

Programme Note

*Written for Mathilde Milwidzky and Huw Watkins
and dedicated to Peter Thomson*

In December 2017 I co-directed a course on word-setting at Snape Maltings, with actor/writer Peter Thomson, as part of the Offstage Initiative. This led to conversations about the relationship between music and natural spoken inflection.

I asked Peter to record Yeats' poem *The Wild Swans at Coole*, and made a transcription of his voice as the starting point for this piece.

The poem explores themes of loss, in contrast to the constant renewal of nature. The work begins with an introduction, followed by a setting of verse one, low on the violin. After this, episodes reflecting the poem, and exact settings of verses 2 and 5, form a paraphrase of the poem.

I met Mathilde Milwidzky when I returned to viola playing in 2015, and we have performed together several times. Her playing struck me immediately as direct and expressive, with a translucent beauty. Huw Watkins has recently premiered my *Night Doves*, and I am a great admirer of his musical sensitivity and clarity, both as pianist and composer.

It was commissioned as part of St John's Smith Square Young Artists' Scheme, and first performed at St John's Smith Square on 31st May, 2018, by Mathilde Milwidzky and Huw Watkins.

The Wild Swans at Coole

W. B. Yeats

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly moue
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Tood with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

Wild Swans

for Violin and Piano

Sally Beamish

Andante meditativo ♩ = 76

The musical score is presented in a system of four staves. The top staff is for the Violin, and the bottom three staves are for the Piano (Right Hand, Middle C, and Left Hand). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Andante meditativo' with a quarter note equal to 76 beats per minute. The score consists of measures 1 through 9. Measure 1 features a violin rest and piano accompaniment starting with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Measures 2-3 show the violin entering with a long note and the piano accompaniment continuing. Measures 4-5 show the violin playing a melodic line while the piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Measures 6-7 show the violin playing a melodic line with a 'rit. poco' marking. Measures 8-9 show the violin playing a melodic line and the piano accompaniment with a 'rit.' marking.