

At God speeded summer's end (1999)

At God speeded summer's end is the second line taken from the Prologue by Dylan Thomas (Collected Poems 1934 -1953). Its construction is unusual in that the second of the two verses of the poem rhymes backwards with the first. In Thomas' own words: "The first and last line rhyme; the second and last but one; and so on and so on. Why I ackrosticked myself like this, don't ask me".

The title for the musical work interested me as it is the only line to appear twice and unaltered in the whole poem. The form of the piece is essentially a procession of scherzi which vary in orchestral colour and density as well as rhythmic complexity. Certain melodic ideas are actually instrumental settings of lines from the poem whilst the organisation of the work mirrors Thomas' original. For example, the main thematic motive (A \flat , B \flat , B, C, D, B \flat) opens and concludes the work while other sections share affinities at opposite ends of the piece. The development of this basic idea provides the narrative movement and primary line. The three broad sections - dramatic and active, lyrical, and driving - allow the main ideas to be constantly varied and presented with different background settings.

A friend of Thomas, Gwyn Jones, encapsulated the poet's recurring stylistic concerns; 'the cunning complexity of metres, the chime of consonants and pealing vowels'. These traits, musically, are ones which also concern me and which I have tried to weave into this work.

At God speeded summer's end was commissioned by the BBC and first performed by the BBC Philharmonic, conducted by Vassily Sinaisky, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, 11 November 2000.