

## **SWALLOW**

### **COMPOSER'S NOTES**

#### **THE SONG IN A SENTENCE** (or two...)

Numerous creatures on Earth cope with seasonal differences by moving from one location to another where conditions are more amenable. The European swallow travels thousands of miles from its summer breeding grounds in the North to its 'holiday resorts' in the South.

#### **HISTORY & MAIN POINTS OF THE SONG**

This song has a very similar history to that of *Hedgehog*, written in 1984 for a schools concert in Plymouth. In 2004 I added the more serious-sounding first section in an attempt to explore further the subject of migration. I also revised the words of the 'old' second section and added the bridge section.

Embarrassingly, right up until a few weeks ago (it's May 2009 as I write), I thought European swallows raised another family or two whilst in Africa. Indeed I displayed a classic example of False Memory Syndrome in that I was certain I'd checked this fact back in 2004. But I was wrong. In fact swallows travel South for pretty much the same reasons we Northern Europeans do – for a bit of a holiday! They build up their strength, feed well on the copious food sources available in warmer climes then return to Europe to breed again in the spring, where the much longer days enable them to spend the time they need to feed their young and nurture them towards maturity and independence.

So the lyrics near the end of the song about raising a family in Africa are not right! Sorry about that. I will aim to correct the lyrics in the near future, but I thought it better to make the song available for now even with the slight factual error.

#### **STYLISTIC POINTS**

The moods of the two halves of the song could hardly be more different. The first half should be almost melodramatic as it lists the incredible feats that even tiny creatures achieve in order to migrate, whereas the second half – the 'old' song – needs to be light, airy and charming, almost like a popular song of the 20s or 30s.

#### **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

- You could research both migration and hibernation, trying to work out why one behaviour evolved rather than the other and discovering whether there are common characteristics amongst the species that do one as opposed to the alternative.
- You could devise a choreography that highlights the different moods of the two sections of the song – the first dark and dramatic, the second light and bouncy.
- Devise a quiz where people have to guess whether a certain species migrates, hibernates or just keeps going through the seasons whatever the weather.
- You could create a collaborative wall-hanging illustrating many different migratory species.
- Research records in migration – the furthest, the greatest by number, the most surprising or bizarre migrators (take a look at the daily vertical migration of jellyfish in the Republic of Palau!)