

12th February 2026 talk, U3A Old Church Hall Sully 2pm

Daniel Curtis: “Song Stories”



Daniel’s polyglot musical life (so far!) includes persuading the Welsh museum authorities to get an upright piano down a mine for a concert, collecting a proper revenge punch from Welsh boxer Joe Calzaghe – “You made me sing,” Joe said, “then told me I was rubbish at it!” – and getting a symphony orchestra to perform music from a tiny hymn sheet.

Born in the Welsh valleys, Daniel’s boyhood was divided between two households: one with a record collection comprising mostly just one performing artist – Mario Lanza – and the music of George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern; the other of his grandparents who were Frank Sinatra fans. Daniel called the combined recorded music of his childhood houses “The Great American Songbook 1920-1950”.

Daniel shared how the music of this era has impressed and shaped him, using his in-depth knowledge of the evolution of two Gershwin works we know as modern classics: *Rhapsody in Blue* for piano and orchestra, and the song *Someone to Watch Over Me*. Originating as a fast jazz dance number for the *Oh, Kay!* 1926 musical, when later performers slowed the tempo, the song became the haunting ballad more familiar to us now. Daniel showed us the tragic ephemerality of these composers’ and performers’ lives – Gershwin and Lanza dying at only 38 – their struggles with commercial contracts, and getting their original work acknowledged.

For the 2013 centenary of the Senghenydd colliery explosion, Wales’ worst mining disaster in which 440 men died, Daniel Curtis and Laura Coyne created [A Miner’s Song](#). A composite video premiering before the Six Nations Wales vs England fixture on 16th March 2013, it featured over 300 famous Welsh voices – and that piano in the Blaenaevon Big Pit mine surrounded by singing miners.

From the macro reach of the video we went o a micro fragile ‘penny sheet’ of the words to a hymn called *Prepare to Meet Thy God* by Sarah Ann Thorne of Abertridwr. Written shortly after the Senghenydd disaster, this tiny piece of paper was to raise money for a memorial plate at the local church. Any music for it was long lost, but Daniel felt it deserved to have “an entire orchestra thrown at it” and we heard the spectacular rendition.

Daniel concluded our afternoon of musical commemoration reminding us to record the stories and experiences of our upper generation before they are lost to time. **SJW**