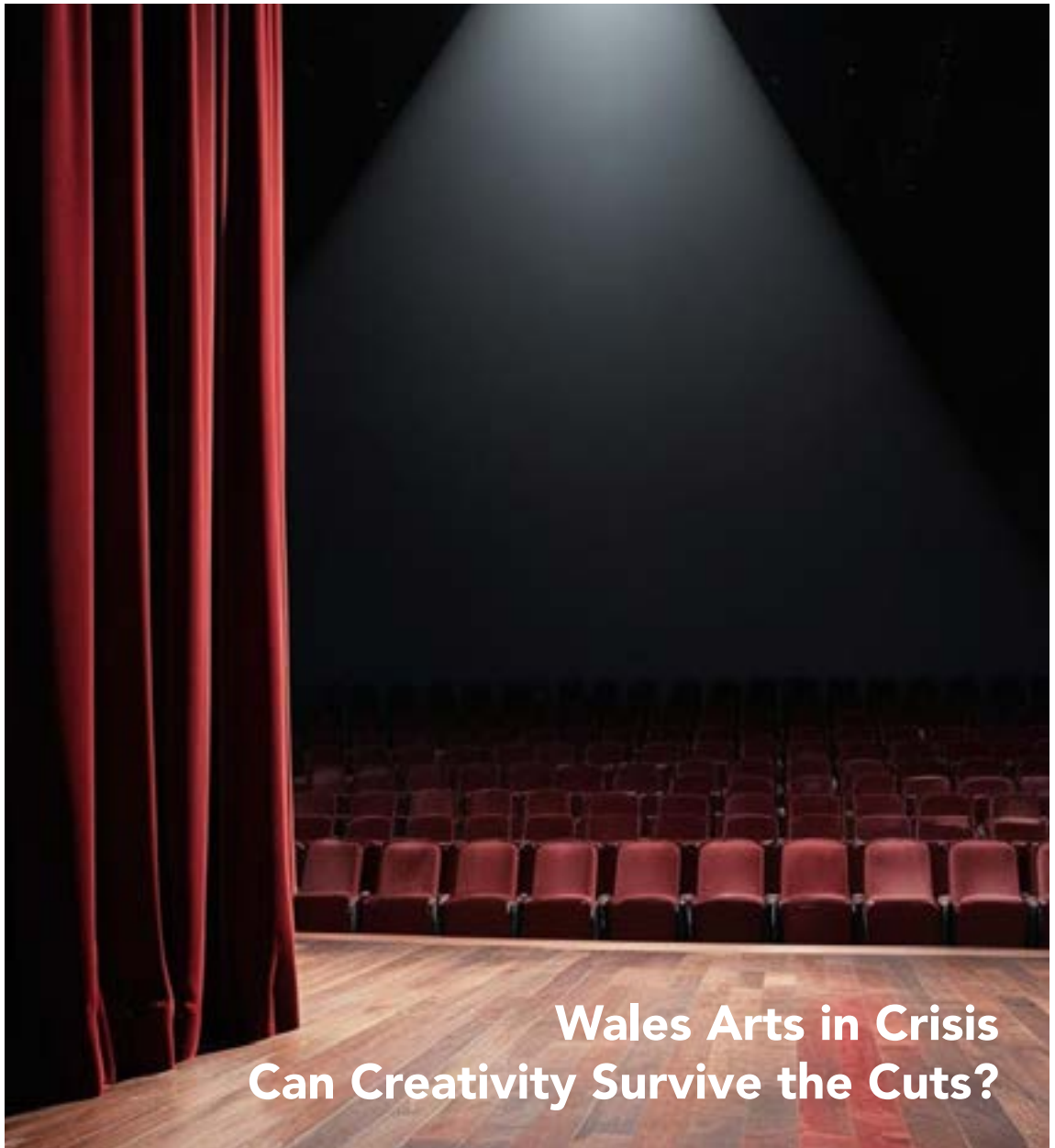


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**Wales Arts in Crisis
Can Creativity Survive the Cuts?**

January 2025 | Jade Burrell



Ffotogallery in Cathays celebrated 50 years of Marian Delyth, one of Wales's most prominent photographers with a major solo exhibition. The exhibition, part of the broader FfotoCymru 2024 festival, aimed to put a spotlight on female photographers. Delyth's exhibition was open to the public from October 4 until December 14. It was curated from 50 years of her photographic archive of social movements and activism in Wales. "I spent months digging into my archive—it sometimes felt like an archaeological dig," she says. The main focus of the exhibition and festival is the role of women in the male-dominated industry of photography. Delyth, who is a founding member of the first Ffotogallery on Charles Street in 1978, reflects on her time as a photographer in this male-centric profession. She says: "When I started, I was often the only woman in the room. Now there's a growing recognition of female

photographers. "It's wonderful to see this being reflected in events like Ffotocymru." The exhibition marks a milestone in Delyth's career, with an archive spanning five decades as well as coinciding with her 70th birthday. Bob Gelsthorpe, creative producer at Ffotogallery, explains that the festival and exhibition aim to address the gender imbalance in photography. Gelsthorpe says that the commission for Marian Delyth is a prime example of their goals. "She has had very few major public exhibitions," he says. "A lot of men in similar career positions have been celebrated all over the world." The exhibition at Ffotogallery features over 100 images. However, as Gelsthorpe notes, it's only around 5% of what Delyth originally wanted to include. He adds that over the next year, the gallery will be looking to rectify the male to female balance in their exhibitions with a better focus on female and non-binary artists.



Welsh farmers faced major challenges in 2024, with unpredictable weather, labour shortages, and funding uncertainty affecting the sector. A wet, cold growing season caused poor crop yields, with seasonal growers like David Phillips of Clearwell Farm struggling to meet demand for pumpkin picking, requiring ticket sales to manage visitors. Funding concerns remain, as Wales historically received £90 million annually through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. NFU President Tom Bradshaw stressed the need to prioritise farming, warning, "It should not be kicked around like a rotten pumpkin." Sustainable funding is crucial in 2025 to support the sector's resilience and growth.

50 days to transform care

The Welsh Government's 50-day Integrated Care Winter Challenge aimed to ease NHS pressures by improving hospital discharges. Concluding in late 2024, the initiative included a 10-point action plan. While progress was made, delays in discharges and record-high waiting lists underscored the ongoing challenges facing Wales' stretched healthcare system.

An Interview with Zoey Allen

Zoey Allen's journey of self-discovery as a transgender woman has inspired her to write children's books, create jewellery, and advocate for the LGBTQ+ community.

University is a time when many people discover themselves and for Zoey Allen, that was true. She realised she was transgender. Allen initially kept her realisation hidden, fearing that by coming out she would "lose it all." She recalled how many stories she read about people coming out ended in loss. She had a good job, a happy family, and was in a successful band. The thought of losing it all was terrifying. Her 'now or never' moment came a couple of years later, aged 38, when she came out to her then-wife, Kelly, at the end of 2018, starting the new year with a stronger sense of self and hope for the future. Five years on, Allen, 43, is a children's author, businesswoman, and a LGBTQ+ advocate.



"As long as I'm happy, that's all that mattered to them" - Zoey on coming out to her children

Five years ago, Zoey Allen came out as transgender to her family, including her children, Molly and George. Their response was simple: "As long as I'm happy, that's all that mattered to them." Surrounded by books growing up, Molly and George were open and understanding. Yet, Allen noticed a lack of accessible children's books about trans lives. Inspired, she wrote *My Brother George* and *My Momma Zo* from Molly's perspective, presenting her story through a child's eyes. Now, Allen is working on a third children's book, set to be released in early 2026, continuing her mission to educate and inspire.



Outside of books, Allen also creates jewellery. *KelZo*, co-founded with Kelly in 2020, features an 'affordable, fun, and quirky' LGBTQ+ collection, in which Allen donates 10% of the profits to LGBTQ+ charities. Allen also managed a stall at the Christmas market for the first 11 days before returning to work at Lidl, after leaving in 2021.



Allen says her supportive coworkers at Lidl made the decision to return to work reassuring, especially as her jewellery business has struggled with "dire" online sales despite her advertising efforts. While she enjoys the festive atmosphere of the Cardiff Christmas market, now in its 30th year, she's opted for a shorter schedule this year to stay warmer.

Curtain Call: The Fight to Save Wales' Arts and Music Scene

The spotlight shines on an empty stage. Seats sit vacant, their silence louder than applause. This isn't the start of a hauntingly minimal performance, it's a glimpse of what Wales' arts sector could become.

In recent years, the sector has been hit hard with the cost of living crisis and shrinking budgets. In research commissioned by performing arts union Equity, it was found that since 2017, the arts sector has seen a 30% funding decrease. This is the biggest drop in the UK, with Scotland reporting a two percent increase.

Even institutions as internationally recognised as the Welsh National Opera (WNO) are struggling. They were hit with a 35% cut from Arts Councils in England and 11.8% from Arts Councils in Wales. Combined, this adds up to 25% of the WNO's annual budget.

Welsh National Opera Faces The Music

Dubbed as a jewel in Wales's crown, WNO is Wales' largest arts employer and the largest touring opera company in Europe.

This funding crisis prompted an open letter signed by cultural icons like Sir Bryn Terfel, Katherine Jenkins, and Michael Sheen, calling for urgent support. The letter warns that WNO's ability to operate year-round is at risk.

"What has painstakingly been built up over 80 years will be eroded, and a vicious cycle will have begun," says the letter. WNO, who has 222 employees, says in their letter that "music and opera are needed now more than ever," and even quoted Sir Winston Churchill's wartime declaration: "The Arts are essential to any complete national life."

But this crisis isn't limited to the WNO.



When The Music Stops

Back in December 2017, Cardiff became the UK's first music city in the hopes of boosting the city's international profile and protecting its music scene.

That year, Womanby Street, Cardiff's musical hub, faced several threats.

The Moon was set to close in January.

In March, Fuel Rock Club was served a noise abatement order. By September, plans to build flats next to Clwb Ifor Bach emerged.

Despite efforts to preserve the music scene, Challenges persisted. Earlier this year, The Moon announced it was closing down. The Moon closed its doors for the final time after over a decade in the city's live music scene.

The venue, which previously shut in 2017 but reopened thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign, is now unable to continue with the ongoing pressures facing small grassroots music venues.

In a statement, the venue noted: "The financial pressures put on independent music venues are extreme, and the support we receive just isn't enough to match that."

The Moon hosted a wide range of musicians, from emerging local talent to well-established performers. Many artists have expressed their frustration and heartbreak, including some whose first gigs were at The Moon.

Since its closure, thousands of people have donated into a support fund for staff and freelancers, demonstrating that for many, the arts are worth fighting for.

Cardiff Amplifies It's Music Scene

Last year (2024), in an attempt to support grassroots music venues, Cardiff Council announced new funding for the Cardiff Music City initiative.

The fund offers venues grants of up to £10,000 for essential improvements and nurturing local talent.

They also launched the inaugural Cardiff Music

City Festival.

This festival, which took place 27 September to 20 October, was spread over 25 venues and featured more than 200 artists.

Council Leader and Chair of the Cardiff Music Board, Cllr Huw Thomas, says: "Cardiff's grassroots venues play a vital role in the city's music scene."

Media Advisor for Creative Wales, David Harris, says that a Sound Diplomacy report they commissioned at the start of their music work shows that live music contributes around £100 million to Cardiff's economy every year.

"Last year, the concerts in Cardiff Castle alone brought over 80,000 visitors to Cardiff from outside Wales," he says. "Coupled with an extensive local supply chain and 300 additional part-time jobs during the period, they

contributed £26.3 million to the city's economy."

Dan Donnelly, the communications and security manager at Fuel Rock Club, has recently launched an arts based community interest company, BEWT Creative C.I.C.

He says: "We only incorporated at the end of August, so we were horrified to hear the news about The Moon."

Donnelly says BEWT is aimed at helping the to promote unsigned artists and musicians in the grassroots scene.

Our Stage, Our Future

Despite these efforts, the future of Wales' arts sector hangs by a thread.

Just last month, chief executive of Arts Council Wales, Dafydd Rhys, warned that "there will be no professional sector in ten years" if funding cuts continue.

When the curtain falls on creativity, it isn't just performances we lose.

It's the vibrant stories, voices, and culture that bring communities together.

The spotlight still shines, but for how long?

If Wales' arts sector is to avoid an empty stage, it needs action. Audiences must fill seats.

Communities need to advocate for support.

There must be a renewed commitment to investing in Welsh culture.

**"There
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