

**Nothing Gold Can Stay**  
**By Robert Frost (1874-1963)**

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.

More laconic than a sonnet, but more verbose than an epigram, *Nothing Gold Can Stay* is one of Robert Frost's most beloved and poignant short poems. Written in iambic trimeter where the combination of stressed and unstressed syllables provides a steady rhythm and structure in twos, threes, and sixes, the poem represents in so many ways the best that poetry has to offer in a mere eight lines. In the case of *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, there is a universality that leaves the reader with a deep resonance that cannot be denied. Whether it is the golden sunlight of morning, the golden leaves of spring, or the golden season of youth, the fleeting nature of it all, as well as its inescapable decline, is both celebrated, and mourned. After all, sunrises must yield to sunsets, and birth must give way to death.

The concept of a 'symphonic poem' was more popular when Robert Frost was born in the mid-to-late 1800s, and largely fell out of favor by the 1920s when the poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay* was authored (1923). And while music strives to communicate that which cannot be expressed in words, this symphonic poem strives to accentuate, augment, and amplify Frost's written word. And in the case of this orchestral work; to bask in the glory and profundity of the poem it represents the way one might bathe in sunlight.

This 'world premiere' commemorates the 100-year anniversary of Robert Frost's collection of works entitled *New Hampshire*, which included the poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, and won him a Pulitzer Prize in Poetry in 1924. It was his first of four Pulitzers, which earned Frost the notoriety of being the most awarded and decorated poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Robert Frost once quipped, that writing poetry without rhyme and rhythm (known as free verse) is 'like playing tennis with the net down'. I feel the same way as a composer of music. There is a place for atonal music without melody, harmony, and rhythm, but I strongly believe that it is in our nature as humans to be attracted to that which has structure, and therefore, construction. The combination of triplets (triple accents) and duplets (double

accents) from the poem are carried over into the musical work. There is a constant ebb and flow from twos, threes, and pools of twos and threes into sixes – and occasionally the juxtaposition thereof.

As straight forwardly as Frost's poem presents the dawn of day, so too the musical interpretation. And once the golden morning is carried over, the fleeting nature of it all begins with the trumpets fighting to hold on. This eventually builds into leaves, flowers, and an explosion of nature, until suddenly, the golden hue wanes into day and its undeferrable loss.

The harp plays a unique role in this work by simultaneously representing the genesis of life in the beginning of the work, as well as the transient unfolding of life, with a final twinkle of light... as nothing gold, can stay.