

# Wythnos Euskara Cymru

Bro Ddyfi, January 2017

Wythnos Euskara Cymru in Bro Ddyfi was a long week – eleven days rather than seven. It was packed with events, including two exhibitions, six evening concerts, a film show, a poetry night, a feast, a two-day art workshop and a number of other activities. At its peak, there were seventeen Basque visitors sharing our lives in the valley, and more than two dozen volunteers helping to make things happen. A partnership between Celtic Neighbours, Ysgol Bro Hyddgen, MoMA Machynlleth, Menter Maldwyn and Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, it grew out of many years of collaboration between artists, musicians and others in Bro Ddyfi and Nafarroa, and a strong sense that our two communities have so much in common that we can promote each of our two languages and cultures by learning about, admiring and supporting the other. So, how did it go and what did it achieve, if anything? Here are three perspectives, from Year 10 pupils at Ysgol Bro Hyddgen in Machynlleth, who were each



involved in different ways.

*Alaw, Myfanwy a Cerys*

## Alaw Jones

Well, Euskara is a very special language. It's so unique and colourful when you listen to it. As you already know, the majority of the pupils in our year had the chance to hear this language spoken through most of the week by doing and watching different activities. There is an obvious connection between the two languages, Welsh and Euskara. They are both among the oldest languages in Europe and are still being spoken by many people in countries so small compared to the bigger countries of the world.

I'm sure you've never heard this language before. Before this project began, I had no idea that there was a small country between the



South of France and the North of Spain, and certainly didn't know that they have a language of their own. But no, the Basque people speak Euskara, and that's that.



One thing I remember is when a friend of the artist Gorriti first visited the school and started talking about him, our class had no idea what she was talking about! We were all struck with this strange language we didn't understand! The only word I understood was 'artist' and of course the name 'Gorriti'. But we were very lucky to be involved in making posters that were put up around the school to translate the Welsh language into Euskara. I remember some of the vocabulary still, such as: "How are you?" Zer moduz?; "Goodbye / I'll see you again" Gero arte; and finally, "Thank you" Eskerrik asko.

By doing this project, I have developed new skills of all kinds, and an insight into another culture. So I would like to thank people for the opportunity to be part of this special project. The week has been great and is going to be one that will not be forgotten, certainly not by me. I've enjoyed it so much, I hope that this type of event

happens in Machynlleth again soon. Thanks to all who have given their time to organize all this and to make this week possible, successful and very special.

## Myfanwy Fenwick

Recently, we had the unforgettable chance to attend the inspirational exhibition of Juan Gorriti in the Tabernacl, and indeed seeing his work for the first time was certainly a thrilling experience. Every piece exhibited expressed prominent elements of Gorriti's Basque heritage especially in his use of a captivating blue paint which reflects his great love for the sky above his country. Amidst the sea of bright sculptures and humorous portraits was my favourite piece – the Gambara. The Gambara is a traditional frame that suspends from the ceilings in Basque household., it is a home to numerous possessions that are hung there for safe-keeping. In this case Gorriti had expertly hung a vivid array of objects from the frame in an explosion of colours including the blue that he feels so passionate about. From



the moment you entered the room his work created such a special atmosphere with elements of a sweet childhood, history, tradition and playful nuances that without

a doubt would appeal to children.

When I heard that us year 10 pupils would be recreating our very own Gambara with the help of the Welsh artist Eluned Rhys Parry I was over-joyed. This was a truly unique chance to develop our understanding of art in other cultures. And so along with about twenty other students we worked over the duration of two days to produce our very own multi-coloured objects to hang on our Gambara, including of course our version of Gorritti's blue.

As I looked at the finished work, it was evident that our efforts had ended in a great accomplishment, and everyone was looking so pleased with their work. In that moment it became clear to me how unique the affinity is between us Welsh people and The Basques, it is so incredible how two small countries have succeeded in extending hands and building a bridge of friendship over 1060 miles and I feel privileged to have been a part of it.

### Cerys Hafana

The best bit about the Basque week in Machynlleth for me was probably being given two enormous blocks of Basque cheese, in return for letting the young Basque band Bitartean borrow some instruments. This happened at the end of a wonderful night in Tal y Bont, where I got the chance to play the triple harp as support for the band.



The turnout was amazing (hence my sitting on the floor and risking my ears - albokas were not made for crowded pub rooms) and there was a definite buzz in the air. One of the best things about the band in my opinion, apart from their energy, was the unusual choice and use of instruments, such as the incredible tambourine playing (not something I've said before) and the use of a piano in folk music.

To top it off, after lots of Basque hugs (I think I've finally mastered the technique...) I was given a little sheep shaped fridge magnet decorated with the Basque flag - it turns out there are lots of sheep over there too.

The following evening found us in the Y Tabernacl. I was playing with my harp teacher Rhiain Bebb alongside some other Welsh performers (Gwilym Bowen Rhys and Osian

Morris) and the main act, two members from the band Bidaia - one of whom is rumoured to be the only hurdy gurdy player in the Basque country. It was great fun (although I'd have lived without having to share a harp with Rhiain, on my knees, at one point during our performance), and I got to experience a hurdy gurdy for the first time.

One thing I definitely took away from the week is the desire to now try and experience some of [this](#) culture and music in its homeland (hint hint...).