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Connecting to Wales. Alan Upshall, President Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association of North America.

With the exception of the war years, 1943-1945, the Welsh in North America (USA and Canada) have been holding their annual 'National Gymanfa Ganu' since 1929. What began in Niagara Falls, New York, as a classical Gymanfa Ganu, has evolved into a four day festival of concerts, seminars, and tours and eisteddfod competition, capped by a Gymanfa Ganu sessions on the final Sunday afternoon and Sunday evening.

Although successful, there has been much discussion about the relevance of the event - "it reflects Wales of the past", "it does little to attract the new breed of Welsh exile" are frequent comments. Such comments raise the questions: How can the North American Welsh accept and adopt evolving Welsh culture into their annual festivities? How can improved and more direct and constructive connections back to Wales be made?

Connecting to Wales is an *in vogue* topic: I have received correspondence from Welsh MP Chris Ruane soliciting connections to help the Welsh Development Agency with business connections; the officers of the newly formed Welsh North American Chamber of Commerce have created a strong North American network of business activities with a view to improving business connections to Wales and to help with investment opportunities; there are the Internet sites such as www.clickcymru.co.uk; the Wales Tourist Board are very interested in strengthening Welsh connections, if that results in an increased number of visitors to Wales; and there are many others.

Most of this activity has an economic basis, designed to attract and help industry in Wales. There is little activity relating to the development and dissemination of Welsh culture. Several of the Welsh Associations in North America have scholarships to support Welsh related projects, but there is a need for a more direct and meaningful connection to the establishment in Wales, a relationship that will bring together the global Welsh.

What better place to start than the National Eisteddfod in Wales. That has an infrastructure and an event, in the 'Exiles' day, that could be built upon. As well as the exiles ceremony, can we use competition to enhance the connections to Wales? What about building on the existing Thursday ceremony welcoming the exiles home from abroad?

As a first step, the WNGGA in North America is proposing to introduce a vocal competition into its North American Eisteddfod program that will carry a significant prize, namely, the winner will be sponsored to travel to Wales to compete at the Welsh National Eisteddfod. With well-designed promotion on both sides of the Atlantic, this presence can be a foundation for future expansion and with imagination and good planning, it could become the foundation of a competition for the overseas Welsh

Think of a vocal or instrumental competition with entrants from USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and all the other overseas countries that harbor Welsh exiles. Think of a choral competition for the overseas Welsh, with the North American Welsh Choir, The Welsh Choirs from Sydney or Melbourne or Wellington or Seattle or California, or Ottawa as possible competitors. Would it not be exciting if the competition (s) was on

the Overseas day, before the ceremony, and the winner be awarded with the Welsh International Trophy? 'Come home to Wales and compete', and at the same time learn and understand how Wales is changing and creating new traditions in the modern world.

How would this help? It would potentially bring more people back to Wales to see at first hand what

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alan', written in a cursive style.