



June 2005

an extract from "In Tune"

The Quarterly Newsletter from the Oxford Welsh Male Voice Choir

'The Essential Dylan Thomas': A review of a new CD set.

A few weeks ago I met Nicholas Soames of Naxos Audiobooks and we talked about Dylan Thomas. He told me about Naxos' 4 CD package - NA 434312 of Dylan Thomas's work and he sent me one as a present. I thought I'd share what I thought of it with the readers of In Tune as you may have more interest than most in Dylan.

Four CD's - almost five hours long, including a recording of "Under Milk Wood", narrated by Richard Burton, made on January 24th 1954, only two months after Dylan had died. This takes most of the first two CDs. This recording is as good as it can ever get: I have a copy of it on an LP, but it's pretty scratchy and hissy. The CDs don't have these intrusions.

Note for the choir: Philip Burton played Eli Jenkins – he was Richard Burton's adopted father and teacher and they were both very close to Dylan – Eli Jenkins' prayer has the line 'please to keep Thy lovely eye' – rather than 'loving eye' – when did it change to 'loving'? – and in such a different intonation to the way the OWMVC sing it - if historical veracity is of any interest perhaps we should have a listen to this. It was 'lovely' in the screenplay published by JM Dent and in the 1971 Andrew Sinclair film with Richard Burton, Ryan Davies with Angharad Rees as Gossamer Beynon? – when Rosie Probert was played by someone else who was fairly famous (clue: she also starred in some other roles with Richard Burton). She didn't say much....

But I'm digressing and must get back to the CDs. We have Dylan himself reading 'Return Journey' and 'Quite Early One Morning' - where I really love the portraits of Miss May Hughes, Captain Tiny Evans of the Kidwelly ('and I HATED her!') and the Parchedig Tomos Evans 'making morning tea, - troubled by belief'. Then there are five poems: 'Lament', 'Poem on his birthday', 'And Death shall have no dominion' – Dylan seeming as if he was addressing a huge lecture hall rather than making a personal recording, I really prefer the renditions which follow of 'Fern Hill' and 'Do not go gentle into that good night'. The silences between the sections and the short gaps between the various parts are a bit unnerving, but there are well-spaced "track" numbers allowing one to jump to what one wants very easily.

The third and fourth CDs are readings by Philip Madoc, Jason Hughes, Michael Sheen and Richard Bebb; of five stories and sixteen poems. The stories are: Memories of Christmas, The Peaches (from 'Portrait of the artist as a young dog'), A visit to Grandpa's, The Followers and The Outing. On the first hearing, I preferred Jason Hughes' renditions, but I'm sure the others will grow on me. Richard Bebb who worked with Dylan and Richard Burton, reads three poems including Fern Hill and A Winter's Tale.

There's a very good booklet with a short history of Under Milk Wood, including a description by Richard Bebb of the recording session and potted biographies of the readers. And the really good news: I thought it was going to be really exorbitantly expensive, but the set is only £16.99: plus £2.00 for postage just the thing to stuff into a Christmas stocking. You can get it from Naxos AudioBooks, 3 Wells Place, Redhill, Surrey. tel 01737 645600 or over the internet www.naxosaudiobooks.com It will be very hard act to follow.

Lyn Davies - Tenor. 1 June 2005

P.S. Don't ask to borrow my copy.....I'm not risking losing it for anything!