

Memories of the Welsh Dial-a-Poem service

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▲ Wales's Dial-a-Poem service received tens of thousands of calls in its first year. Photograph: RTimages/Alamy

The poet Ralf Webb's article (He's a poet and the FBI know it: how John Giorno's Dial-a-Poem alarmed the Feds, 18 October) about John Giorno's Dial-a-Poem in New York, which is being reproduced as part of the first posthumous exhibition of Giorno's work at the Almine Rech Gallery in London, brought back happy memories of the Welsh Arts Council's Dial-a-Poem service, launched in February 1970 for a year and run for another year in 1972.

At that time, arrangements were made to rent one recording machine (not 10 as in New York!) and other necessary equipment. Poets were invited to submit suitable poems for consideration and each one had to be less than three minutes of reading time to also allow for a short introduction about the poet.

One poem was recorded each week, alternating between Welsh and English. The poets were paid the princely sum of £5 plus expenses to come into the Cardiff office to make the recording. The service received over 40,000 calls in the first year, and fortunately there were no complaints of indecency or of poems that incited violence – as there were in New York, referred to by Webb.

Webb also mentions that Giorno produced a series of LPs featuring the Dial-a-Poets. The Welsh Arts Council did something similar, but far more modest – just two EPs, one in Welsh and the other in English.