## THE TWO TREES


a Dramatic Cantata for Soprano, Mezzo Soprano \& Mixed Ensemble

Phillip A. Cooke

# THE TWO TREES <br> a Dramatic Cantata for Soprano, Mezzo Soprano \& Mixed Ensemble <br> (2011) 

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

Accidentals apply to the note and each subsequent repetition until the note changes
All grace-notes to be taken before the beat
--------- indicates gradually change singing/playing style
If possible the mezzo soprano should wear a white outfit and the soprano a black one, or there to be discernable light and dark colours

Commissioned by Berman Guedes Stretton, PSP Construction Consultants, Price \& Myers and Hoare Lea for the opening of the Shulman Auditorium, The Queen's College, Oxford

First performed on the 17 November 2011 by Julia Sitkovetsky (soprano), Olivia Clarke (mezzo), Ashley Francis-Roy (clarinet), Martin Suckling (violin), Judith Dallosso (cello), Guy Newbury (piano) and directed from the chamber organ by Owen Rees at the Shulman Auditorium, The Queen’s College, Oxford in the presence of HRH The Duchess of Cornwall.

Duration:
12'
Cover photograph: Two Trees (Cooke)
For more information: www.phillipcooke.com
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## PROGRAMME NOTE

I was commissioned in early 2011 to write a new work to celebrate the opening of the new Shulman Auditorium at The Queen's College, Oxford, where I had been a Junior Research Fellow for the previous three years. Part of the thinking behind the commission was that the work would in some way replicate some of the ideas that were present in the design and aesthetic behind the architecture of the auditorium. I met a number of times with the architect Alan Berman and heard his ideas for the building, his own architectural philosophy and his love of music. What seemed to be highlighted by these meetings was how the new auditorium would both complement and enhance both the existing architecture and the beautiful gardens in which it was being built, the sense of light, space and nature that would be present from all angles in the new construction. What became prominent to me was how important two specific trees in the college gardens were to Alan and how they were almost framing the new auditorium, giving the building a secondary reason for being there, measuring the success of a man-made construction against the fragile beauty of nature. It was this that sparked the compositional process and begun the search for a suitable text.

The Two Trees is a setting of William Butler Yeats's poem of the same name, a vivid depiction of the joys and pains of love dedicated to his then muse Maud Gonne. I had set some Yeats in a previous work ('The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ in my song-cycle Lakesongs) so was instantly drawn to his romantic, celtictinged works and came across 'The Two Trees' a poem from the collection The Rose (1893). The poem, like my work, is in two distinct sections (or 'trees') the first tree is optimistic, nostalgic and romantic, the second the opposite - dark, weary and full of foreboding. The idea of the two sections being mirror images (if viewed through a rather imperfect mirror) of each other appealed to me greatly, so many of the sections present in the first tree are found in the second though in a less optimistic and rhapsodic fashion. My work is bound together by a single chord that forms the harmonic material for the whole piece in the first tree it is rhapsodic, ecstatic and romantic - in the second it is darker, grimmer and more austere. The more arioso material present in both trees is interrupted by quasi-recitative material, this is sparser and harmonically static - in the first tree it is the mezzo-soprano who has this narrative, in the 'mirror image' it is the soprano - the differing tones of the voices helping to emphasise the opposing tone in the poem.

As this work was commissioned to celebrate the opening of a new building, it seemed only right that the work should have a positive ending. Following the softly intoned 'Gaze no more in the bitter glass' ending of the second tree comes a reprise of the opening material, though now in a blazing E major, the words 'Beloved, gaze in thine own heart, the holy tree is growing there' now without undercurrent, leaving no doubt as to which tree or mirror image has taken precedence.

# Instrumentation 

Soprano<br>Mezzo Soprano<br>Clarinet in Bb<br>Violin<br>Cello<br>Piano<br>Chamber Organ

## THE TWO TREES

## The First Tree:

BELOVED, gaze in thine own heart, The holy tree is growing there; From joy the holy branches start, And all the trembling flowers they bear.
The changing colours of its fruit Have dowered the stars with metry light;
The surety of its hidden root
Has planted quiet in the night;
The shaking of its leafy head
Has given the waves their melody, And made my lips and music wed, Murmuring a wizard song for thee. There the Joves a circle go,
The flaming circle of our days,
Gyring, spiring to and fro
In those great ignorant leafy ways;
Remembering all that shaken hair
And how the winged sandals dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care:

## The Second Tree:

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.
Gaze no more in the bitter glass
The demons, with their subtle guile.
Lift up before us when they pass,
Or only gaze a little while;
For there a fatal image grows
That the stormy night receives,
Roots half hidden under snows,
Broken boughs and blackened leaves.
For ill things turn to barrenness
In the dim glass the demons hold,
The glass of outer weariness,
Made when God slept in times of old.
There, through the broken branches, go
The ravens of unresting thought;
Flying, crying, to and fro,
Cruel claw and hungry throat,
Or else they stand and sniff the wind,
And shake their ragged wings; alas!
Thy tender eyes grow all unkind:
Gaze no more in the bitter glass.

The First Tree











The Second Tree













## The First Tree (Reprise)




P
stio meno mosso; accel.


Q



