

JONES, WILLIAM SAMUEL (Wil Sam) (1920-2007), playwright

Name: William Samuel Jones
Pseudonym: Wil Sam
Date of birth: 1920
Date of death: 2007
Gender: Male
Occupation: playwright
Area of activity: Literature and Writing
Author: John Owen

Wil Sam was born on 28 May 1920 at Belle Vue, Llanystumdwy, the younger of the two sons of Gabriel Jones, mariner, and his wife Ann (née Owen). His brother Elis Gwyn (1918-1999) was a well-known artist and author, and he worked closely with Wil Sam in the theatre. Their father died in an accident at sea in 1939.

Wil Sam's formal education took place at the Church School in Llanystumdwy and Porthmadog County School, but he had little interest in academic study. His teachers regarded him as a practical lad with a love for machines, especially motorbikes. After leaving school he got an apprenticeship at a garage in Pwllheli, but he left after refusing to work on military vehicles from the camp at Pen-y-berth. Within days he got a job at another garage in Abersoch. He registered as a conscientious objector during the Second World War, and later he was an enthusiastic campaigner for nuclear disarmament (CND). He was a passionate nationalist throughout his life, and when the Welsh Language Society was established in 1962 he joined it and took part in the campaign to paint over English-only road signs. His play 'Mae Rhywbeth Bach ...' (1969) is about the Society and dedicated to it. He was a regular visitor to Ireland, where he attended Dublin theatres, and Irish nationalism was a strong influence on him.

In 1953 he married Dora Ann Jones and they made their home in the Crown (formerly a public house). They had two daughters, Mair and Elin. Wil Sam set up his own garage where over the years he found ample material for his plays in the colourful characters he met, listening to their stories and hearing the dialect of Eifionydd on their lips. He drove children to Chwilog School for a quarter of a century.

In 1956 Emyr Humphreys gave him his first commission to write a radio play, which led to the comedy 'I Bant y Bwgan'. Wil Sam admitted that in writing for radio he constantly had the stage in the back of his mind. He and Emyr Humphreys co-authored the play 'Dinas' in 1970. In 1962 Wil Sam was commissioned by the Drama Company of the University College of North Wales, Bangor to write a full-length play, 'Gwallia Bach', but unlike his other plays it was never published. In the same year he won the short drama competition in the National Eisteddfod for 'Dalar Deg'. The following year, the most important of his career, a collection of five of his plays, *Pum Drama Fer*, was published and he gave up the garage and moved to Tyddyn Gwyn in Rhoslan to make his living by writing - the first to do so in Welsh. From the mid-sixties until 1976 he played a vital part in Theatr Y Gegin, Cricieth with its nationalist ideal on the model of the Pike Theatre in Dublin. His brother Elis Gwyn would produce and he would provide original plays and translations into Welsh. Two plays from this period were 'Y Chwilotwr' (1968) and 'Seimon y Swynwr' (1969). One of the members of Cwmni'r Gegin was the actor Stewart Jones who brought to life Wil Sam's incomparable character Ifas y Tryc for the first time in 1964. His expressions will remain a part of the Welsh language for generations: 'Britannia rwls ddy Wêls', 'Inglannd Refeniw' and 'Sgersli bilff'.

After the period with Theatr y Gegin Wil Sam began to write more for radio and television. He turned out some twenty short plays, hundreds of Ifas y Tryc scripts and half a dozen scripts for television films, documentary dramas, and series such as 'Y Garej' and 'Dr. Shady'. Many of his plays were performed for the first time by Theatr Bara Caws, a company which suited his nature as a playwright and man of the people. Some claim that 'Ty Clap' (1977) is his best play, but in the opinion of others 'Y Sul Hwnnw' (1981) is his classic. 'Y Fainc' (1967) is also a striking play about the frustrations of a writer.

In addition to his dramatic output he published a lecture on the condition of Welsh-language theatre, *Y Toblarôn* (1975), and a collection of short stories, *Dyn y Myncci* (1979). In 2005 at the age of 85 he launched three new volumes: *Mân Bethau Hwylus (Cymeriadau Eifionydd)*, *Newyddion Ffolia Mawr* (a collection of his humorous columns in *Y Cymro*) and a book of verse, *Rhigymau Wil Sam*. In his last years he was an enthusiastic member of Twm Morys's poetry class in Llanystumdwy.

Wil Sam received numerous honours towards the end of his life. The Welsh Academy organised a meeting to celebrate his seventieth birthday in 1990, and in 1995 he won a Bafta Cymru award for his contribution to Welsh theatre. In 2002 Theatr Bara Caws presented a programme in tribute to him, and a Wil Sam festival was held at the National Eisteddfod in Maldwyn in 2003. He was awarded an Honorary MA by Aberystwyth University in 2003, and the following year he received an Honorary Fellowship from Bangor University.

Despite all these honours, his work did not receive the serious study that it deserved until 2010 when *Wil Sam y Dyn Theatr* was published. He was the playwright of his home patch in Eifionydd, but his anarchic plays with their host of social misfits, his unique sense of humour and his theatrical genius gave rich entertainment to the whole of Wales. He ranks with international exponents of the theatre of the absurd, a genre which he combined with the tradition of the village-hall farce. Beneath the comedy and the repartee lie the sadness, the pain and the absurdity of human existence.

Wil Sam died aged 87 in Bangor on 15 November 2007. A memorial service was held in Moreia Chapel, Llanystumdwy and he was buried in Llanystumdwy New Cemetery on 21 November.

Author

John Owen

Sources

Gwenno Hywyn (ed.) *Wil Sam* (1985)

Ioan Roberts (ed.), *Bro a Bywyd W. S. Jones* (2009)

Anwen Jones and Myrddin ap Dafydd (ed.), *Wil Sam Y Dyn Theatr* (2010)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [W. S. Jones](#)

Images

Geoff Charles, Portrayal of Wil Sam (W S Jones), the Llanystumdwy dramatist

Geoff Charles, Y Dramodydd W S Jones

Geoff Charles, Wil Sam a'i ferch Mair ar ddiwrnod graddio Mair yng Ngholeg y Brifysgol, Bangor, Haf 1977

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