

TWO WELSH FOLK SONGS

For baritone & piano

PROGRAMME NOTES

Si-hwi-hwi

Welsh text by Glan Dwryrd, English text by Wendy Hiscocks

Robin Ddiog/Lazy Robin

Welsh trad. Text, English text by Wendy Hiscocks

Two Welsh Folk Songs were premiered by the Welsh baritone Jeremy Huw Williams and the composer as part of the recital *South Wales meets New South Wales* presented by CAM (Celebrating Australian Music). The following quotes the introduction from the programme notes for the recital that was filmed during the pandemic year of 2021, edited by the composer, and released on CAM's new Youtube channel on 26 November of the same year:

The initial idea for *South Wales meets New South Wales* germinated a few years ago as I drove down a motorway towards Barry in South Wales. It was only during the 2020 lockdown when Jeremy Huw Williams established contact, that the programme gained its present focus.

Jeremy was already able to provide settings of Welsh folk music by South Wales composers from his existing repertoire; in fact, he was responsible for commissioning the songs by the young composer Nathan James Dearden. I knew it would be almost impossible to find settings in the original Welsh language by New South Wales composers, so I invited three other composers, either born or living in that State, to join the project. They responded with speed and enthusiasm. The result was exactly what I had hoped for, arrangements that were sufficiently diverse and approached with imagination, and it has given me enormous pleasure to give the world premiere performances with Jeremy.

As is the case with many of my projects, worlds are bridged, and my interest in these songs was born out of the link with my great-grandparents, now buried in Bridgend in South Wales, and my Welsh grandfather Oliver, who migrated to Australia.

The composer was attracted to Welsh lullabies but was looking for something a bit different from the well known 'Suo Gan' and 'Ar hyd y nos'. She was immediately drawn to Meredydd Evan's (1919-2015) hauntingly beautiful singing of 'Si-hwi-hwi'. Of equal interest were the newer words of this old melody written by the north Welshman Glan Dwryrd who travelled to America around 1853 to work in the quarries where he witnessed slaves being sold on the market. His lyrics, sung from the perspective of a slave woman to her baby, were written in support of the anti-slave movement, and give the lullaby a much darker tone.

As a contrast, 'Robin Ddiog' is a simple Welsh nursery rhyme with repeated phrases about the perfect 'tidy house' by the sea and its contented occupant who lives, it seems, without a care in the world.