



Swallows

*For Three Equal Voices
(SSS or TTT)*

Words by Kathleen Jamie

Music by Nigel Morgan

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So rich are the myriad associations with swallows, these familiar and beloved of birds! They return with spring and thus are connected with the yearly renewal of life, and with love, fidelity and fertility. They seem to favour being in close company with human beings. They nest close to us under the eaves of houses and in sheds and barns.

For fifteen years a pair of swallows built a nest against a wall in an outbuilding close to my cottage high on Anelog, a mountain in sight of Bardsey Island. From May until August they were a continuing presence with their elegant flight paths and aerobatics over and above the home field of Mount Cottage.

The awareness of birds has been a late arrival in my consciousness of the natural world. And this I share with the poet Kathleen Jamie who claims she did not write about the observational life of a birder until her book of essays *Findings*, although *Swallows* and *The Swallows' Nest* does appear in her first collection of poetry *The Tree House*. The former poem, with its curious and beautiful use of the word batten in 'battened heart', made it instantly memorable. It is a captivating poem full of images that for me celebrates all that is swallowness. *The Swallows' Nest* is quite different, being very much a still-life of objects encountered whilst being shown 'one bird tucked in a home-made bracket of spittle and earth'.

The opening poem in my sequence is from a later collection *The Overhaul*. This tiny poem is for me a companion piece and close relative to *The Beach* where in beachcombing 'we hope for the marvellous / all hankering after a changed life.'

This collection of part-songs is written for and dedicated to the artist Alice Fox, who in her own creative and gentle response to the natural world, has, and in company with the poet Kathleen Jamie, enriched my life.

Landfall

When we walk the coast
and notice, above the sea,
a single ragged swallow
veering towards the earth-
and blossom-scented breeze,
can we allow ourselves to fail

The Swallows' Nest

Shutters, broken,
firewood, a rake, a wrought-
iron bed, the torch-lit
rafters of the lumber-room
you showing me

one bird tucked in a home-
made bracket of spittle
and earth, while its mate slept
perched on the rim, at an angle
exact as a raised latch.

Swallows

I wish my whole battened
heart were a property
like this, with swallows
in every room – so at ease

they twitter and preen
from picture frames
like an audience in the gods
before an opera

and in the mornings
wheel above my bed
in a mockery of pity
before winging it

up the stairwell
to stream out into light

*For Alice
on her birthday
21 November 2015*

Landfall

Measured ♩ = 60

mf

Soprano 1
When we walk when we walk the coast when we walk the coast and no-tice

Soprano 2
When we walk when we walk the coast and

Soprano 3
When we walk

4 *cresc.* *f* *mp*

S.1
and no-tice a - bove the sea a sin - gle ra-gged swa - llow a

S.2
no-tice and no-tice a-bove the sea a-bove the sea a sin - gle ra-gged swa - llow

S.3
and no-tice a-bove a - bove the sea a sin - gle ra-gged swa - llow

8 *mf* *mp* *mf*

S.1
swa-llow vee-ring vee-ring to - ward the earth blo - ssom scen

S.2
a swa-llow veering to-ward the earth and blo-ssom scen-ted

S.3
a swallow veering to - ward the earth and blo-ssomscen-ted breeze

12

S.1 *mp* *p* *mf* *mp*
 - ted breeze Can we can we can we a - llow can we a - llow

S.2 *mp* *p* *mf* *mp*
 breeze Can we can we can we a - llow can we a - llow

S.3 *mp* *p* *mf* *mp*
 Can we can we can we a - llow can we a - llow

17

S.1 *f* *mf* *mp*
 can we a - llow our - selves can we a - llow our - selves to fail

S.2 *f* *mf* *mp*
 can we a - llow our selves can we a - llow our - selves to fail

S.3 *f* *mf* *mp*
 can we a - llow our selves can we a - llow our - selves to fail

The Swallows' Nest

intimate but expressive ♩ = 75

mp

Soprano 1
Shu-tters, bro-ken, fire-wood, a rake,

mp

Soprano 2
Shu-tters, bro-ken, fire-wood, a rake, a wrought i-ron

mp

Soprano 3
Shu-tters, bro-ken, fire-wood, a wrought i-ron

5

S.1 *mf* the torch lit raf-ters *mf* you show-ing

S.2 *mf* bed, the torch lit raf-ters *mp* of the lum-ber room *f* you

S.3 *mp* bed, of the lum-ber room

9

S.1 me *mp* you show-ing me

S.2 you show-ing me one bird tucked *p* you *mp* you

S.3 *mf* you show-ing me one bird *mp* you show-ing me one

13

S.1 *mf*
one bird tucked in a

S.2 *mf*
show-ing me one bird tucked one bird tucked in a home made bra-cket of

S.3 *mf*
bird in a

16

S.1 *f* *mp*
home made bra-cket of spi-ttle and earth sho-wing me

S.2 *f* *mp*
spi-ttle and earth you sho-wing me one bird

S.3 *f* *mp*
home made bra-cket of spi-ttle and earth sho-wing me

20

S.1 *mf* *mp*
while its mate slept while its mate slept perched on the rim at an an-gle

S.2 *mf* *mp*
while its mate slept perched on the rim at an

S.3 *mf* *mp*
while its mate slept while its mate slept perched on the rim at an an-gle

24

S.1 *mf*
 at an an - gle e - xact as a raised latch you sho-wing

S.2
 an - gle e-xact as a raised latch you

S.3
 at an an - gle e - xact as a raised latch

28

S.1 *mp* *poco rallentando*
 me you sho-wing me one bird

S.2 *mf*
 you sho-wing me one bird

S.3 *mf* *mp*
 you sho-wing me one bird

Swallows

spirited ♩ = 80

Soprano 1 *mf* *f*
 I wish I wish my whole ba-ttered heart I

Soprano 2 *mf* *f*
 I wish I wish

Soprano 3 *mf* *f*
 I wish I wish

5 *mf* *mp*
 S.1 wish my whole ba-ttered heart were a pro-per-ty were a pro-per-ty like this

S.2 *mf*
 I wish I wish my heart were a pro-per-ty

S.3 *mf* *mp*
 I wish my whole ba-ttered heart were a pro-per-ty like

9 *mp* *poco a poco rit* *tenderly* ♩ = 60 *p*
 S.1 like this with swa-llows in e-very room so at ease

S.2 *mp* *p*
 like this like this with swa-llows in e-very room so

S.3
 this like this with swa-llows in e-very room

15 *mp* *mf*

S.1 so at ease so at ease so at ease they

S.2 at ease *mp* so at ease

S.3 so at ease *mp* so at ease

precise ♩ = 120

20 *f* *mp*

S.1 twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter from pic- ture frames they twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter

S.2 *mf* *f* *mp*
twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter from pic- ture frames twi-tter twi-tter

S.3 *mf* *f* *mp*
twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter twi-tter from pic- ture frames twi-tter

with conviction ♩ = 60

26 *mf* *f*

S.1 twi-tter twi-tter and preen like an au-di-ence in the Gods be-fore an

S.2 *mf* *f*
twi-tter twi-tter and preen like an au-di-ence in the Gods be-fore an

S.3 *mf* *f*
twi-tter twi-tter and preen like an au-di-ence in the Gods be-fore an

32 *bright* ♩ = 80 *mf*

S.1 *o-pe-ra* and in the mor-ning and in the mor-ning and in the mor-ning

S.2 *o-pe-ra* and in the mor-ning

S.3 *o-pe-ra* and in the mor-ning

37 *restrained* ♩ = 65 *f* *mp* *bright* ♩ = 80 *mf*

S.1 *whee-l whee-l whee-l a - bove my bed* in a mo-cke-ry of pi -ty be-fore wing- ing it

S.2 *whee-l whee-l a - bove my bed* in a mo-cke-ry of pi -ty be-fore wing-ing it

S.3 *whee-l a - bove my bed* in a mo-cke-ry of pi -ty be-fore wing- ing it

42 *f* *mf* *f*

S.1 *up the stair -well* to stream out in -to the light

S.2 *up the stair -well* to stream out in -to the light

S.3 *up the stair -well* to stream out in -to the light