The Wild Goose
(an gē fhian)

for symphonic winds & percussion

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Fornine Music
THE ENGLISH HORN SOLO
The English Horn soloist should be viewed as a separate entity within this piece and should be positioned side-stage, or off-stage... such as a choir loft, side balcony or mezzanine. This of course will depend on the layout and size of the performance venue so there is flexibility in where they are placed, but the idea is that the English Horn speaks into and over the rest of the ensemble, their sound emanating from a dimension different from the frontal-projecting sounds of the staged ensemble. It’s not necessary that the soloist be hidden but they should be out in the open and have a direct line of sight to the conductor and audience so that ensemble timing accuracy and balance isn’t compromised.
The ancient Celtic people who occupied the British Isles around 1,600 years ago were a people who shared a deep connection with nature and the world they found themselves in. Around this time Christianity found its way to this land and these ancients would often draw on their surroundings for symbolism. In the Celtic tradition the Holy Spirit is represented as a bird, but not as the delicate and peaceful dove found in other cultures, but as An Gé Fhíain. The Wild Goose.

Like a wild goose, they perceived the Spirit of God as wild and untamed. Geese are loud, raucous, and strong. Their honk is challenging, piercing, unnerving. They are uncontrollable, difficult if not impossible to catch, and their actions cannot be anticipated (thus the phrase “wild goose chase”). These ancient people absorbed spirituality then not as something that you captured, or something that you bent to your will. It was a pursuit, an adventure that you chased after. Their faith was one that was free and unpredictable.

Juxtaposed against the chaos of the Goose chase these ancients also had a phrase for those places where the distance between earth and the spiritual realm collapses. Locales where we are able to catch hints and glimpses of the transcendent and where the divine seems to speak the clearest. They called these destinations “thin places”.

In writing this piece I was intrigued by these two impressions: the wild and rambunctious Goose that calls us on an adventurous chase, and the tranquil, reverent places that the Goose leads us to. These two thoughts intertwine, sometimes gracefully and other times forcefully. The piece is written in the free form of a fantasy overture and is built around a 5-note motif that variates throughout the allegro sections. A simple chordal hymn first stated by the horns provides the basis for the adagio segments. The Goose, represented by an antiphonally staged solo English horn, shows up at various points in the work as both the boisterous motivator and the soothing counselor. Music influences coming from the Celtic traditions are faint early on in the piece but transition to the forefront towards the end as the emulated sounds of bagpipes, penny whistles, and Irish drumming transform the 5-note figure into a reel and jig.

AN GÉ FHIÁIN (The Wild Goose) was commissioned by Robert W. Clark as gift to Dr. Barry K. Knezek in honor of his passion for and devotion to the Lone Star Wind Orchestra.