



## EDWARD NORMAN HAY (1889-1943)

### The Wind Among the Reeds (1921)

approximate duration: 33 minutes

*The Wind Among the Reeds* is a setting of seven poems from the 1899 collection with the same title by W.B. Yeats (1865-1939). The music was written between September and December 1921 when Belfast was in the grip of civil strife; one horrific incident followed another and the death toll in the city that year was 109. The Anglo-Irish Treaty that December only created further uncertainty and unrest throughout the North.

It's not surprising then that Norman Hay's work was never performed at that time (the Yeats estate had no record of permission being given to use the poems), though another factor may have been Yeats's resistance to musicians setting his poetry – he had horrible memories of thousands of boy scouts torturing his *Lake Isle of Innisfree* at the Royal Albert Hall! The music, described by Hay as a *Cantata for Solos, Chorus and Orchestra*, perfectly illustrates his real flair for setting words. He had married Hessie Haughey from Coleraine in April 1920 and the score is dedicated simply 'To my wife'.

Many of the musical motifs in the opening number for mezzo and choir recur throughout the work. At the outset, Hay depicts a desolate landscape with the timpani, side drum, bass clarinet, bassoon, solo viola and an ever so sad cello solo. The dichotomy represented by this melancholy and desolation on the one hand and the overblown grandiosity of the climaxes on the other offers a fascinating metaphor for the Ulster temperament and predicament.

The settings offer fascinatingly varied textures, well-illustrated in the reduced orchestra used for the baritone's *The Song of Wandering Aengus*, with its string figurations, flute and harp. Many of the songs share that unerring ability to catch a mood and a sense of place thanks to Hay's considerable talents as an orchestrator (just listen to the trumpet at the 'golden apples of the sun').

The overblown grandiosity comes into its ceremonial best for Hay's setting for baritone of *The Cloths of Heaven* with its lovely use of the harp and its ethereal ending. At this point the baritone has three songs in a row, though after the first three lines of *The Cry of the Sedge*, the chorus (this time of sopranos and contraltos only) takes over. In the final song, set for the solo mezzo and the full chorus, Hay gives the last words to the choir – *O sweet everlasting Voices, be still* – and the music ends, as it began, quietly with the side drum and timpani.

Hay's titles do not always correspond to the titles used by Yeats (Yeats himself changed many of the titles in later editions to give the poems more universality, so characters like Michael Robartes, Hanrahan and Aedh (symbols of certain kinds of men, or as Yeats put it 'principles of the mind') are replaced with 'He' or 'The Lover' or 'The Poet'). The titles below are those found in Hay's score.

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Poem texts on the following pages.

## Outworn Heart

OUT-WORN heart, in a time out-worn,  
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;  
Laugh heart again in the gray twilight,  
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.  
Your mother Eire is always young,  
Dew ever shining and twilight gray;  
Though hope fall from you and love decay,  
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:  
For there the mystical brotherhood  
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood  
And river and stream work out their will;  
And God stands winding His lonely horn,  
And time and the world are ever in flight;  
And love is less kind than the gray twilight,  
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

## The Song of Wandering Aengus

I WENT out to the hazel wood,  
Because a fire was in my head,  
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,  
And hooked a berry to a thread;  
And when white moths were on the wing,  
And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
I dropped the berry in a stream  
And caught a little silver trout.  
When I had laid it on the floor  
I went to blow the fire a-flame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And someone called me by my name:

It had become a glimmering girl  
With apple blossom in her hair  
Who called me by my name and ran  
And faded through the brightening air.  
Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

## O what to me the little room

O WHAT to me the little room  
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest;  
He bade me out into the gloom,  
And my breast lies upon his breast.

O what to me my mother's care,  
The house where I was safe and warm;  
The shadowy blossom of my hair  
Will hide us from the bitter storm.

O hiding hair and dewy eyes,  
I am no more with life and death  
My heart upon his warm heart lies,  
My breath is mixed into his breath.

## Had I the Heavens' Embroidered Cloths

HAD I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

## The Cry of the Sedge

I WANDER by the edge  
Of this desolate lake  
Where wind cries in the sedge  
*Until the axle break  
That keeps the stars in their round  
And hands hurl in the deep  
The banners of East and West  
And the girdle of light is unbound,  
Your breast will not lie by the breast  
Of your beloved in sleep.*

### **O Curlew, cry no more**

O, CURLEW, cry no more in the air,  
Or only to the waters in the West;  
Because your crying brings to my mind  
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair  
That was shaken out over my breast:  
There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

### **The Everlasting Voices**

O SWEET everlasting Voices be still;  
Go to the guards of the heavenly fold  
And bid them wander obeying your will  
Flame under flame, till Time be no more;  
Have you not heard that our hearts are old,  
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,  
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?  
O sweet everlasting Voices be still.

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