vaughan Williams for advice and criticism. I chose him because I knew he was prepared to do that sort of thing, and I admired him anyway. It was during the war, when I had a very busy time as 'Fire-officer' for the village and for the school, and had very little time to devote to composition. I was very despondent, wondering whether there would ever be a future for a serious-minded composer in Wales. I sent Vaughan Williams the songs to find out really if they were good enough to justify my continuing with composition. He gave me some good advice and criticism, and his letter encouraged me to continue writing. I also sent a *Violin Concertante* to Matyas Seiber, who was also encouraging.

AJHR : Your winning the Clements Prize in 1944 for a string quartet was also decisive in encouraging you to persist, in those years spent as if in a void, I believe? Was this when you took the name 'David Wynne' as a *nom-de-plume*?

DW: Yes. I had used the name as a *nom-de-plume* on my entry for the Clements Prize. Afterwards the secretary of the competition thought it a good name to adopt professionally, and I took the advice.

AJHR: I take it you did a lot of reading, especially in the early years, as you must have felt a need to catch up on your general education at times. Do you still read as avidly?

DW: Well, I did a lot of reading, always, but simply because I wanted to, rather than to catch up, though that had something to do with it. I was strongly influenced in this respect by the two university friends I mentioned earlier. I think I got through at least as much literature in my college days as most people do by the time they've gone through secondary school. I seem to find less time to read nowadays, and that mainly in German, and more prose than poetry in recent years. I seem to have gone through most of the obvious European classics during my younger days. I don't find the moderns so satisfying on the whole. I'm thinking of taking up French again, after having left off some years ago. Languages have always interested me, and they are ideal for learning on bus journeys to and from Cardiff when normal reading is difficult.

AJHR: I take it you read Welsh?

DW: Well, my mother was English, so it wasn't spoken at home, though I heard plenty of it in chapel and so on. I learned it for 'Matric.' and took it for a year at the university. I certainly learned enough to be able to cope, with a dictionary, even with early poets like Taliesin. I have made my own translations for my settings from the early Welsh poets. I checked them afterwards with Welsh speakers just in case there might have been some 'bloomers' – but they all got by.

AJHR: You have gone on record as saying that you had a bent for drawing as a child – shades of Schoenberg!

DW: Yes, perhaps! One of my earliest memories as a four-year-old at school is of having a drawing of an apple done in sand held out for admiration. I always found that it was a school subject I could do with ease, though, of course, there was no question of a career based on it – one simply didn't know about such things in those days; and in any case I left school at twelve and a half. It was looked upon then as something whimsical, to be savoured and then set aside. It never occurred to my working-class generation that there might be a weekly wage to be got out of art. Perhaps I would have become an architect had circumstances been different. Certainly apart from music my interests have extended to writing verse and painting. I have always maintained an interest in pictures, and as a young man often went walking with a sketchbook in my pocket. During my teacher-training year at Bristol University I chose art instead of music as the 'creative' course.

AJHR: Has it influenced your music in any way, do you think? I don't necessarily mean in an obviously impressionistic way. Do you have a visual image or pattern of your music, or do you (as I believe Britten said he did) visualise – in a metaphoric sense, perhaps – a completed work in outline before you perceive the detailed parts or ingredients?

DW: Not in that way – no. Everything starts with sound. Even a single note can start a reaction in me, and things follow from there. We all have preliminary approaches or guidelines, of course. I never start a composition before deciding on the forces to be used and their characteristic sound-quality. (During that period I avoid listening to classical music if I can help it.) Then I decide on the length and form of the music. The form is all-important at this stage. That is what I think Britten meant. Teaching composition as I do, I'm very conscious of that. It's a basic problem for young modern composers, of course, because analysis of the old classical forms (which are less useful today) show them to be based essentially on units and sections related by key. This can be emulated in our time in different ways. If it's serialism, it's a case of variations. (What we today call 'continuous variation' is an old device, Haydn's in fact – and he was very good at it, too.) When I use the serial system the tone-row does not come from a series of 12 notes; I start from a group of three-note harmonies. This harmonic structure then becomes the base for all other musical devices. The advantage of this base is that its constituent units are easily remembered, and can be transposed easily to any pitch desired. From these harmonies I then derive a principal tone-row from which the main themes of the work are composed. As permutations of the basic harmonies are possible and desirable, other subsidiary rows can be formed for secondary themes and motifs. Also the basic harmonies allow the use of tonal centres to be used in passing, or to be stressed to emphasise structural boundaries. The method outlined has endless possibilities. The idea of deriving thematic material comes from classical music. From the Viennese period onwards, the basis of compositional procedure is that of melodising harmonies, rather than of harmonising melodies. The above technique is really a continuation of a traditional one. If one's mind has found its 'groove' new things come easily; if one is constantly experimenting and casting about, the music is bound to sound unsatisfactory, and one will lose the essential purpose of communicating. When one writes intuitively one is not tied to intellectual considerations. I haven't much use for academic things like canons, and so on; though lots of people use them, I feel they are often used as a way of getting out of structural difficulties.

AJHR: You've written music in a great variety of media. Do you have any preferences?

DW: Not really. Most of the works I've written since 1950 have been commissioned. This takes care of the medium. I learned early to adapt my mind to the required medium.

AJHR: I've often wondered whether an established composer doesn't sometimes risk having his natural impulses or development stifled by being bound to a kind of treadmill of commissions. Don't you ever say to yourself, "I'd like to writeanother piano sonata, but there's this choral commission hanging above my head..." and so on?

DW: Well, one can always fall back on one's own inclination you know. For example, I've done a one-act opera (I call it a theatre-piece) to a libretto of my own; simple and economic to produce - only four artists. I'm half-way through a sequel to it, which I've dropped for the moment, having just finished the score of a wind and piano sextet for the Cardiff Festival next year. The operatic pieces are not commissions. They are lying there waiting for a performance, but I'm in no particular hurry. The point is, one should be able to turn one's hand to practically anything, commissioned or otherwise, given the right attitude of mind and, of course, the necessary technique. Any composer worth his salt should be able to write good light music also. All the great masters did this. One doesn't have to be a dead serious composer all the time. It is a good and salutary thing to simplify one's textures and communicate more directly at times. Look how successful Alun Hoddinott's *Welsh Dances* have been! It's merely a question of steeping oneself in the required style.

AJHR: Surely some great composers were unable to adapt to different media; Chopin, for example?

DW: Well, it can also be a question of temperament. Most of today's Welsh composers will write in practically any medium. I can, however, quite understand people not wanting to be bothered with certain types of composition.

AJHR: Purely as a matter of curiosity, do you compose at the piano or away from it?

DW: Away from it, almost entirely – though you will readily understand this point is not in itself important. Alun does the same, but some composers prefer writing at the piano, as did Stravinsky for that matter, and so does Michael Tippett. It's really a matter of habit or procedure. For me the instrument would interfere with my imaginative processes, especially when writing for other media.

AJHR: Let me try what I call my 'desert-island' type of question on you. If you were forced to choose a work (or works) of yours amongst your total output, to be preserved from destruction, which one would you opt for?

DW: I don't think that I would or could choose. I'm never satisfied and always eager to move on to the next piece.

AJHR: Rather like Tchaikovsky, you believe the latest, or rather the next, will be the best?

DW: In a way, yes.

AJHR: Some composers destroy much of their earlier work as time goes on. (Again Grace was an example of this; I tried to persuade her not to, because less satisfactory works are always interesting to study, if nothing else.) I'm sure much good music gets lost in this way. Do you do this?

DW: A composer must be ruthless with himself. I'm destroying all the time. Some are able to do this less than I do. For every piece I write, I push another into the waste-paper basket. It isn't that I think slowly, but that I have so many second thoughts. Mind you, I think I've got my fair share of rubbish here in the cupboards – but then why not! Perhaps some Ph.D. candidate will be glad of it some day!

AJHR: Finally, let me ask you how you see the prospects for the future, and especially the situation as it is in Wales today, from your rather special vantage point. Are we still very far behind other countries in musical achievements do you think?

DW: Considering that we have had no real tradition to follow, and produced no great composer to enable people to make comparisons, I think we haven't done too badly in a short space of time. In a small country of two and a half million people, with no professional musical tradition, we have composers like Hoddinott and Mathias who enjoy a wide reputation. And the composers of my generation have done quite well considering the environmental (musical) difficulties they've had to contend with. And there are a number of promising young composers on the way up. In general there is an increase (especially in young people) of awareness of good music. This can be attributed to the wider school music curricula, the National Youth Orchestra, and the universities' music departments. Most young people nowadays have an opportunity to know something of contemporary music, and are able to take it in their stride. Things have changed from the days when a string trio of mine was played by London instrumentalists for the first time in the Hall of Pengam School in 1947. Some of my colleagues thought the work outrageous, or even a complete leg-pull! At least we've moved from that stage now. Youngsters aren't like I was at 20 not knowing there were composers around who were celebrated not just for hymn-tunes. Today it is more the official public attitude of the political establishment that is behind the times, reflecting a kind of indifference to the artistic needs of the common people. Although we have the Welsh National Opera Company with its orchestra and, of course the BBC, and the university music departments, these things aren't enough: they belong to a certain sector rather than to people at large. They are mainly institutional in character. We, as composers, need a much broader professional base to practise on, and, of course, proper concert halls, and an opera house. All small countries need this sort of thing if their identity is to survive: they are necessary national institutions and assets. In other countries, too, the native composer gets an automatic hearing, and the public expects it. In Wales (and in other parts of the British Isles) promoters will only put a new work in the programme if they are given an extra grant to do so. Public opinion needs to be educated to understand that the country's cultural wealth is as important as its material wealth. Finally, we shall not be recognised by the outside world as a musical nation until the Welsh establishment takes music as seriously as it takes literature.