

# Welsh folk group Still going strong

BY IFAN PAYNE

IN THE hurly burly world of pop where this year's "in" group is next year's "has been" and last year's group is a footnote in Rolling Stone it is quite remarkable to find that Wales's first professional Welsh folk group is not only still going strong but is in fact celebrating its tenth anniversary.

It is doing this with its *Taith ar ol Deg* which can be loosely translated as the "Tour After Ten," a decade during which Ar Log has established an international reputation as one of the leading western professional folk groups.

Ten years ago the Celtic Festival was being held in Lorient, Brittany, and the festival's Welsh Committee was looking for a group to represent this country. At the time the brothers Gwyndaf and Dafydd Roberts were performing in local "noson lawen" and Iolo Jones and Dave Burns were performing on the South Wales circuit. The two groups were approached to combine together for the festival.

"Ar Log," rent-a-group, was their response to this request and the group has been renting out its talents ever since.

In the intervening years vocalist Dave Burns has left the group (though, as the latest album shows he is still involved with its endeavours" and violinist and mandolinist Graham Pritchard has come and gone.

Dafydd Roberts (harp and flute), Gwyndaf Roberts (harp and bass) and Iolo Jones (violin) are still with the group which now also consists of Geraint Glynne Davies (guitar and lead vocals) and Stephen Rees (accordion, violin). Though this list does not fully convey the range of recorders, woodwinds and keyboards which also flavour the performances.

Dafydd Iwan, a popular soloist in his own right, has also been an important element of the group's concerts and records.

The group has performed all over Europe, the United States, Canada and South America. Since the release in 1978 of the original *Ar Log* album there have been ten successful LPs issued variously on Sain, Dingles and their own label.

*Ar Log* has made a speciality of performing Welsh folk songs and

traditional dance music in arrangements which are replete with stringy, reedy sounds without ever sounding fay or "folksy." On the contrary, its music making can be vibrant, foot-tapping stuff of which the infectious "Cân y Cardi" from *Ar Log IV* is a good example.

Typical also is the way in which that rousing song is followed by the slow, haunting violin duet "Ar Fore Teg." It is beautiful music making that surely touches the heart of the listener, whatever their nationality.

However the two albums which included Dafydd Iwan, *Rhwng Hwyl a Thaith* and *Yma o Hyd*, seemed to suggest a move towards a more popular style.

But the release of their latest album, *Meillionen* ("The Clover") marks a definite return to tradition. Both the spirited performances of the Welsh dance tunes and also the impressively researched inserted booklets (compiled by Dave Burns) make their own contributions to keeping alive the traditional dances of Wales.

Paradoxically, their best known recording to a wider audience is one that may not be instantly associated with the group. It was Ar Log who prompted the highly successful Welsh contribution to the Ethiopian tragedy, *Dwylo Dros y Môr*, which was released on their own label.

So now its "still together again" after 10 years and a celebratory whip around the Principality in a series of concerts in which former member Dave Burns, Graham Pritchard and Dafydd Iwan will be joining.

Following concerts in Aberystwyth, Pwllheli, Llandudno, Gorseinon and Carmarthen the Tour After Ten will end with a concert in the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, on April 13.

But the celebrations will not end there. They're off to Holland, Germany and Sardinia later in the year. Ar Log has already toured South America (Colombia and Ecuador) and now an even more extensive tour of that continent is being planned.

"Ar Log" clearly mean to go on celebrating Welsh music until it is time for their twentieth anniversary.

