

PRESS RELEASE – 21.11.16

Elin Manahan Thomas & Brian Ellsbury showcase the music of Morfydd Owen in Tŷ Cerdd Records' latest release

The internationally renowned soprano and distinguished pianist have teamed up to explore the ravishing sound-world of this early 20th-century Welsh composer in *Portrait of a Lost Icon*.

Morfydd Owen led an eventful life by any standards – she was beautiful and brilliant, attracting many potential suitors along the way. She made extraordinary friendships including DH Lawrence, Ezra Pound and the flamboyant Prince Yusupov (who went on to assassinate Rasputin), and was rapidly becoming the toast of musical society in Edwardian London when she married the Freudian psychoanalyst Ernest Jones. Their marriage was difficult and she died the following year, 1918, aged just 26, under circumstances which have never been fully explained. This recording highlights Owen's skill and creativity, and showcases her diverse output – from her natural affinity with the medium of song, to her increasingly authoritative writing for the piano.

Elin Manahan Thomas has long been fascinated by the music of Morfydd Owen: "The depth of her harmonies, the complexity of her dissonances and the power of her words are striking. One of Wales's most important composers, she only had a short life, but our hope is to encourage a renaissance of her musical legacy: a legacy not only for Wales, but for musicians everywhere."

Brian Ellsbury has spearheaded the project, having been a fan of Owen's music since studying at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in the 1980s. He explains how the research became something of a pilgrimage: "Our Morfydd journey has been extraordinary – as part of the research, we found ourselves in Mumbles, Swansea, and were invited quite by chance into Craig y Mor, the house where Morfydd died. I had the opportunity to play the sonata – which has lain un-played, unpublished, for over 100 years – on the grand piano in the current owner's drawing room; and incredibly poignant experience."

The release of this recording continues Tŷ Cerdd Records' mission to celebrate and promote the work of Welsh composers past and present. The release is accompanied by a current tour by Elin Manahan Thomas and Brian Ellsbury, in a performance that brings some of the songs, piano music and letters of Morfydd Owen to audiences in Wales and London.

The tour, which started on 19 November at Theatr Ardudwy, Harlech, progresses to Great Hall, Bay Campus, Swansea University on Friday 25 November (where the official launch of the release will take place); Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama on 31 March; Eglwys Jewin, London, on Saturday 25th March 2017.

For further information, please contact shakira.mahabir@tycerdd.org / 029 2063 5649

Tŷ CERDD

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promoting the Music of Wales to the world

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Notes to editors

- *Morfydd Owen: Portrait of a Lost Icon* is available for purchase at www.tycerddshop.com on Tŷ Cerdd Records, catalogue no: TCR 014
- Tŷ Cerdd's mission is to promote and celebrate the creation, performance and recording of the contemporary classical music of Wales, engaging with communities and audiences nationally and internationally.
- Elin Manahan Thomas is a leading British soprano, born and bred in Wales. She has recorded and performed extensively on the international concert platform, and is particularly well known for her interpretation of Baroque repertoire and for her performances of new music. She is also in demand as a presenter on TV and radio. <http://www.elinmanahanthomas.org/>
- Pianist Brian Ellsbury's varied career has taken in engagements as diverse as performances of Shostakovich and Mozart piano concertos for the BBC, appearances with the London Swing Orchestra, and collaborations with Julian Clary and Immodesty Blaise in their burlesque revue.

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