

Crying bird, echoing star

Like many previous works of mine (in particular *Stoicheia*, *Phainomena*, *Mountain Language* and *The Journey of the Magi*) *Crying bird, echoing star* is conceived as a discourse of questions (Cries) and responses (Echoes). At the back of my mind was Ives' *The Unanswered Question*, where a lone soul intones "The Perennial Question of Existence" to which a quartet search endlessly for "The Invisible Answer" - this discourse is supported by very quiet and 'eternal' resonance from the strings who represent the "Silences of the Druids - Who Know, See and Hear Nothing".

The discourse in *Crying bird, echoing star* becomes rather more agitated and complex than in Ives' work, and brings together two long-held fascinations of mine, namely birdsong and the star patterns of the constellations. Made up from the cries of birds and the echoes of the stars, the discourse is entrusted mainly to the flute, clarinet, violin and cello, with the piano providing rhythmic framework and resonance. Sometimes the cries are answered by one or more echoes, but other times they go unanswered. The musicians are spaced out quite widely on the stage in order to help convey a certain degree of space and perspective.

As in *Stoicheia*, *Phainomena* and *The Journey of the Magi* the star patterns of the constellations are developed using my own particular graphic techniques of rotation, augmentation and diminution on both x and y axes, and applied to constantly shifting harmonic fields. It has always struck me how uncannily 'alive' and lyrical they become when realised in this way.

The birdsong used in *Crying bird* is based on the songs of twelve birds - Robin, Blackbird, Icterine warbler, Pied butcherbird, Hill blue flycatcher, White-rumped shama, Tropical boubou, Spotted mourning warbler, Black-tailed robin chat, White-browed robin chat, Red-capped robin chat and Rufus-throated solitaire; and the star-patterns are based on twelve constellations - Draco, Bootes, Virgo, Hydra, Ursa Major, Coma Berenices, Corvus, Leo, Crater, Sextans, Lynx and Cancer.

Crying bird, echoing star was commissioned by the New Music Players and is dedicated to their director, Edward Dudley Hughes. It was written between December 2001 and March 2002 and first performed on 8 May 2002 at the York Spring Festival of New Music.

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