

HUGHES, (ROBERTS), MARGARET ('Leila Megáne'; 1891 - 1960), singer

Name: Margaret Hughes
Pseudonym: Leila Megáne
Date of birth: 1891
Date of death: 1960
Spouse: William John Hughes
Spouse: Thomas Osborne Roberts
Parent: Jane Phillip Jones (née Owen)
Parent: Thomas Jones
Gender: Female
Occupation: singer
Area of activity: Music; Performing Arts
Author: Huw Williams

Born in Bethesda, Caernarfonshire, 5 April 1891, one of the ten children of Thomas Jones, a member of the Caernarfonshire police force, and Jane Phillip (née Owen) his wife. In 1894 the family moved to Pwllheli but her mother died when she was 7 years old. Her father sacrificed much to give her a musical education. She had singing lessons for a period with John Williams, conductor of Caernarfon Choral Society, and in 1907 she made her first solo appearance singing 'Gwlad y delyn' ([John Henry](#)). Soon afterwards she received her first contract to sing in a concert, in Abersoch, for which she received an acknowledgement of 15 shillings. One of those who heard her sing in that concert was [Harry Evans](#), who prophesied that she would become a famous singer if she had a competent tutor.

In the Anglesey eisteddfod at Beaumaris in 1910 she entered a competition for the first time and won first prize for singing 'Gwraig y pysgotwr' (Eurgain), with [Thomas Price](#) (1857 - 1925) and [T. Osborne Roberts](#) adjudicating. Also that year (against more than 50 competitors) she won the open contralto solo in the national eisteddfod at Colwyn Bay, and was highly praised by the adjudicator, [David Evans](#) (1874 - 1948). Soon afterwards she was brought to the attention of George Power (a successful singing tutor in London) by Mrs. Ernest Taylor, who had heard her sing in Llanbedrog, and she later entered the Royal Academy of Music. In London (under the name Megan Jones) she came into prominence in ballad concerts, and was assisted by [David Lloyd George](#) and others to study for a further six years in Paris under the famous singer Jean de Reszke, who had been a student of Cotagni in Turin. After adopting the name Leila Megáne (on de Reszke's advice) she received her first professional contract, a two-year agreement to sing Massenet in the Opera Comique, Paris. The dress which she wore in the Paris opera is now in the Museum of Welsh Life at St. Fagans. At the beginning of World War I she was in France and spent a period entertaining injured soldiers, which drew the attention of prominent politicians, among them Lord Balfour, Bonar Law and (Sir) Winston Churchill.

After singing in various opera houses in France and Monte Carlo she gained a five-year contract to sing in Covent Garden, where she made her début in Therese (Massenet) in May 1919, with [Lloyd George](#) and Melba, the famous singer, in the audience. In 1920 she sang for the first time in a concert in the Aeolian Hall, and for eight years she sang regularly in the Queen's Hall under the direction of Sir Henry Wood. After a successful tour of Europe, where she sang in La Scala (Milan) and Moscow, she was invited in 1923 to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York. She married (1) in New York, 21 March 1924, [T. Osborne Roberts](#) who had accompanied her in concerts at home and abroad. They later made their home in Pentrefoelas. She popularised several songs composed by her husband, among them 'Y Nefoedd', 'Cymru annwyl' and 'Pistyll y llan'. She retired in 1939.

Leila Megáne had a rich, mature, contralto voice, and her performances were characterised by much warmth. Among the items which she recorded circa 1920-25 are selections from French opera (sung in French), works by Handel, Welsh songs, and Elgar's Sea pictures, with the composer himself conducting the performance.

She married (2), 6 October 1951, in Llanrwst, William John Hughes, Efailnewydd, one of her contemporaries who had performed in many concerts with her before she went to the Royal Academy of Music. In Pwllheli national eisteddfod, 1956, a scholarship bearing her name was established for young Welsh singers studying at the Royal Academy of Music. She died suddenly in her home, Melin Rhydhir, Efailnewydd, near Pwllheli, 2 January 1960, and was buried in Penrhos, Pwllheli.

Author

Huw Williams, (1922 - 2002)

Sources

'A Springtime of song' (her autobiography in typescript, dated 24 January 1934, which was in the possession of Mrs. W. O. Jones, Holywell, in 1960);


The Liverpool Daily Post, 8 October 1951 and 4 January 1960;

Welsh Music, the journal of the Guild for the Promotion of Welsh Music, 3, 8 (1970), 35;

information from her daughter, Effie Isaura Osborne-Hughes, Pwllheli;

Megan Lloyd Ellis, *Hyfrydlais Leila Megáne (Llandysul 1979)*(1979).


Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Leila Megane](#) 

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MSS 15281-15301: Leila Mégane manuscripts](#) 

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