

***The Hand* (2018, rev. 2019)**

by

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'The Hand' emerged from a request from my collaborator David Braid to write words to a piano sketch entitled 'new ballad'. He had recently written the ballad with a view to me performing with him in recital. Our preliminary discussions involved how the work was distinct from our previous piano-vocal collaboration 'Air'. Unlike 'Air', which sought to convey the imagery of a hand holding up a suspended body, the text for the new ballad was to have a more searching quality; I have expressed this quality here as a yearning to be guided somehow, and ultimately settled on the idea of 'The Hand' to convey the presence of, or yearning for, the power of an unseen force. The challenge was to extend the form into a larger narrative while balancing 'searching' and 'guiding' aspects that are inherent to the melodic-harmonic content of the sketch, and to build into the text opportunities for improvisatory expressiveness in accompaniment. The approach is strophic, but with the imagery and mood shifts balancing the two halves of each verse.

The text takes as its inspiration a wide variety of sources from Oscar Wilde's 1988 short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*, Western Biblical, Daoist and Jungian references. The resulting narrative emerged from improvisations with vocal sonorities in order to maximise communicative potential and tonal flexibility.

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I, the nightingale, do sing well
As darkness transforms my light,
Whistling here through all the shades and shine.
Am I fine –
Guided by the Thorns and Rose
Looking for places where I might repose,
Searching throughout the night unknown,
Finding where I've flown?

In dreams, misty, cold and weathered
I drift through the fear-filled night
Wondering now if I should trust my lead
To succeed.
Looking for a way to go ...
Here is a challenge for our world to show:
Should I trust providential signs
To make me more than blind?

Through the mirrors, I did look far.
I sought all that I could dream.
Twisting my ways, I would reach out there.
"It was fair!"

Compel me to follow Thee
Up to the heights from which I might then see.
Draw my heart's light and draw it near
So my heart might hear.

In the garden, I did wander
Through mazes where I found gold
Tarnished by all virtues I abused
I did choose
Blindly. Let the hand give way
Just as the Shepherd holds his fold in sway.
Steer me, Hand, take me, guide my sound,
Find the space profound.

I, the nightingale, I sing well
As darkness transforms our light,
Whistling through all the shades and shine.
I am fine
Guided by the Thorns and Rose
Finding the places that I sought and chose,
Drifting all through the glorious night
Knowing that's my flight.