

The Swan for baritone and piano

Programme Note

The Swan

The Swan is a scena for baritone, specially written for Jeremy Huw Williams, who created the part of Hiroshige in my chamber opera *Tokaido Road*.

The text is a mediaeval sequence describing, in beautiful imagery, a migrating swan. The swan laments the peril and loneliness of crossing the ocean; only when it sees the constellation Orion blazing among the stars, does it take hope of finding a haven on the far shore. Originally an allegory of the soul's journey, to me the poem speaks for all the migrants seeking a safe refuge today.

The poet Fleur Adcock has made an English version of the original Latin, matching the imagery with her own vivid words. My scena weaves together the Latin and English words.

This setting of *The Swan* is also available arranged for baritone and small ensemble: trumpet or flugel horn, and string trio.

The Swan lasts 10 – 11 minutes.

The Swan

Clangam, filii,
ploratione una

alitis cygni,
qui transfretavit aequora.

O quam amare
lamentabatur, arida

se dereliquisse
florigera
et petisse alta
maria.

Aiens: infelix sum
avicula,
heu mihi, quid agam
misera?

Pennis soluta
inniti
lucida non potero
hic in stilla.

Undis quator,
procellis
hinc inde nunc allidor
exsulata.

Angor inter arta
gurgitum cacumina
gemens alatizo
intuens mortifera,
non conscendens supera.

Cernens copiosa
piscium legumina,
non queo in denso
gurgitum assumere
alimenta optima.

Hear me, my children,
telling the lamentation

of the winged swan
who journeyed across the ocean.

Bitterly he grieved
for what he had abandoned —

the flowering meadows
of the solid land —
to make his voyage
over the high seas.

This was his cry:
'I am a doomed creature.
What shall I do
in my desperate misery?

My wings will never
support me freely
here in this brightly
clinging moisture.

The waves batter me,
the force of the gale
dashes me to and fro
in my exile.

I am confined between
close peaks of water.
Flying I moan
and gaze at the doom-bearers,
unable to mount higher.

I can see pasture
in plenty for fishes
but in the crowding billows
I cannot snatch a bite
for my own good nurture.

Ortus, occasus,
plagae poli,
administrare
lucida sidera.

Sufflagitate
Oriona,
effugitantes
nubes occiduas.

Dum haec cogitaret tacita,
venit rutila
adminicula aurora.

Oppitulata afflamine
coepit virium
recuperare fortia.

Ovatizans
iam agebatur
inter alta
et consueta nubium
sidera.

Hilarata
ac iucundata
nimis facta,
penetrabatur marium
flumina.

Dulcimode cantitans
volitavit ad amoena
arida.

Concurrere omnia
alitur et conclamare
agmina:

Regi magno
sit Gloria.

Sunrise and sunset
and polar quarters,
give me for guidance
the brilliance of stars.

Summon Orion
to light my way.
Sweep the western
Clouds from my vision.'

While these thoughts possessed his mind
vermillion dawn
came to his rescue.

A breeze gusted up for him,
making him strong
with his old vigour.

Now he exulted
feeling himself flung
amid the stars
in their high familiar
constellations.

Joy overtook him;
he was ecstatic
beyond telling
as he dived and surfaced
in the streams of sea.

Singing his melodies
he glided to the welcome
shores of dry land.

Come now, all you multitudes
of birds, and proclaim
together in chorus:

Praise and glory
To the great King.