

Kalavinka Duos

2017

for percussion duo

Kalavinka Duos is the second in a trilogy of works for different groups of percussion instruments exploring my long-held fascination for birdsong and the star patterns of certain Constellations. The first of these works is *Secret Dialogues*, for solo marimba, the second, *Kalavinka Duos*, for percussion duo, and the third, *Kalavinka Quartet*, for percussion quartet. In Buddhist mythology, Kalavinka is the Sanskrit name given to a giant fantastical bird with a human head, the body of a bird and a long, flowing tail. These birds have loud and beautiful voices (which they start to develop even from inside the egg), and from their lofty positions in Buddhist paradise (nirvana) they fly around the sky distributing and enforcing the laws of Buddha. In Japanese, this bird is called Karyōbinga.

In both *Secret Dialogues* and *Kalavinka Duos* a continuously evolving theatre, or choreography is imagined, where birds call and answer each other from ever-changing positions in space, sometimes nearby and sometimes far away. Whilst in *Secret Dialogues* this 'spatialization' has to be realized by the solo marimbist just with skillful control of colour, character and dynamic, in *Kalavinka Duos* there is the added advantage of physical space between the two performers. Thus there are two kinds of spatialization in play: that between calls and responses played by the same performer, and that between calls from one performer answered by further calls or responses from the other. The birdsong is always played on the marimbas (except in one isolated case, where a bird response is played on the vibraphone for practical reasons) - but the Constellations, whose basic melodies are often harmonized to form quite rich harmonic progressions, are played both on the vibraphones and marimbas.

Similar to *Secret Dialogues*, the work can be seen as a representation of the passing of a day from dawn to dusk - from the very first glimmer of light the opening isolated birdcalls gradually build up into a dawn chorus - the middle part of the day is represented by a more volatile and dramatic period, once again developing into a noisy and energetic dusk chorus, before the gradual return to silence at nightfall.

The birdsong used in *Kalavinka Duos* is based on the following sixteen birds: Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Icterine Warbler, Pied Butcherbird, Pied Flycatcher, Hill Blue Flycatcher, White-Rumped Shama, Tropical Boubou, Spotted Mourning Warbler, Black-Tailed Robin Chat, White-Browed Robin Chat, Musician Wren, Dunnock, Whitethroat and Linnet. Many of these birds have an extensive repertoire of songs - in the case of the Musician Wren, for example, some nine different songs can be heard. Altogether fifty-five songs are used, each one undergoing subtle harmonic and rhythmic transformations with each new appearance.

This intricate theatre of birdcalls is overseen by a steady succession of eleven Constellations, whose presence has the effect both of accompanying and resonating the sound of the birdsong, just as one imagines the sound of the Kalavinkas would resonate around the universe. The Constellations make their first appearance in the following order: Corvus, Sextans, Bootes, Lynx, Draco, Hydra, Leo, Ursa, Cancer, Virgo and Coma Berenices. As in certain previous works of mine, the star-patterns of these Constellations are realized and 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 realized in this way, and

in some cases they even begin to resemble the birdsong.

Kalavinka Duos was commissioned by an international consortium of percussionists and American universities headed by Garrett Arney, and is dedicated both to Garrett and his duo partner, Mari Yoshinaga - Arx Duo.

James Wood