

CORN GWLAD / ENGLISH SYNOPSIS

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1. THE SETTING

Nominally, the audience is watching a very prestigious crowning ritual conducted by the Orsedd of 1924. However, the vibe is very cabaret and the Orsedd are like catty, DreamGirls / MeanGirls parading around the audience lording it over them, following behind their Head Druid Archie.

It's anarchic, draggy, surreal and freewheeling. At one point we'll time travel, and probably teleport. People can gain and drop characters in a heartbeat, and reveal new levels of fabulousity on the regular.

2. A NOTE ON THE ORSEDD AND OUR VERSION OF IT

The Orsedd is the honours system of Welsh language Wales, and is a super exclusive club where you get dressed up in robes and do rituals.

Our version of the Orsedd is ultra fabulous and glam. The real ones are not, but ours are. Therefore, as a baseline, everyone is gawj. Apart from Archie, everyone in the show doubles as members of the Orsedd, and as characters.

It's a tradition when you're inducted into the Orsedd that you take on a new "Bardic Name" that represents your heritage or your art. Therefore, everyone's Bardic Name sort of represents their personality.

3. CHARACTERS

ARCHIE

The Arch-Druid and Queen Bee of the Orsedd. She is a robed, gold-plated, Celtic goddess. She is the ultimate gatekeeper of Welshness and tradition, and she guards those gates fiercely. High-minded, high-handed, quick to judge and quick to temper; she, however, would tell you that she's quite a lot of fun after a couple of sherries. If she was in a Tekken style fighting game her ultimate move would be to fire bolts of judgement at you from a harp. But fabulous.

DUWATH / PROSSER RHYS

"Duwath" roughly translates as "Blimey", and Duwath is a simple soul, a bit of a farmer, and forever being surprised by things.

Prosser Rhys is a real 1920s poet and bisexual, who wrote the winning poem of the 1924 Eisteddfod, which was autobiographical and mentioned him having sex with a woman and a man. Scandalous. Our version of Prosser is a Very Serious Poet, a very brooding leading man type. But fabulous.

SOCSAN / IOLO MORGANWG

A "Socsan" means you've trodden in a puddle (or something else wet) and got your socks wet. Socsan is a fancy boy who loves dancing and hates camping and nature..

Iolo Morganwg was an 18th Century inventor, poet, magician and massive opium addict. This one time, while he was in debtors prison, he basically made up all of what we now think of as Welsh-language cultural history (Eisteddfods, druids etc)

and then made everyone believe that he'd found ancient scrolls that proved that these traditions are ancient. All of these traditions therefore started with him. In the show, he's pretty much summoned as a ghost, and he's like a ghoulish genius on crystal meth. But fabulous.

GWENCI / JINI GWALLT NEIS

"Gwenci" means "weasel" and Gwenci is an avid collector of rodents. She is your weird mate who's shy, weird and sweet..

Jini Gwallt Neis (Jini with the Good Hair) is a busty, horny barmaid. But fabulous.

MEISTRES Y GWISGOEDD / PROFESSOR EVANSEVANS

Meistres y Gwisgoedd (Mistress of the Clothing) is a real position within the real-life Orsedd: She is in charge of putting the cloak on someone when they win a prize. She has made everyone's clothing and is obsessed with everyone wearing the correct thing at any given point.

Professor EvansEvans is an 18th Century literature professor, but also a massive emo. This is basically because his name sounds like "Evanescence" and we thought that was funny.

4. THE SHOW IN BEATS

SCENE I: ENTER THE ORSEDD

From off, on mic, ARCHIE gets the crowd into a frenzy to welcome to the stage, your saviours: The ORSEDD!

Sexily in silhouette, ARCHIE, DUWATH, SOCSAN, MEISTRES and GWENCI enter through the audience. They tell us that they're super powerful, and ancient (but they still look so *young!*) and they are GORGEOUS. They live to safeguard the culture of Wales from barbarians and idiots.

They sing their opening number (**1. "IS THERE PEACE?"**) which is the call-and-response catchphrase of the Orsedd, to which the audience normally responds "heddwch!" ("peace!"). This Orsedd very much uses that question as an equivalent of "Say My Name!", i.e. to enforce their dominance on the room.

Like in *Miss Congeniality*, each member of the ORSEDD is called forward and introduced by name, and has a little intro line each.

As the number reaches its frothy peak (**1A, "IS THERE PEACE? PT 2"**) the SWORD is brought out. I don't think this has a more specific name than this, but it is used in the real ceremony, carried by a rugby person and could not be more hilariously phallic. They wank that off for a while in a sort of satirical moment type thing. Then the opening number is over and everyone is super happy.

SCENE II: THUS, WE BEGIN THE RITUAL

ARCHIE begins the ceremony.

She does a bit of crowd work, getting people to stand up and sit down on her command, and the ORSEDD ponce about.

ARCHIE tells us more about how this incredibly sacred and ancient ceremony works: anyone can join the ORSEDD (even you plebs): all someone has to do is prove their command over Welsh by writing an incredibly difficult poem, which will be judged by ARCHIE. When she has chosen the winner, the Corn Gwlad (The Nation's Horn) will be blown and the winner announced. The winner shall be given a crown and invited to join the ORSEDD.

SEAL THE DOORS! She commands. Nobody shall enter nor leave this pavilion until the ritual is over and a winner has been crowned.

(3. **“I’M THE MISTRESS”**) wherein Meistress dictates to the audience what they ought to be wearing - A NICE UNIFORM SO YOU ALL LOOK NICE AND THE SAME.

MEISTRES brings this year's poems to ARCHIE, who speed-reads them to decide a winner (4. **“READING JUDGILY”**) . She angrily announces that they are all shit this year - shame on you all!

However, there is *one* poem that actually is incredibly good, BUT its subject matter is just disgusting, therefore of course it can't be given the prize. Before they leave, the ORSEDD sing a

song about how unworthy all of you twats are of their brilliance (4. “NOBODY IS WORTHY”).

SCENE III: SOMETHING IS BADLY WRONG

However, they can't leave. The doors refuse to open. Some power is keeping them contained in the room. DUWATH works out that because ARCHIE proclaimed that the doors would not open until the ritual was over and a winner crowned, clearly the magic of the ritual is keeping them sealed.

The only way to escape is to crown a winner! And the only poem that is vaguely worthy is an absolutely disgusting and immoral poem about *buttholes!* Shit!

ARCHIE says “walk with me” and the ORSEDD go into West Wing mode, marching round the space trying to work out a way out of this predicament - they need a loophole. They make dirty jokes about someone here needing to give ARCHIE a nice loose loophole to save the Nation.

Suddenly, they realise, the ritual has the power to seal them in this room, but because the space itself is magical, that means that they are free to travel... *through time!*

ARCHIE announces that they will travel back to the foundation of the modern Eisteddfod and visit the man that revived the traditions of ancient Wales; her personal hero IOLO MORGANWG. If anyone can work out a nice stretchy loophole and save the day, it'll be IOLO.

DUWATH, MEISTRES and GWENCI form a circle and conduct a seance / summoning ritual to transport us back to the 18th Century (**5. “SPIRIT, TAKE THE PLUNGE”**).

It works! We vanish into a whirl of screeching lights and flashing voices.

SCENE III: WELCOME TO THE PAST

Iolo arrives as a ghost, is very excited, chaotic and off his face on Opium. He hears their predicament and whirls them off to 1772 to discover his secret. He sings that he knows that he's brilliant, but nobody gives him any respect, just because he's off his face on Opium. His only goal is to become a legend remembered throughout history, with his face carved in the moon, and he'll do anything to accomplish that mission. Hey! He's just had an idea! Wales is a bit like him; everyone thinks we're basic and don't respect us. Two birds, one stone: he'll make Wales the most famous nation in the world, and thus secure his place in history.

Then he whisks everyone off to the pub.

6. “IOLO! YOLO! (YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE).

SCENE V: TROUBLE IN A PUB

He whisks us, Christmas Carol-style, to a pub. He greets his friend JINI GWALLT NEIS, who encourages him to enjoy the simple joys of being salt of the earth people having a simple, folksy time in the pub, like all of these salt of the earth welsh folk.

They cast the audience as these simple Welsh folk in the pub, through some simple audience participation.

However, IOLO is unimpressed by this simple sort of low brow culture: he wants the Welsh to aspire to something *better*, but the common folk of Wales are even worse than he thought! With a boisterous continuation of his signature song (7. “IOLO! YOLO! PT 2) he sings to the pub folk that the English are laughing at us, with their Shakespeare and Chaucer, and what have we got? Flat caps and fiddles. He’s frustrated by how low everyone else’s ambitions are. He vows that he will save us all.

SCENE VI: ENTER THE MENTOR

But how can he do this? Suddenly, PROFESSOR EVANSEVANS enters, bereft and being very emo, ordering white wine and a line of 18th century jelly shots.

IOLO asks him what's wrong, and he explains that he's a professor of Welsh history, but there isn't any to study! The Celts never wrote anything down and any trace that there was of our old culture was held in ancient scrolls and tablets, but they were all burnt or hidden by the Romans, so there's *nothing* left!

So, there's things out there that could save our culture, asks IOLO... but they're lost? EVANSEVANS says yes, but there's *no* chance anyone will ever find them! **8. "EVANSEVANS (IOLO! YOLO! PT 3)"**.

IOLO has some good news for EVANSEVANS; while he was singing that song, IOLO had a look over there by that pile of chairs, and actually found a bunch of our old scrolls and tablets (and in no way actually scribbled fake ones that he's now trying to pass off as real). EVANSEVANS is dumbfounded - *really?* Yes, says IOLO!

They have a bit of a back and forth as EVANSEVANS finds faults that nearly rumble IOLO's deception, but ultimately IOLO fools the professor: **9. "IOLO! YOLO! PT 4"**.

IOLO has a vision of a pure Wales, unsullied by England or anyone, past, present and future intertwined and all truths unlocked and paradise visible in the daytime sky! (This has absolutely nothing to do with the Opium): **10. "IOLO! YOLO! PT 5"**.

Suddenly, we flash forward to the creation of the first Orsedd, on Primrose Hill in London. IOLO's "discoveries" have been taken seriously and have led to the founding of an array of beautiful traditions: **11. PRIMROSE HILL (IOLO! YOLO! PT 6)**"

SCENE VII: A STROKE

Back in 1924, ARCHIE asks if she can get this straight: all of the traditions she believed in her whole life, everything she based her existence on as a Welsh person... was a lie made up by a smackhead?

Pretty much, replies IOLO.

ARCHIE's dreams are dashed. **12. "THE NATION'S HORN"**. She sings about how when she was growing up, other children and teenagers never made sense to her, but when she was in the Eisteddfod, listening to that sweet horn sound its song, everything made *sense*, and everyone was together. But now that entire sense of self is SHATTERED, she falls to the floor and announces that she's having a stroke.

SCENE VIII: C'MON

Iolo says to Archie that the two of them are the same - all they want is for Wales to stand proud and be incredible and sexy and awesome.

So, says Iolo, there's nothing to worry about! After he started things rolling in his era, surely now in 1924 traditions have evolved so much that by now the Orsedd and the Eisteddfod probably are held in a huge arena floating around the world on an enormous balloon, spurting out Welsh champagne and fireworks over a grateful world, who scream out their joy at catching a glimpse of Wales, the most wonderful nation on Earth.

However, he's horrified to learn that the Orsedd and the crowning ceremony are exactly the same as they were in his day.

He demands to see this shit ritual they've been peddling for the last 150 odd years and Archie, her pride piqued, agrees to show a bit of the ceremony, **THOUGH NOT ALL OF IT!** For, if the ceremony goes too far and the Horn of the Nation is sounded, they won't be able to stop the poet who wrote the bumming poem from rising and being crowned.

Then we go into "Here We Go Doing the Ritual", as per.

13. "HERE WE GO DOING THE RITUAL"**14. "HERE WE GO A FETCHING"**

SCENE IX: NEMESIS

ARCHIE faces off with PROSSER on stage.

She accuses him of being the “butt-hole bard” and he slaps back that his poem is about love and need in all its forms, and yes, some of that involves really hot beach sex. SEE! She screams! It’s just about rutting like dogs with you people. She’ll never crown him, the ritual is over.

No! Says PROSSER. Oh what do you care, says ARCHIE. Why dyou want to destroy it anyway, it’s just a shiny hat. But PROSSER bites back: you don’t get to decide one minute that it’s unimportant just because I won it!

Chill out, says ARCHIE. It’s all meaningless, that twat IOLO made it all up so who cares?

PROSSER says that he cares, because when you’re on the outside of something, something that’s denied to you... it takes on more meaning. He thought if he broke through all the gates and codes and cultural locks and *did things the ORSEDD’s way*, they’d have to at least acknowledge him. All he needs is to be heard, for his life and heart to mean something in the country he loves.

In **15. “PART OF THIS”** *t* PROSSER and ARCHIE duet ferociously, PROSSER saying that his whole life he’s been told that he’s fundamentally wrong. And he tried to fix it by getting married, but had to find love in the darkness away from the acceptable life. But he always knew he was not a mistake, not

a criminal, and that he would one day prove that by being crowned. Then that would make all the pain worth it, a sacrifice so people like him could live in the light, and be *part of this*.

ARCHIE counters: how dare you say that this is about love? When it's ARCHIE's blood and adoration that's kept this all going. She sacrificed who she was to save Wales, and newsflash: Wales is dangling on a precipice, and only *unity and purity* can save it, not everyone scrabbling to get what they want.

Here in 1924, they realise they're in a battle between two minorities, but if they continue to fight... or if they make their peace and that weakens them both against their enemies... Where will we be in a century?

SCENE X: CATHARSICISING

Prosser says "I'm sorry, Archie. I'm sorry, I thought you actually loved Wales." Archie explodes angrily that she does, she loves it as much as dragons, coal and massive hats! Prosser says that if you love something you should share it with the world. Archie claps back that only sluts say that. Queer sluts.

Prosser responds that the queers are everywhere nowadays, and we always have been. Even in 1924, asks Archie, agog. Iolo appears and says "yeah, even in 1924".

Prosser and Iolo explain that queers are typically very creative and obsessive as a people; and that due to the oppression they faced in 1924, most of them don't have children, so they have more time to focus on projects. "Projects like... Wales?" asks Archie.

Meistres asks if it's possible for anyone to join the queers. Is there an entrance exam or something? No! Say Iolo and Prosser, welcome aboard! Archie, seeing her allies slip away from her, turns to Gwenci.

Archie mournfully proclaims that Wales isn't strong enough to be brave and change; she's too brittle. There's no room for change.

Gwenci says that her grandma always used to say "however tight your nook or cranny, there's always room for a ferret." Archie asks what the hell that means other than that her grandma was gross.

Gwenci sings a song "Little Ferrets" about how they are creatures of pure joy that bring light into any corner, and that there is no heart that's too full - or too closed - to welcome a little ferret.

Meistres, Iolo and Prosser join in and soon the stage is full of happy ferrets.

Archie is unconvinced. If you start letting anyone in, and changing little things about Wales, pretty soon everything's changed and is it even Wales any more? No, it's just a shambles. And if it all falls apart, we'll all be alone with nothing connecting us.

Meistres sings a tender reprise of her solo, saying it's bloody hard to be an individual, standing all by yourself, and that wearing a uniform in the middle of other people is comforting sometimes, so you feel less alone. However, when the clothing becomes more important than the people wearing it, then you need... a MAKEOVER.

We could have a makeover, they agree, not only of the clothing but of the traditions, make them mean something to the people who are alive now, while remembering who we used to be, who we want to be, and who we need to be.

Archie, on the brink of agreeing, calls upon lolo - "it doesn't mean anything lolo, if it's not ancient, can it ever be real and meaningful?". "Maybe not to start with, but if we all pretend together that it is real and meaningful, maybe one day... it will be?"

Archie finally relents and, with a gasp, she "discovers" an ancient scroll from the days of yore, which tells us about another missing custom: that we need to wiggle our pants! Everyone joins in, "discovering" scrolls that tell us what our ancient traditions are. Lo and behold, they tell us we should be closing on a big fat finale number.

And so we do.

With a finale, **16. “BEING A POET IS HARD”** they all sing that life, like a poem, is best when things that are different can find that they rhyme, and fit together in ways nobody ever saw coming. It's tough sometimes to make things rhyme, but when it works UGGHHHH IT FEELS SO GOOD!!

They sing and they party and everything feels, for a moment, good with the world.

THE END.

www.franwen.com/en/productions/corn-gwlad