

By SARAH BATLEY

TATTOOS and bibles are not often the starting point for a new oratorio but poet Menna Elfyn has brought together two worlds that have intrigued her for years, in a new work that is

premiered in North Wales next month.

Together with composer Pwyll ap Siôn she's written *Gair ar Gnawd* (Word on Flesh), which involves a 40-strong amateur choir drawn from around Caernarfon, performing alongside Welsh National Opera singers.

The Welsh language piece, commissioned by the WNO, will be premiered at Caernarfon, with a second performance in Wrexham.

It tells the story of a David and Goliath struggle between the developers of a large casino and a local community whose livelihoods are under threat.

The main characters are Awen, a tattooist, and Anwar, a translator of the Bible into all the languages of the world.

"We were asked to come up with a piece of work for a North Wales venue, said Menna, an award-winning poet and playwright, who is Director of Creative Writing at the University of Wales' Carmarthen campus.

"I looked at William Morgan, who first translated the Bible into Welsh in 1588, but Pwyll and I didn't want a period piece, we wanted it to have a modern dynamic. So we made a William Morgan for the 21st century."

Among her inspirations was the Wycliffe project, which translates the Bible into the languages of small communities, such as Samoa.

Another was a collection of cuttings about tattoos, their meanings and similarity to religious beliefs.

"Tattoos are messages that everybody can see, so they have a strong cultural significance," explained Menna.

"For one, the word becomes flesh, for the other the words are flesh."

Menna's intricate libretto mixes in the voices of construction workers, developers, councillor and a community anxious to be heard against those supporting a unwanted property development.

The rich tapestry of voices will be created by the community choir, which has been supported by The Gwendoline and Margaret Davies Charity. WNO Chorus member Siân Meinir plays Awen and Philip Lloyd Evans is Anwar.

"It's about language, locality, identity and what we believe in," explains Pwyll. "But it's also about people coming together and working to make the world a better place."

The piece has been supported by Pendine Park and owner Mario Kreft, a WNO Community Champion, who said: "Gair ar Gnawd chimes with the work we are doing at Pendine Park where enjoyment of the arts is helping to improve the quality of life for residents."

Play on words



Menna Elfyn

TATTOOS AND BIBLE INSPIRE NEW WORK

TICKETS

Gair ar Gnawd, Caernarfon
Galeri March 12, 01286 685250,
galericaernarfon.com; Stiwt
March 15, 01978 841300,
stiwt.ticketsolve.com

German
wheel
acrobats,
Acrojou
in action



Acrobatic show is a wake-up for senses

GERMAN wheel acrobats Acrojou bring their show *Wake* to Caernarfon Galeri next week.

It's a dark, humorous and uplifting study of one man's DIY relationship with his own existence: love, laughter, good manners, grief, death, home operations, wheels and waltzing.

Directed by Flick Ferdinando of renowned Company FZ, it's an hour of visceral and fast moving storytelling.

Wake features the stunning physicality of German and Cyr wheels, strikingly choreographed acrobatics, a set which, along with the hero, veers and shifts, collapses and is rebuilt, all woven around emotive themes with the absorbing visuals for which Acrojou are becoming renowned.

Acrojou was formed in 2006 by Jeni Barnard and Barney White with a Trafalgar Square Festival commission. This was followed by nationwide and international performances, a Without Walls commission, and UK and international residencies.

Creating original, designed performance on the kinetic canvas that circus provides, the company says it endeavours to produce work with emotional integrity, bridging the gap between visual art and physical performance.

● *Wake*, Caernarfon Galeri, February 17. Tickets 01286 685222, galericaernarfon.com

Feist date at Green Man

CANADIAN artist Feist is to headline the Green Man festival.

The singer-songwriter is a long-standing member of music collective Broken Social Scene, and has also collaborated with Wilco, Beck and Grizzly Bear.

Last month she was nominated for a Brit Award for Best International Female Solo Artist.

Also lined up for the Hay on Wye festival, the tenth, are Yann Tiersen, The Walkmen, Felice Brothers, Jonathan Richman and Scritti Politti.

● *Green Man*, August 17-19, tickets 0844 888 9991, greenman.net

SEE THIS What's on in N.Wales galleries

NORTH Wales artist Gareth Parry has his first major solo exhibition at the Martin Tinney galleries, Cardiff, until February 25. Born in Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1951, his work is mostly about the Welsh land and its people. Latterly his paintings are produced in the studio and are based on pencil sketches or on memory. His landscapes are more about mood and effect than place, while his figurative works often reflect his own concerns about living in a changing Wales. Details 029 2064 1411, artwales.com

● *Mediaeval Minds* is the title of a look into life in Wales in the middle ages at Wrexham Museum. The



Work by artist Gareth Parry on display at Martin Tinney Gallery

display, until June 30, explores Welsh history between the first incursions of the Normans in the late 11th century and the union with England in 1536. The exhibition concentrates mainly on the 13th and 14th centuries between the Age of the Princes and the time of Owain Glyndwr. Details 01978 297460, wrexham.gov.uk

● Contemporary ceramics are displayed under the umbrella title *Earth* at Ruthin Craft Centre until March 18. They explore form, emotion, memory, poetry and responses to landscape and are by artists Beverley Bell-Hughes, Peter Bodenham, Adam Buick, Carys

Davies, Anne Gibbs and Ashraf Hanna. Details 01824 704774, ruthincraftcentre.org.uk

● Helfa Gelf Art Trail is seeking artists to join 2012's open studio event and wants to hear from those keen to get their work seen. Helfa Gelf Art Trail takes place in Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. Organisers invite the public to visit artists at work in their studios and chat about the creative process. Exhibitions are also held in various venues and each artist's work is featured in Helfa Gelf catalogue and website. Details helfagelf.co.uk