

About Gwinna

As I am generally a composer of visual music (that is, music which narrates and provokes the listener's imagination), I often begin with a story, poem, painting, etc to use as inspiration. It is no surprise, then, that when presented with a collaborative project, the first thing I ask of the performer is if there is any particularly significant art or memorabilia that he/she would want incorporated into the piece. Such an element provides not only a meaningful canvas on which to create, but a unique level of depth and meaning for my collaborator (and the listener).

Gwinna, a children's story written and illustrated by Barbara Helen Berger, was introduced to me by my friend and excellent harpist Emily John, who commissioned this work. I found the story to be outrageously appropriate for this particular project as Berger makes music such an integral part of her story line. The main character, Gwinna, is a girl born with owl wings who is started on a quest to discover her origins and purpose when she begins to hear music on the wind. She follows the melodious tones to the source and ultimately acquires a harp on which she learns to play the very songs that drew her there. Gwinna brings the harp back to her home and discovers the healing powers of the music she creates.

The idea of a flute, viola, and harp trio came from three core elements of the story: the harp of course being Gwinna, the flute being the hooting of the owls (which Berger actually describes as flutes), and the viola being the tree from which Gwinna's harp is made. The ethereal and almost mystical atmosphere that Berger establishes is the perfect backdrop for what can be produced with such a combination of instruments. All the compositional choices that push instrumental boundaries, whether it be the use of percussion or the harpist's vocal line, are intended to recreate that atmosphere musically.

Gwinna truly is a magnificent story that is hardly done justice by my brief recounting in these notes. The experience is enhanced greatly by the author's exquisite illustrations, which no doubt contributed to my own inspiration. My hope is that the listener will walk away with images/perceptions of the tale and perhaps even be moved to read it. This is, I hope, the first of what will be several movements comprising a larger work.