Mari Lwyd brought to life at the Urdd National Eisteddfod

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The 17th-century cultural celebrations will take place on the Urdd National Eisteddfod site at Llandrillo College, Glynllifon Campus near Caernarfon next Wednesday, 6 June at 1.30pm as a flash-performance of Mari horses make their way through the festival site.

Mari Lwyd (Y Fari Lwyd in Welsh meaning Old Grey Mare), is traditionally a New Year celebration to pass the marking of the dark days of winter and welcome the spring. Once celebrated across Wales, it's now a tradition associated with south and south-east of the country.

With funding of £6,700 from HLF, trac:Music Traditions Wales Ltd (trac) has launched a year-long project to help revive the tradition throughout Wales. Through the project, young people will be provided with resources and workshops in traditional Mari customs including music and dance lessons, routes and a flatpack of a model Mari Lwyd horse, addressing the barrier of obtaining horse' skulls for the Mari tradition.

Trac, which has already started rolling out the project, recently visited Ysgol Gynradd Nefyn, where they ran workshops to bring this Welsh tradition alive and prepare Mari horses, which will be used by school children participating in the performance at the Urdd.

Gwawr Howel, classroom teacher at Ysgol Gynradd Nefyn said: "We have been extremely fortunate to be one of the first schools to get involved with the Mari Lwyd project. As well as supporting the curriculum, the hands on workshops captured the imaginations of the pupils and developed new skills and a greater understanding of their heritage and culture."

Danny KillBride, director at trac:Music Traditions Wales said: "It's fantastic to have received this funding from HLF, which has enabled us to get communities involved with this traditional custom. Back in 2009 we worked with the Chepstow community to establish a Mari group, and since have been regularly approached by other communities also wanting to reignite this exciting tradition.

"We're really excited about our flash-performance at the Urdd National Eisteddfod next week and we hope it will draw in the crowds and spark an interest in the great Mari horse tradition. Through the project, we will be visiting schools and community groups across Wales, delivering resources and lessons in Mari Lwyd traditions. We hope that these skills will then be passed between community groups, expanding the knowledge and practice of the Mari tradition throughout Wales."

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF Wales, said: "Projects like this give people the opportunity to explore Wales' heritage and culture. We're delighted to be supporting such a worthwhile project that is meeting the demands of communities across Wales.

"People and communities are at the heart of HLF projects and it is thanks to organisations like Trac that Wales' diverse heritage is brought back to life and safeguarded for future generations. Hopefully 2013 New Year celebrations will

include Mari Lwyd traditions in even more locations, bringing communities together across Wales.”

Further information

To find out more about the Mari Lwyd project and how to access the bilingual resources including a Mari Lwyd flatpack and booklet of Mari customs written by Dr. Rhiannon Ifans, visit trac's website, call 029 2031 8863 or email trac.

What is the Mari Lwyd tradition?

- The Mari Lwyd (Y Fari Lwyd in Welsh meaning Grey Mare), is a Welsh midwinter tradition, often to celebrate New Year.
- The Mari Lwyd consists of a wooden or cardboard mare’s skull on a stick, which is carried by a person and covered with a white sheet. It is decorated with ribbons and small bells.
- The Mari Lwyd forms part of a group which makes its way in ceremony through the streets of the local community, calling at pubs and houses where they break into traditional dancing and song.
- Sometimes, the jaw of the skull is spring loaded so that the operator can ‘snap’ it at passers-by, trying to frighten them and causing some humour and havoc.
- Modern day Welsh Mari Lwyd celebrations take place in some parts of Wales; a Mari Lwyd performance can be seen every December at the St. Fagan’s National History Museum and a mixture of Mari Lwyd and Wassail celebrations take place in the border town of Chepstow every January.