WRITER

POET

BROADCASTER
Over just two short decades, Dylan Thomas established a reputation as a poet and storywriter of remarkable power and reach. That reputation has only grown in the years since his death. As we mark the centenary of his birth, Dylan now stands not just as one of Wales’ most important cultural figures, but as a writer of international stature and renown.

For BBC Cymru Wales this is an anniversary with a special resonance. Dylan was not only a writer and poet, but also a remarkable broadcaster. Fostered and championed by the BBC, he became a dazzling radio poet. His broadcasts and recordings took his voice and his ideas far beyond his homeland, and he used the compelling intimacy of the medium to conjure extraordinary images and characters that seduced millions of listeners.

The BBC has brought together some of the best programme makers in Wales and the UK to present a kaleidoscope of programming which will place the poet and the stories of his life and work before a new generation. In documentary, in drama, in poetry and in prose, this will be a memorable celebration and exploration of one man’s rich contribution to our own national life and culture, and to the world beyond.

We have, of course, built our season around the words of the man himself. Was there really any other way? But we have also honoured Dylan’s reputation as an innovator by harnessing the latest technologies and digital services to ensure that audiences everywhere can experience his work as surely and as powerfully as those who sat entranced and bewildered by the wireless more than 50 years ago.

This season of programming simply would not be possible without the support of so many partners, including an impressive array of contemporary artists and writers. As well as looking back at an extraordinary life, it seems fitting that we also take this opportunity to shine a light on a new generation of literary and artistic talent.

On the following pages you will find a summary of our season, and hear from some of those who have been most closely involved in its scope and development. I hope you can take time to take a look at what’s coming up, and enjoy it with us on the BBC.

Rhodri Talfan Davies
Director, BBC Cymru Wales
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,

Time held me green and dying

Though I sang in my chains like the sea.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

FERN HILL
MY GRANDFATHER AND ME

DYLAN AND THE BBC

My grandfather's success on the radio was a result of his wit and charm, sense of fun, empathy and, above all, his hard work. These attributes brought my grandfather respect from many of his colleagues. Contrary to popular belief, Ralph Maud, in his introduction to his book The Broadcasts, a collection of broadcasts for the BBC, stresses that Dylan was 'a professional radio broadcaster, whose services as a performer and scriptwriter were sought and appreciated'.

In terms of his other writing, he was a perfectionist. He worked slowly, experimented with a single phrase; writing sentences a hundred different ways before he was content. I'm heartened to discover that this same work ethic was clearly shown during his time at the BBC.

The BBC archive undoubtedly reveals to us that, as well as being a great writer, my grandfather was an excellent actor. Richard Burton described Dylan as an 'explosive dynamic performing force', and 'a dangerous rival for other actors'. My mum, Aeronwy Thomas, had strong memories of her father. Recalling their weekly reading sessions, acting out the stories, she described her father, while reading Hansel and Gretel, adopting 'a falsetto voice' making 'quite a convincing old lady'. As well as dramatic parts, Louis MacNeice discovered that, when necessary, Dylan was capable of 'underplaying' a role.

This was never more evident than when my grandfather read his own broadcasts, letting the words speak for themselves. The one that really stands out for me is Return Journey, which shows how he was profoundly moved during the Second World War – especially after seeing the impact of a three-night-blitz on his hometown of Swansea. The script sees Dylan describing the devastation caused, while also seeking out his younger self amongst the destruction. In his usual style, my grandfather researched the piece meticulously, in order to ensure that he had correctly named all the shops and buildings that had been ruined. On a different level, hearing my grandfather's beautiful voice describing a mischievous boy taunting cats and the exploits of his eccentric aunts and uncles in his classic A Child's Christmas in Wales, never fails to make me laugh. His friend Bert Trick described listening to him saying 'The glorious voice boomed out of the loudspeaker', and the 'living room filled with the presence of Dylan'.

These are just a few examples from the one hundred and forty five separate engagements that my grandfather had with the BBC. These included writing scripts, reading poetry and short stories, as well as acting. He also became a regular on many panel discussions, making him a well-known radio personality. I hope both the lighter, and the more serious, sides of my grandfather's work for the BBC can be reflected in this season.

Hannah Ellis
Grandaughter of Dylan Thomas
EXPLOSIVE

DYNAMIC

PERFORMING

FORCE
Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
UNDER MILK WOOD

“...with this unique re-imagining of Under Milk Wood: a collaboration with the ever-inventive and brilliant National Theatre Wales and voiced by some of the best of Wales’ acting elite. It is a true celebration of great Welsh talent.”

Faith Penhale
Head of Drama, BBC Cymru Wales

BBC ONE WALES — MAY

A contemporary presentation of Dylan Thomas’ famous ‘play for voices’ in collaboration with National Theatre Wales, featuring a host of Welsh stars.

Taking place from the 3rd-5th May, the performance consists of an installation event Raw Material; Llareggub Revisited - a re-imagining of the world of Under Milk Wood where the audience is taken through the historic town where Dylan lived until his death and which inspired the fictional town of Llareggub, described in his famous play.

As the weekend draws to a close, BBC Cymru Wales will broadcast a contemporary, multi-layered version of Under Milk Wood incorporating elements of the NTW live event and pre-recorded readings by a star-studded cast in New York, Los Angeles, London, Cardiff and Laugharne to celebrate the centenary of Dylan Thomas’ birth as well as the 60th anniversary of the first BBC broadcast of his famous ‘play for voices’.

Bethan Jones, Executive Producer, BBC Cymru Wales

The idea that I write a piece, a play, an impression for voices, an entertainment out of the town I live in, and to write it simply and warmly and comically, with lots of movement and varieties of moods, so that, at many levels, through sight and speech, description and dialogue, evocation and parody, you come to know the town as an inhabitant of it.

Dylan Thomas
1951
Immerse yourself in places where Dylan lived and worked. Sea views, picture postcard towns and landscapes that feed the imagination.

As part of the Weatherman Walking series of programmes, I have walked in the same footsteps as Dylan Thomas. To be honest, I didn’t realise he wrote so many poems. I knew about his work Under Milk Wood from my school days but hadn’t really revisited his poems since.

I have realised that there is so much more to Dylan Thomas than I had thought and I have been able to immerse myself in places where Dylan lived and worked. Sea views, picture postcard towns and landscapes that feed the imagination.

I've visited many of the places that meant so much to him. We all know about Laugharne and his beautiful Boathouse - where I sat at his desk looking at the stunning views over the estuary but I also went to lesser-known places to find out about their connections with Dylan. I went to New Quay where I walked up through the town and down to the wild beach below all the way to Llanina Point. I even found out more about Swansea - Dylan’s ‘ugly, lovely town’ - which left its stamp on him.

Walking in Dylan’s footsteps has really shown me a very different side to the man I thought I knew. I already knew about his reputation for drinking and I did pop into some of his favourite watering holes along the way to try to imagine what his life would have been like. But I also met the people who are passionate about Dylan - Dylan’s granddaughter, Hannah Ellis, and Jeff Towns, a Dylan Thomas encyclopedia, known as the ‘Dylan Thomas guy’. They had so much passion and enthusiasm for Dylan, it was very contagious. It’s given me a renewed enthusiasm for his work. He was, and still is, one of our nation’s greatest poets.

I’ve really enjoyed roaming around Dylan’s Wales and the places that left their mark not only on him but on the pages of some of his greatest works. The landscape of Wales gives meaning and texture to the work of Dylan Thomas and that rich landscape is still here today with all those magical places still to enjoy on our doorstep.

Derek Brockway
Presenter, BBC Cymru Wales
Dylan Thomas was an inspiration to me, growing up in South Wales and dreaming about becoming a writer. I loved the wonderful rich patterns of sound he created; I loved his humour; but most of all I was inspired by the way he conjured a childhood and adolescence very much like my own into something wonderful and extraordinary. So I was thrilled when Griff Rhys Jones and BBC Cymru Wales offered me the chance of writing a film about him.

The original idea was to write about the last week of his life and his tragic early death in New York, but I was determined that our film should celebrate his poetic achievement and show the roots of his inspiration, which stem from his childhood experiences; I also wanted to celebrate his passionate and stormy relationship with his wife, Caitlin. I used lots of flashbacks, and a flowing impressionistic style. I’m so happy with the performances and the direction, and the evocative use of beautiful authentic locations. I found the whole experience very moving and I hope you will too.

Andrew Davies
Writer
There is a book of photographs of Dylan taken in Laugharne during his last summer. These black and white photographs transport us back to that time in 1953. In some of the photographs Dylan is smiling. In others he is thoughtful, standing alone. There are some pictures where he sits with his family. Happy moments. In all of these pictures we see the landscape that influenced so much of Dylan’s later work. St John’s Hill, the estuary, the writing shed, the Boathouse and Fern Hill.

The same photographer took photographs of Dylan rehearsing in New York that Autumn with the cast of Under Milk Wood. This is a different Dylan. He looks older. Something in his face tells us he’s struggling. He’s smoking heavily. In these black and white images you get a real sense of Dylan as he must have been. The 39-year-old poet at the height of his fame. You can see how he interacted with people. How he walked. How he smiled. He’s cheeky. Solemn. You can see how he’s dressed. I showed these pictures to lead actor Tom Hollander on our first meeting and we agreed that we would try and get as close to that Dylan as we could.

We both listened to Dylan’s recordings as he read his poetry and short stories and of course the famous first recording of Under Milk Wood. As we met over the weeks before filming Tom slowly started to inhabit the role. He put on weight. Grew his hair. He changed the way he walked. He wanted to transform himself utterly if he could. We had both agreed that the role required that.

Not long before filming started we went to Laugharne together. I wanted Tom to see it. In the small sitting room in the Boathouse with no one else around, Tom quietly closed the door and spoke to me in Dylan for the first time. He wanted me to hear him. I sat and listened, amazed. Later as we walked back towards the village together I dropped behind and watched Tom, heavier now, as he walked reciting Fern Hill aloud. He really had transformed himself into our Dylan Thomas.

Aisling Walsh
Director
I thought of this title before I wrote a word of this piece. Some time ago I just threw Dylan Thomas in with all the other dead, white, male poets that grown-ups tried to force us to like. There’s nothing wrong with being dead, male or white, the problem was that when you’re an angry young black kid, seeking justice, and trying to find art that expresses your struggles and your pain, you just get angrier when you’re told to go away and read a poem about daffodils. I have nothing against daffodils. Some of my best friends are daffodils, but it was about priorities. My contemporaries and me went off and created Dub-Poetry, a modern form of performance poetry, and we were happy not to be associated with those dead guys.

But then two things happened to me. A friend of mine sat me down and read Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night to me, telling me what led up to the writing of the poem, and then I heard a relative of Dylan Thomas saying that he once used to have a writing shed and she would often hear him reading his poems out aloud.

So Dylan Thomas was a real bloke I thought, not an elitist, he had love and passion, that’s why he wrote Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night and he was a performance poet. He wrote with the voice in mind. He is no dead, white, male poet. He lives. I have proof. He turned me on.
Dylan Thomas was a seismic event in the history of English language poetry. A 19-year-old whose powerfully original work attracted admiration and letters of interest from the leading poets of the day. A modern poet whose writing was daring and experimental, and yet was also rooted in an ancient music, an elemental vision. A popular performer who could attract audiences of thousands on his tours of America.

Dylan Thomas was also, however, a poet whose life continually threatened to subsume his work. With his death the myth of Dylan the hell-raiser, the womaniser, the drinker, crystallised about him, until it became all too easy to forget the startling poems that first caught the world’s imagination.

On the centenary of Dylan Thomas’ birth, I want to get back to what makes Dylan Thomas extraordinary - those poems. I want to ask why his work, despite its challenging nature, continues to have such enduring popular appeal. How did he create the seductive effects of his verse? And why, exactly, did his writing have the impact it did when it first appeared in print?

Focusing on five key poems from the different stages of Dylan’s artistic development, I’ll excavate his worksheets to illustrate the rigorous craft that went into the poetry.

I’ll also travel to the places at the source of his poems: suburban Swansea, the London of the Blitz, and the remote rural beauty of Laugharne. In doing so, via this poetic map, I hope to sketch out the biography behind the writing, and to explore the events that fed into Dylan’s work.

Along the way I’ll be meeting contemporary poets and writers, to learn something of the nature of Dylan’s legacy, and to gather their views on his poetry.

By the end of the programme I hope viewers will have had an accessible but in-depth look at a writer who, for too long, has been more famous for his life than for his work. And I hope, too, that the poems that first began Dylan’s story will have been placed centre stage in the re-telling of it 100 years after his birth.

Owen Sheers
Writer and Poet

BBC TWO WALES — APRIL
BBC FOUR — SPRING

Viewers will have an accessible but in-depth look at a writer who for too long has been more famous for his life than for his work.
Though lovers be lost, love shall not

AND DEATH SHALL HAVE NO DOMINION
BBC Cymru Wales’ radio stations are at the heart of the Dylan Thomas season. BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru will be joining forces to remember Dylan Thomas in the radio tent at Laugharne. It seems fitting that radio should come to Laugharne to remember the man whose poetry travelled from Laugharne to the world over the radio.

The national radio stations for Wales will be hosting Laugharne Live - a radio festival broadcast from within the grounds of Laugharne Castle and overlooking the Boathouse where Dylan wrote. There we will join forces with BBC Radio 3, 4, and 6 Music to broadcast a rich mix of live and pre-recorded shows celebrating the life, work and legacy of Dylan Thomas.

At the heart of our radio festival will be a marquee where you will be able to come along and be part of the experience. BBC Radio Wales will be dipping into the festival all weekend and BBC Radio Cymru’s Dan Yr Wyneb will be there to debate Dylan. BBC Radio Cymru’s long-running poetry competition Y Talwrn will also be recording a special edition at the festival, where two teams of poets will compete on a Dylan-based theme. Ian McMillan will be presenting BBC Radio 3’s flagship poetry show The Verb and In Tune will be bringing its exciting mix of great music to the castle. BBC Radio 4 brings The Kitchen Cabinet and a series of new stories to what Dylan called this ‘timeless, mild, beguiling island of a town’. And the stage will also play host to brand new music showcased on Stuart Maconie’s 6 Music Freak Zone, and BBC Radio Wales’ very own Bethan Elfyn will be adding to the heady mix by introducing the next generation of Welsh musicians.

Come to Laugharne and join the conversation about Dylan and beyond. bbc.co.uk/dylanthomas
This centenary year is a fantastic opportunity for BBC Radio 3 to celebrate Dylan Thomas’ achievements. It was our predecessor, *The Third Programme*, that first broadcast *Under Milk Wood* and many of Dylan’s other works for radio, from the late 1940s onwards.

As a result, BBC Radio 3 is dedicating a day of programming to Dylan on 5 May and every hour from breakfast until late night, listeners will hear archive performances, newly-recorded poems and live broadcasts reflecting on Dylan’s legacy.

Matthew Dodd
Head of Speech Programmes, BBC Radio 3
It is always intriguing to cross between art forms, to see what one can offer the other and how new and creative ideas can flourish. So when it comes to celebrating the life of Dylan Thomas, we have a wonderful opportunity to explore his influence on music, both within his lifetime and through his inspirational legacy. In 2014, we will perform music by two contrasting figures: one, a friend of the poet, the other, a composer hugely influenced by Dylan’s poetry.

**JOHN CORIGLIANO: A DYLAN THOMAS TRILOGY**

Composer John Corigliano first encountered Dylan’s poetry in 1959 while a student. He was ‘irresistibly drawn to translate his music into mine’.

The composition of this oratorio was a long and evolving process, as Corigliano explained: ‘Thomas’ poems have reappeared in my life precisely when they have felt most autobiographical and just when I needed to write exactly the music they have evoked.’ The first version of the piece used three poems: *Poem on his Birthday*, *Fern Hill* and *Poem in October*. The premiere took place in 1976, but after revisiting the work he felt it to be missing a chapter, and so the amended 1999 revision was premiered including music set to *Author’s Prologue*.

**DANIEL JONES SYMPHONY NO 4: IN MEMORY OF DYLAN THOMAS**

Daniel Jenkyn Jones remains one of Wales’ most acclaimed composers. A close friend of Dylan Thomas, they were part of the same group of artists who would meet in the Kardomah café in Swansea. As well as dedicating his fourth symphony to his friend, Jones’ memoir was entitled *My Friend Dylan Thomas* and he edited a collection of his poetry in 1972.

**DYLAN THOMAS EVENTS**

**Monday 5 May**
BBC Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff

**Saturday 11 October**
Brangwyn Hall, Swansea

**Thursday 30 October**
Prichard-Jones Hall, Bangor

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Michael Garvey
Director, BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales
Dylan Thomas isn’t just a popular poet and writer; he’s a respected member of the literary tradition. So, it’s easy to forget that he was also a great innovator who used the latest communication technologies to change the way poetry was regarded by a generation of people across the world.

As we celebrate the centenary of Dylan Thomas’ birth, we find that we are once again in the vanguard of a technical revolution. The internet, the smartphone and the tablet have changed the broadcasting landscape in recent years, and we are going to use every aspect of that change to showcase programmes and content from across the season to introduce a new audience to Dylan Thomas.

We’ll be producing a series of guides, fronted by familiar faces providing their take on Dylan Thomas’ most famous works and colourful lifestyle. Dylan Thomas & Me will include insights from well-known figures exploring the writer’s influence and impact on the world. And we will lead new listeners back to the famous recordings made by the poet himself, and by actors like Richard Burton and Anthony Hopkins, recordings which carried Dylan’s name and his poetry across the world in the middle of the last century.

We’ll also be taking our audiences inside the newest Dylan Thomas projects, with unique access to additional and behind the scenes footage from programmes such as A Poet in New York, the National Theatre Wales’ production of Under Milk Wood and the weekend festival in Laugharne in May, we have something to reinvigorate and introduce to fans old and new.

BBC Cymru Wales will create a celebratory hub for all Dylan Thomas-related programmes and content across the BBC season at bbc.co.uk/dylanthomas.

Iain Tweedale
Head of Interactive Services, BBC Cymru Wales
POEM IN OCTOBER
A springful of larks in a rolling
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
Blackbirds and the sun of October
Summery
On the hill’s shoulder...
Dylan Thomas had very strong connections with many separate places. Swansea, Laugharne and New Quay will always be associated with him, but so will Fitzrovia and New York. He was a busy broadcaster for the BBC, and the recordings he made in America spread his words even further. He was a poet and playwright, critic and storyteller. As his fame and reputation have grown in the years since his death, Dylan has come to belong not just to one place or another, or to be associated with a single institution or art form.

BBC Cymru Wales has worked closely with many organisations, and individuals in seeking to capture the essence of Dylan Thomas in 2014. We will be showcasing the best of the new writing and performance which the year will bring on all our platforms throughout 2014.

Celebrations of the life and work of Dylan Thomas continue throughout 2014 - many of them sponsored by the Welsh Government’s Dylan Thomas 100 partnership.

**Horizons Music Stage at Laugharne**

Horizons is a scheme delivered by BBC Cymru Wales in partnership with the Arts Council of Wales to develop new, independent contemporary music in Wales. The aim is to support and promote the best new Welsh music talent to new and wider audiences through music stages at festivals around Wales - with Laugharne Live being one of the events in 2014. Look out for Horizons artists around the festival over the weekend.
Under Milk Wood is arguably the most famous radio play in the world and 60 years after its first broadcast, the BBC continues to set the international standard for radio drama. Developing new writers is at the heart of over 400 broadcast hours of radio drama every year.

That's why we're looking for a new generation of original writers of drama who are inspired by the work of Dylan Thomas, to create pieces for broadcast on BBC Radio Wales and bbc.co.uk/dylanthomas.

Up to 10 students will be shortlisted and invited to a BBC workshop to develop their pieces. With further development time the aim will be to polish, record and then broadcast the most successful. And in time some of those writers may go on to establish careers in radio drama and other forms of creative writing.

Alison Hindell
Head of Audio Drama UK, BBC
The force that through the green fuse drives the flower

Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees

Is my destroyer.

And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose

My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.