

The Selfish Giant

for flute and storyteller

2009, rev. 2011

(ca. 12:00)

Christopher Gainey (b. 1981)

with text adapted from
"The Selfish Giant" (1888)
by Oscar Wilde

Program Note:

The Selfish Giant (2009, rev. 2011) is a musical retelling of a short story with the same title by Oscar Wilde. The text is presented in its original form with a two exceptions. First, many of the more descriptive passages are not read aloud, but rather musically represented by the flute. Second, a portion of the story containing overtly Christian symbolism has been removed. The purpose of this cut is to highlight universally applicable messages in the story, while avoiding the possibility that religious imagery may offend or alienate anyone. I encourage everyone to embrace his or her own reaction to this powerful little fable.

This piece is dedicated to Claudia Anderson.

*Special Thanks to: Jennifer Mahaffey, John Bumbalo, Brad Sherman,
George Drake, David Gompper, Bruno Amato,
and Ray Chester*

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The Selfish Giant

by Oscar Wilde

*(abridged and adapted,
italicized text not read aloud, but musically represented by the flute)*

I. Expulsion from the Garden

Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant's garden. It was a large and lovely garden, with soft green grass.

Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are here!" they cried to each other.

One day the Giant came back. He had been to visit his friend the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over he had said all that he had to say, for his conversation was limited, and he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.

"What are you doing here?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away. "My own garden is my own garden," said the Giant; "anyone can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So he built a high wall all around it, and put up a notice-board.

TRESPASSERS
WILL BE
PROSECUTED

He was a very selfish Giant. The poor children had now nowhere to play.

They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high walls when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. "How happy we were there!" they said to each other.

II. Dances of Eternal Winter

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children and the trees forgot to blossom. Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep. The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost.

"Spring has forgotten this garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver.

Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came.

He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimneys pots down.

"This is a delightful spot," he said, "we must ask the Hail on a visit."

So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

"I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Selfish Giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none. "He is too selfish," she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.

III. The Return of Spring

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the King's musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, *but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement.*

"I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out. What did he see? He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still Winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still quite covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above it. "Climb up! little boy," said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the little boy was too tiny.

And the Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done. So he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became Winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see the Giant coming. And the Giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hand, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the Giant's neck, and kissed him.

And the other children, when they saw that the Giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring. "It is your garden now, little children," said the Giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found the Giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

to Claudia Anderson

The Selfish Giant

I. Expulsion from the Garden

Christopher Gayney (2009, rev. 2011)
adapted from a text by Oscar Wilde

(overblow to produce harmonics)
Flute $\text{♩} = 72$

(Contour lines show the melodic shape of the cascade of harmonics to be produced, and the end of the dashed line shows when to stop overblowing and return to the normal method of playing)

f > *p* < *mf* > *p* *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp* *mp* *f*

rit. (measured timbral trill) *a tempo*

(finger "F4" and put down both trill keys for 2 upper notes)

accel. *rit.*

pp *mp* *n* *pp* *mf* *p* *mf*

sin mesura

(sing)

(slight downward pitch bend at end of note)

(ca. 4")

gradually decrease speed of tremolo

Every afternoon as they were coming from school,
the children used to go and play in the Giant's garden.

It was a large and lovely garden,
with soft green grass.

$\text{♩} = 60$

n *mp* *f* > *mp* *f* > *mp* *f* > *mp* < *f* > *mp* *f*

p *mf* *p* *f*