

Y Bardd Anfarwol (The Immortal Bard)

Below is a track by track description of the album, explaining the meaning and story behind each song. Scroll down for English translations of the songs.



1. Erddigan Chengdu (Chengdu Harmony)

Chengdu is the city in Sichuan that I stayed in for my residency. The track opens with the sounds of the a street market in Sichuan and before moving to birds in one of the parks in the middle of the city. It represents the journey of the young poet Li Bai as he leaves home in the city to the countryside. The further he goes the more distant the sounds of the city and the louder the birds sing. At the end of the track the ringing of Buddhist temple prayer bells can be heard.

2. Antiffoni (Question and Answer)

This track follows Li Bai as he travels deep into the Taitien mountains where even the ringing of the temple bells cannot be heard. He searches for a wise old man (a Taoist master) that lives alone in the mountains, but fails to find him. He concludes that the wise old man has deliberately avoided him and left him in the splendor of nature. He decides that he has been given his lesson, and that his future lies in traveling in search work as a poet.

3. Yr Wylan Fry (The Free Seabird)

Having made his decision Li Bai finds his way onto a ship and begins a period traveling along the great rivers of China. The title of this song comes from a poem by a contemporary of Li Bai's, a poet called Du Fu, who said that the life of a traveler is like that of a seabird flying overhead; it's easy to see going by but once gone he is gone forever. In this song Li Bai sings to his wife who he has had to leave behind, wishing that he could be with her but forced to travel in search of work.

4. Ymadael Dinas Brenin Gwyn (Departure from White King City)

This instrumental represents Li Bai's travel along the rivers of China

5. Marwnad Chang-Kan (The Chang-Kan Lament)

In this song we hear the voice of Li Bai's wife as she sings to him in her loneliness. She describes how they met as children before they fell in love and married as young adults. She asks why he has left her alone and dreams that she becomes a seagull to find him. At the end of the song she describes how her heart is lost amongst the wild waves and crashing tides that Li Bai is now traveling on.

6. Meddyliau distaw'r nos (Quiet Night Thoughts)

This instrumental represents the interlude of the album, with Li Bai far from home and lonely with his wife far away from him. He sleeps in a cold room and a shaft of moonlight lights up the floor so that it looks like frost. He raises his head to look at the moon and his thoughts turn to his home.

7. Yfed gyda'r lleuad (Drinking with the moon)

Unable to sleep, Li Bai gets up and sits in an orchard drinking wine in the moonlight. He invites the moon down from the sky to share his wine, but obviously she stays where she is. Instead, he invites his shadow to drink with him and his shadow matches him cup for cup (of course!) and he ends up very drunk, dancing with his shadow. He promises to meet the moon and his shadow again one day at the end of the silver river, which is the Chinese name for the Milky Way.



8. Brwydr An Lushan (An Lushan Rebellion)

A little bit older now, Li Bai decides to pursue a career as a military adviser. He advises a prince who is supposed to be putting down the An Lushan Rebellion against the Emperor, his uncle. However, it turns out the prince has ambitions of his own and tries to take the throne from his uncle. The prince is defeated and Li Bai is punished to death. Fortunately, his sentence is later changed to exile and he is banished from China. He is taken by boat a long way to the very edge of ancient China. Luckily for Li Bai, he is pardoned before he travels beyond the border and he is allowed to return to China.

9. Edau Gwyn (Threads of White)

Li Bai is beginning to age and doesn't quite believe it. He describes his head as a loom and time as the weaver that folds threads of white into his hair. This track is a meditation on getting old.

10. Afon Arian (Silver River)

This track tells the story of Li Bai's death at the age of 61, on his way back along the river from exile. Late one night he decides to go out on the river in a boat with some wine. In the song Li Bai describes a waterfall descending from a great height as if the Silver River had fallen from the sky. He is reunited with his old friends; the moon and his shadow, and begins to drink the wine and is soon drunk. Gazing at the reflection of the moon in the water Li Bai sees the faces of his wife and all that are dear to him. This is the moment that he decides to unite with the moon and he falls into the water in an attempt to embrace the reflection, and drowns.

11. Bore Braf (Fresh Morning)

This is a traditional Sichuanese piece for the Guqin adapted for the guitar. I thought it an appropriate end to the album as it is a very old instrument that poets like Li Bai would traditionally sit and play whilst composing poetry. The title is also appropriate as it implies a new beginning, rebirth and another journey after death.

12. Untitled

This is Zhou Yuanlin from the Chengdu Associated Theatre of Performing Arts demonstrating her mastery of the Pipa. I recorded this in Sichuan in 2011 and put it at the end of the album as a thank you to everyone that helped me to create the album and because it sounds brilliant of course!

Y Bardd Anfarwol Lyrics

Below are translations of the Welsh lyrics. I've done my best to remain as accurate to the Welsh as possible whilst also staying true to the feel of Li Bai's poems.

Antiffoni (Question and answer)

Down in the valley no bell ever chimes
No note rings aloud where the great mountain climbs
Only the shivering song of the rain
and hush from the whispering pine trees remain

Over the water and over the land
I've travelled to seek out a wise old man
Should I be searching the blossoming peach
For lessons that he is trying to teach?

Tell me what sense can there possibly be
To a lifetime alone with nothing but trees?
I've stumbled around in this forest for days
Whilst he has been stubbornly hiding away

Water keeps flowing from mountain to sea
To great open lakes from slow trickling streams
Far past the peaks where the snow geese fly
Beyond this horizon to unending skies

Beyond this horizon to unending skies
Beyond this horizon to unending skies
Far past the peaks where the snow geese fly
Beyond this horizon to unending skies

Down in the valley no bell ever chimes
No note rings aloud where the great mountain climbs
Only the shivering song of the rain
and hush from the whispering pine trees remain



Yr Wylan Fry (The Free Seabird)

Oh! The long days all begin
With White Gibbons and their din
Their cries to praise the morning
cross the water as they sing
What I'd give to hear the Cuckoo
calling brightly with the dawn
But those two notes are so distant
In the West where I was born

Further still the water's flowing
And it carries me away
I've left my life of comfort
To search the land for pay
What I'd give to still be lying
In the warmth of your embrace
Whilst there's money on the river
Then the river I must chase

And they say a sailor's life
Is like a seabird flying high
So easy to see gliding over
Once gone, only empty sky

Late at night the moonlight glistens
Just like frost upon my floor
I raise my head to listen
and to gaze upon the door
What I'd give to let the moonlight
Turn my heart to ice instead
To keep me from this feeling
'Till my travelling days are dead

And they say a sailor's life
Is like a seabird flying high
So easy to see gliding over
Once gone, only empty sky



Marwnad Chang-Kan (The Chang-Kan Lament)

By branches full of fat green plums
We two were pleased as bees
In springtime's glow we shared a kiss
Beneath the spreading leaves
When I was still a girl so young
And you a wayward boy
It soon became our time to join
And share our lives in joy

We were as dust and ashes
O! To keep the fire near
Why did you join the river's flow
And go so far from here?

When Autumn's song is in the air,
And golden leaves are lost
It can't be long before we come
To winter crows and frost
I dreamed I rode the great West Wind
A poor old gull in flight
Across the waves I swirled and soared
in search of you last night

We were as dust and ashes
O! To keep the fire near
Why did you join the river's flow
And go so far from here?

On mountain tops I stand and stare
At every sail that nears
But not a single one belongs
To you my sailor dear
Why did I wed a wayward man
When I was young and fair?
Between wild waves and crashing tides
You'll find my poor heart there



Yfed gyda'r lleuad (Drinking with the moon)

The moon has shamed the stars tonight,
they hide beyond the glow
And I, beneath her perfect light
am drinking with my shadow

Amongst a stand of blooming trees
With moon and wine I settle
The branches bow, so every breeze
brings rains of silken petals

So bright above the somber earth
I call the moon by name
Each time I raise my cup to her
my shadow does the same

Before the hills are sunlight-stained
and dewfall makes us shiver
Let's dance and vow to meet again
beyond the silver river

A drinker knows the talk of trees
and speech of stones so stark,
The grasses slick with salty tears
and moonsong in the dark



Edau Gwyn (Threads of White)

I stare into the mirror
In the early morning light
My head's a loom upon which time
Has woven threads of white

I can see the children playing
On the hilltop flying kites
Against the breeze they pull and strain
And hold to threads of white

Threads of white, threads of white
Threads of white, threads of white
My head's a loom upon which time
Has woven threads of white

The lake has frozen over
And the leaves are taking flight
My head's a loom upon which time
Has woven threads of white

I stare into the mirror
In the early morning light
My head's a loom upon which time
Has woven threads of white



Silver River

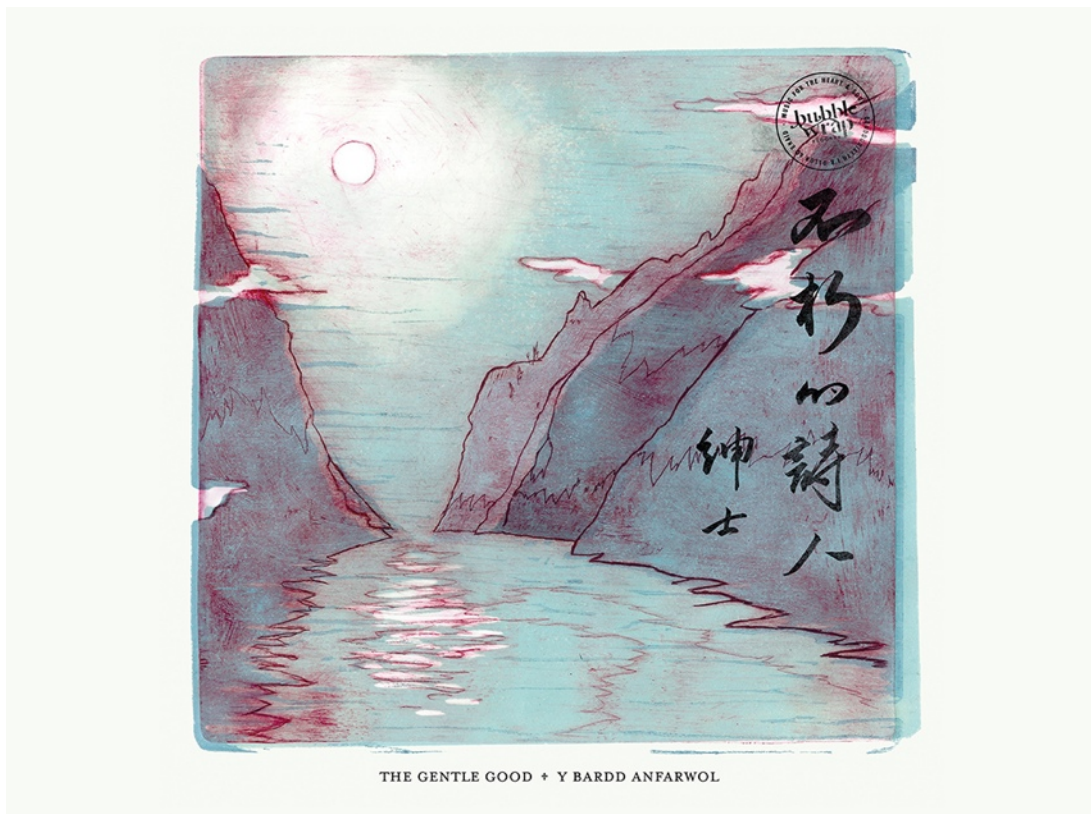
This is the river that fell from the sky
A roaring cascade three thousand feet high
White water pounds all around like a drum
Here on the river my moment has come

Enchanted once more by moonlight and wine
My tireless shadow, the moon and I
White water pounds all around like a drum
Here on the river my moment has come

O! The white apes are all sleeping
On the shoreline where the willow grows
For my loved ones I am yearning
Down where the Silver River flows

And now at the end my poems are done
I reach for the moon and at last we are one
To drown in her glory this life I must shun
Here on the river my moment has come

O! My lonely heart is smiling
As I reach toward her perfect glow
For my loved ones I am pining
Down where the Silver River flows



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