
PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITION

How can music raise awareness for endangered bird species?

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Introduction

Environmental sustainability and other issues surrounding the preservation of nature are not only issues concerning both science and society, but also of the arts. Music and other related arts-humanities subjects all have real potential for developing our understanding, thus our education of nature conservation and environmental matters. Music is an interdisciplinary, which is to say it draws upon the disciplines of history, sociology, psychology, philosophy and much more, and so as an art form, music is universal and enables multiple disciplines to share common ideas or philosophies.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that climate disasters, whilst spreading fearfully essential knowledge, are vital and although many natural disasters are unavoidable, there are certainly things that as a society, we can do to prevent the acceleration of manmade climate dangers.¹ In a recent review on the different approaches to cultural dimension of sustainability, Soini and Birkeland emphasise that society has “a system of values, principles and beliefs... It [the arts] has the potential, alongside education and other cultural instruments, to lead radical changes in human capacities for understanding and human knowledge production itself.”² It is acknowledged that society must action for change with regards to environmental sustainability, yet the exploration of combining the intersection of music and sustainability has received very little attention thus far.

Throughout my undergraduate degree at the University of Nottingham, (2017-2020), I dedicated much of my compositional studies to exploring the relationship between music and nature, and how we can utilise music as a tool to educate and promote awareness surrounding environmental issues. I have built upon my final year (undergraduate) portfolio of composition, in which I explored the conservation of the ocean with music, to further research and address the following questions:

- How can music help address Environmental Issues?

¹ The ideas set out in this paragraph have been drawn from: Hoesung Lee et al. “AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2022.” January 2021. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/> accessed 11/1/22

² Katriina Soini and Inger Birkeland. “Exploring the scientific discourse on cultural sustainability.” *Geoforum*, Volume 51, January 2014. pg.214.

- What are the historical and contemporary connections between music and nature and how can we use these to educate and inspire?
- How has birdsong been used in Western Classical and Popular music?

This particular portfolio of composition is connected through the theme of 'UK endangered bird species.' I wanted to compose works that required me to do extensive research on how and why there are so many endangered bird species in my home country of England, in the hope that these works will inspire other performers, composers and potential audience members to be proactive in protecting and preserving wildlife local to them. It is worth noting that the general societal climate of the past two years has been one of great panic, given we are amidst a global pandemic and issues surrounding humanitarianism and environmentalism have truly accelerated, therefore my compositions also serve the purposes of using art to turn panic into productivity. Actress Emma Thompson summarises these thoughts in *letters to the Earth*, a collection of literature specifically cultivated to raise awareness for the future of planet Earth: "art – in all its forms – can turn us all into astronauts. It can help us out of the prison of assumption and the caverns of ignorance into the atmosphere of clarity and hope. The temptation to panic is very great but panic will always prevent useful action."³

³ Emma Thompson, as quoted in *Letters to the Earth* (London: William Collins Publishers, 2021) pg.2.

How can music help address environmental issues?

It is no secret that the planet is in desperate need of our attention, spikes in media coverage, the creation of Extinction Rebellion (XR) and the ongoing socio-political campaigns to action change for the planet have vastly accelerated over the past couple of years. Whilst my research predominantly covers the issue of endangered bird species, it would be ignorant to not consider other areas of environmental concern, particularly as each concern has either a direct correlation to the bigger issue of climate crisis. "Climate crisis is the greatest ever threat to human rights. The economies of all nations, the institutional, political, social and cultural fabric of every state, and the rights of all your people, and future generations, will be impacted."⁴

Environmental issues such as climate change, are not new to us; there have been several environmentally specific actions from the melting of the icecaps to fossil fuels that have needed addressing over the past century. Arguably, one of the most notable environmental disasters, the oil spill in the Santa Barbara Channel in 1969, encouraged a wave of activism that eventually led to the first Earth Day in 1970. As a result of centuries worth of environmental disasters, the term 'eco-anxiety' has been coined by the American Psychology Association (APA) to mean "the chronic fear of environmental cataclysm that comes from observing the seemingly irrevocable impact of climate change and the associated concern for one's future and that of next generations."⁵

The issue I want to address with my research and my compositions alike moving forward, is how we can alleviate much of this 'eco-anxiety' by utilising an accessible tool such as music, to promote better mental wellbeing whilst simultaneously promoting actions for environmental change. A study conducted by The All-Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing shows that "the arts have a positive impact on mental health. Art can help relieve stress, anxiety and depression and strengthen

⁴ Michelle Bachelet, "Climate crisis is greatest ever threat to human rights, UN warns," *The Guardian*, 9th September, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2019/sep/09/climate-crisis-human-rights-un-michelle-bachelet-united-nations> accessed 11/1/22

⁵ Melody Schreiber, "Addressing climate change concerns in practice," *American Psychological Association*, 1st March, 2021, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/03/ce-climate-change> accessed 11/1/22

cognitive reserve.”⁶ The arts allow us to express ourselves in many ways; get messages across and embed deeper meanings. Thus, encouraging more of the arts, not just musicians, would enable more of a global recognition for the environmental concerns we face. Music can also act as a point of connection between both the natural world and humans. In such ways, biologists and environmentalists Kate Turner and Bill Freedman argue that “music can inspire environmental action and advocacy while also helping to foster empathy for the natural world.”⁷

One of the most notable ways in which environmental activism fought back with music was via the founding of Greenpeace, a beneficiary concert organised by musicians Joni Mitchell and Phil Ochs. The purpose of the first Greenpeace in 1970 was to fund a voyage of protesters sailing from Amchitka, their intention was to sabotage a nuclear test that was set to occur.⁸ Greenpeace has been established for over fifty years: over those fifty years, the charity has partnered with some incredible and iconic musicians from the likes of Yoko Ono and Queen to Thom Yorke of Radiohead, providing not only respite in the form of musical entertainment, but also events that broadcast on a global level, the environmental challenges we are facing.

There are too many songs to list that draw upon eco-anxiety and the injustices of subsequent environmental issues for lyrical inspiration; their topics covering everything from oil spills to the destruction of the rainforests’. To conform to the restrictions of a word count, I will refrain from demonstrating popular music lyrical analysis, but it must be noted that all of my listening research will be fully listed in the bibliography.

To summarise in short, it is not unconventional to promote socio-political issues through the form of music, in fact, one might argue that it is encouraged. There is an abundant history of musicians who

⁶ Paul Camic and Stephen Clift, *Oxford Textbook of Creative Arts, Health, and Wellbeing: International Perspectives on Practice, Policy and Research*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) pg.22.

⁷ Kate Turner and Bill Freedman, “Music and Environmental Studies,” *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 36:1, (2004) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3200/JOEE.36.1.45-52> accessed 11/1/22

⁸ The ideas set out in this paragraph have been drawn from: Brett Milano, “Don’t Drink The Water: How The Environmental Movement Shaped Music,” *udiscovermusic*, 22nd April 2021, <https://www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/environmental-movement-in-music/> accessed 11/1/22

have used their platform to promote issues of gender, race and the environment being one of the more recent. My research findings have shown that music is accessible and enables deeper-rooted messages and emotions, therefore making it an ideal tool to educate society about environmental issues.

Composition: 'a lonelier sky'

Conservationist and folk musician Sam Lee states that “folk songs describe the various interplays between humans and the landscape,”⁹ as such, British Folk music has featured heavily throughout this portfolio of compositions. I have done some research specific to British folk music, which must be noted needs much more in-depth research, as birdsong features heavily within this musical realm. Some of the works I listened to and studied for inspiration for my own composition ‘a lonelier sky,’ include the traditional Welsh song ‘Adar Môn y Mynydd,’ (The Little Birds of the Mountain).¹⁰

The recording of Adar Môn y Mynydd performed by Siwsann George¹¹ really elevated the meaning of the text and gave importance to the lyrics:

The Nightingale and the spotless lark
And the little birds of the mountain,
Wilt thou go as messenger to summer's colour
Which is suffering from a new illness?¹²

Nightingale's, as aforementioned, have appeared over five-hundred times in the title of a folk song alone, it was unsurprising then to learn that the symbolism of the nightingale is vast. Lee writes “we find the nightingale singing in sorrow, in sexual pursuit and in duplicity; in lament, in playful rejoicing and even in wise consultation; but it is always a bird rich in – and a conduit for the many names of –

⁹ Sam Lee, *The Nightingale: Notes on a Songbird*, (London: Century, 2020) pg. vii.

¹⁰ See appendix A for full lyrics (translated).

¹¹ Siwsann George, ‘Adar Môn y Mynydd,’ (The Little Birds of the Mountain) #1 on *Traditional Songs of Wales*, SayDisc, 1994, compact disc

¹² Ibid[^]

love.”¹³ I have found that where Nightingale’s in particular, appear within British folk music, the symbolism of them in the lyrics often depicts grief, heartbreak and lament. The semantic field of grief and loss is something I deliberately chose for my own lyrics in ‘a lonelier sky,’ as whilst the music is very simple and presents as a ‘pop song,’ the message of the lyrics is the most important. I feared that overcomplicating the composition would detract from the message of the song.

I wrote the lyrics for ‘a lonelier sky’ to depict a soft, mournful almost lament; the nightingale is said to become extinct within the next thirty years,¹⁴ and so my lyrics are written for a future where there all but a few nightingales’ left, perhaps when there are none even.

Oh grief, oh grief have I,
For the Nightingale’s who have lost their flight.
The tree’s feel lonely,
as I search for you.
The sky feels a little more blue.¹⁵

Another element of which I was inspired by traditional British folk music was the simplicity of the instrumentation. Most British folk songs I had listened to and researched surrounding the topic of birds used often voice and guitar and perhaps another melodic instrument such as the fiddle. I have tried to emulate this sparse texture in my own work with the instrumentation of voice, cello, acoustic guitar and birdsong. When researching how birdsong was used specifically in folk music, I came across musician Cosmo Sheldrake who has an entire album titled *Wake Up Calls* (2020)¹⁶ that is dedicated to the birdsongs of UK endangered bird species. It features twelve original works that feature field recordings and soundscapes of the birds the song is named after; the thirteenth work is Sheldrake’s

¹³ Sam Lee, *The Nightingale: Notes on a Songbird*, (London: Century, 2020) pg. viii.

¹⁴ Sam Lee as interviewed by Laura Smith, “The Honest Truth: Plight of the nightingale... Seasonal songbird decades from extinction,” *The Sunday Post*, 8th May 2021, <https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/nightingale-extinction/> accessed 11/1/22

¹⁵ See appendix B for full lyrics.

¹⁶ Cosmo Sheldrake, *Wake Up Calls*, Tardigrade Records, 2020, compact disc.

own arrangement of Benjamin Britten's "Cuckoo" from *Friday Afternoons*.¹⁷ In an interview with an unnamed source for *The Ecologist*, Sheldrake summarises his album as this: "I hope that this music may serve as a wake-up call to help us become more aware of the glorious polyphonic soundworlds that surround us before they become extinct."¹⁸ This statement, in essence is what I strive to emulate with my own music; the importance of being accountable for our actions and being aware of the effects we have on those, including nature, around us whilst simultaneously inviting those perhaps unfamiliar into a polyphonic soundworld of birdsong is a privilege.

I had the privilege of meeting with Sarah Briggs of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust in October 2021 as a prerequisite to her Winter Bird Identification Course. We met at the Attenborough Nature Reserve, home to over 160 species of bird, so that I, similar to Sheldrake, was able to do some field recordings of my own. Due to travel restrictions and thus the inability to go and obtain field recordings of endangered birds such as nightingales, yellow wagtails, lesser-spotted cuckoos etc, the birdsong used on 'a lonelier sky' is that of non-endangered birds such as an osprey, a dunnock, a garganey and a tree pipit (on the RSPBC official red list for endangered bird species). I borrowed a RØDE NTG2, a condenser shotgun microphone, and took it with me on my tour around the nature reserve to try record as much birdsong as possible. I took the samples I had recorded and inputted them into Logic to filter as much background noise out as possible, initially, I picked up an acoustic guitar and played around with some simple chord patterns over the birdsong and then began the compositional process. I wrote the lyrics and recorded each part into Logic, with the cello line, I improvised this over what I had already recorded.

Improvisation over birdsong is something that I found a lot of when doing my research; cellist Beatrice Harrison pioneered this relationship of duetting with birds, the nightingale in particular. In Harrison's autobiography, *The Cello and the Nightingales*, she writes how "in a moment of silence a sudden burst

¹⁷ Benjamin Britten, *A Ceremony of Carols / A Boy Was Born / Friday Afternoons / Psalm 150*, Choristers Of All Saints, Margaret Street, conducted by Mogens Wöldike, 1953-1966, Decca Records, LC 0171, compact disc

¹⁸ Cosmo Sheldrake as interviewed by an Unnamed Source, "Wake up calls," *The Ecologist*, 8th September 2020, <https://theecologist.org/2020/sep/15/wake-calls> accessed 11/1/22

of birdsong in imitation of the cello's notes, exploded above me."¹⁹ I deliberately wanted the introduction of 'a lonelier sky' to be just birdsong, and for the piece to also end with birdsong to try and emulate that exact moment in which Harrison experienced. From a performance perspective, I have encouraged the performer to duet with live birdsong where possible, this is because I want to try and create this relationship between nature and human via the medium of music.

What are the historical and contemporary connections between music and nature: how can we use these to educate and inspire?

One of the earliest instances of birdcall in musical notation derives from 'Sumer is icumen in,' an incipit of a medieval English round dating back to the thirteenth-century: it also has the name of 'Cuckoo Song,' presumably as the cuckoo's distinctive call (resembling a descending major third), features throughout the notation.²⁰ Much of the natural environment can be considered 'musical', if by Joseph Machlis's definition of music to be "an auditory art form that incorporates elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics."²¹ There are a plethora of animals that have aural displays of melodic and rhythmic sounds, with the obvious being birdsong. These sounds have been the source of inspiration for a large selection of Western Classical composers such as Olivier Messiaen, Ludwig van Beethoven and Bedřich Smetana, all of which have works dedicated to pastoral musings. Alongside being a source of inspiration, John Hawkins stated in 1776 that:

The voices of animals, the whistling of the winds, the fall of waters, the concussion of bodies of various kinds, not to mention the melody of birds, as they contain in them the rudiments of harmony, may easily be supposed to have furnished the minds of intelligent creatures with

¹⁹ Beatrice Harrison, *The Cello and the Nightingales: The Autobiography of Beatrice Harrison*, (London: J. Murray, 1985) pp. 65

²⁰ The ideas in this paragraph have been drawn from Richard Jensen, "Birdsong and the Imitation of Birdsong in the music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance". *Current Musicology* (40):50.

²¹ Joseph Machlis, *The Enjoyment of Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 3rd edition, 1970). pp. 25

such ideas of sound, as time, and the accumulated observation of succeeding ages, could not fail to improve into a system.²²

When Hawkins states ‘a melody of birds, as they contain in them the rudiments of harmony,’ he is perhaps referring to birds such as nightingales and blackbirds, both of whom have been described as having a ‘birdsong’ rather than a ‘birdcall’, as their voices are very melodic and recognisable.²³

When it comes to understanding the historical and contemporary connections between music and nature, more research is required, however, it is clear that nature is a source of inspiration across multiple disciplines. The next two compositions in my portfolio are both choral works, and so I researched several other choral composers to see what techniques they had used to emulate the sounds of nature and more specifically, birdsong. Birds have been used commonly in text setting by composer such as George Handel. Handel’s Oratorio, L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato quotes the nightingale’s song in the aria ‘Sweet Bird,’ the nightingale plays the part of accompaniment.²⁴

Composition: The Turtle Dove (Fare Thee Well)

English folk singer Albert Lancaster Llyod dates ‘The Turtle Dove (Fare Thee Well)’ back to around 1770; “leaflets bearing the words of this [The Turtle Dove] were being hawked about the fairgrounds of England and Scotland. Milkmaids and horse-handles would paste such leaflets on the walls of dairy and stable to learn they songs as they worked.”²⁵ Many musicians have their own recordings and lyrical takes on this, such is the way with traditional folk songs either due to how the music is passed down

²² John Hawkins as quoted by Matthew Head, “Birdsong and the origin of music.” *Journal of Royal Musical Association*, 122, no.1 (1997):1-23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/766551>. Accessed 11/1/22

²³ Sam Lee, *The Nightingale: Notes on a Songbird*, (London: Century, 2020) pp.5.

²⁴ The ideas in this paragraph have been drawn from: Michael O’Connell and John Powell. “Music and Sense in Handel’s Setting of Milton’s L’Allegro and Il Penseroso.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12, no.1 (1978) 16-46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2738417>. Accessed 11/1/22.

²⁵ Albert Lancaster Llyod, Original Liner notes from *The Foggy Dew and Other Traditional English Love Songs*, Tradition Records, 1956, vinyl

through oral traditions or due to performers exploring their artistic licensing; my text setting is from the performance of Peter Bellamy from the album *Mainly Norfolk Songs & Ballads* (1968).²⁶

Oh, don't you see, yon little turtle dove
 Sitting under the mulberry tree
 And a-making mourn for his own true love
 As I shall mourn for thee, my dear,
 As I shall mourn for thee.²⁷

I chose this particular text setting for my own arrangement as the lyrics really draw on the emotions behind the story of a lover bidding farewell. Musically speaking, I saw a lot of opportunities for word-painting and dissonance amongst harmony. Bellamy's version is also the only text setting that features the word 'mourn,' which was another reason for selecting his text setting. As again, the overriding theme of my portfolio is endangered bird species, whilst the text isn't about mourning the loss of extinct birds, I have interpreted it this way, thus giving the song a double meaning.

An example of where I have used word-painting for the word 'mourn' can be found in the harmony in the alto line at figure 1, bars 58 – 60. This passage demonstrates a dissonance over the text setting 'mourning for his own true love'. The A4 clashes with the B4 to create a D6 chord (in the wider context of the piece) which resolves to the subdominant Bm chord.

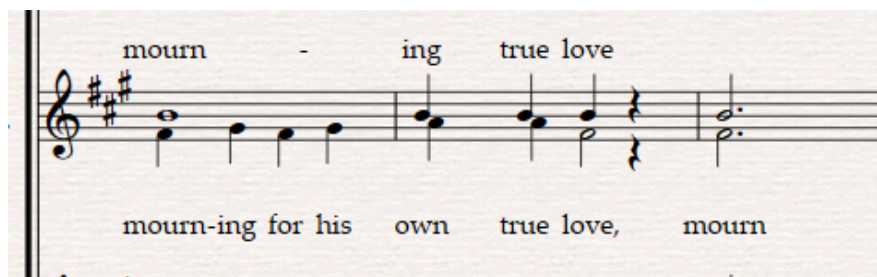


Figure 1. Turtle Dove (Fare Thee Well) Alto Line, bars 58-60.

²⁶ Peter Bellamy, *Mainly Norfolk Songs & Ballads*, Transatlantic Records XTRA 1060, 1968, vinyl

²⁷ See appendix C for full lyrics.

The overall movement and direction in which my work flows were carefully considered too, whilst researching Ralph Vaughan Williams own arrangement of 'The Turtle Dove,' a work for solo baritone and SATB choir, I came across *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* where the authors (unnamed) discuss the timbral contrast between texted soloist and wordless choir.²⁸ Much like Vaughan Williams 'The Turtle Dove', I too have used soli with wordless choir in bars 1-6. Whereas Vaughan Williams work is for a baritone soloist, I have moved the soli sections around certain voice parts. For example, the piece begins with the bass section singing in unison, the melody is then passed to the sopranos. This is to give a new narrative to the story being told, by having the soprano's respond to the basses, it gives the music a sense of a third person narrative. The narrative switches between first person and passes to third person to give a slightly surrealist illusion that we do not know who is experiencing these emotions. The parallel of this when considering endangered bird species, is that we, as a society, may feel it is the responsibility of others to preserve bird species; there is no direct impact on us. However, this is not the case, we must take ownership of the narrative.

Composition: The Darkling Thrush

The next work in my portfolio is titled 'The Darkling Thrush.' I selected Thomas Hardy's poem 'The Darkling Thrush' for this choral works because of what the 'Darkling Thrush' represented in the poem. Before sitting down to compose, I did a quick poetry analysis of the prose to determine how I would compose for the text. I will outline a brief summary of the text below:

On a symbolic level, 'The Darkling Thrush' and its semantic field of winter, is an extended metaphor: "its bleakness and decay reflect the state of Western culture at the end of the nineteenth-century."²⁹ The speaker of the poem is in a state of desolation throughout the first two stanzas, yet when we reach the third stanza, we learn that the despair is not impenetrable: a singing thrush reminds the

²⁸ The ideas in this paragraph have been drawn from: Unnamed Author, *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 141

²⁹ Toby Altman, "The Darkling Thrush." *LitCharts LLC*, 8th May2019, <https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/thomas-hardy/thomas-hardy-the-darkling-thrush> accessed 11/1/22.

speaker that all is not lost, hope and joy are possible. In short, the speaker feels as though society is failing and, on a decline, the anxieties of the poem are deeply personal but they also expand to include fundamental issues of faith and society, issues that the poem hopes to help resolve.

I have reflected the poem's meaning with the harmonic language I have used; 'stanzas' one and two have the home key of B minor. When stanza three begins, 'at once a voice arose among, the bleak twigs overhead,'³⁰ the melodic motif heard throughout repeats yet the arrival of bar 45 shifts the tonality to the relative major, D. I deliberately gave the new key of D major for this stanza to support the poem's meaning, that whilst society appears to be failing, there is still hope and joy. I also aimed to compose more of a traditional chorale, one that might be heard at an Evensong, as the text in stanza three reads "in a full-hearted evensong of joy illimited; an aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small, in blast-beruffled plume, had chosen thus to fling his soul upon the growing gloom."³¹ The use of 'Evensong' and 'soul' create a semantic field of religion and faith, thus hope. I wanted the music to heighten the text and provide the listener with the same emotions that the speaker has. Bars 45-55 talk of 'joy illimited' and thus harmonically speaking, the use of an add ninth on chords gives a pleasant dissonance, one that is pleasant to hear but it still gives a subtle need for resolution. Figure 2 shows bars 67-72 of my composition; the chord shown in bar 71 on the word 'soul' is an A13/G chord, which again I have chosen for word-painting purposes. This chord feels slightly ethereal and otherworldly, matching the word 'soul.'

³⁰ See appendix D for the full poem

³¹ Ibid^

Had cho-sen thus to fling, to fling his soul

Had cho-sen thus to fling, to fling his soul

Had chos-en thus to fling, to fling his soul

chos-en thus to fling, to fling his soul

Figure 2 The Darkling Thrush, Bars 67-72

Ironically, the hope and joy in the poem is represented by the song thrush, a bird which is now registered as 'red' on the RSPCB endangered bird list. Whilst this bird would not have been endangered in 1900, I felt that this message could be applied to twenty-first century in a literal sense, that whilst it feels as though we are in a decline of society, hope can be found quite literally in nature. The preservation of wildlife not only serves a purpose to them (wildlife), but to us also.

How has birdsong been used in Western Classical and Popular Music?

In the aforementioned, I have discussed how birdsong has been used in both Western Classical and Popular Music. I have compiled the ways in which birdsong is commonly used into the following three categories:

1. Imitations of birdsong
2. Recorded birdsong
3. Birdsong as music

For the first category, imitations of birdsong, arguably the most prolific composer of birdsong is Olivier Messiaen. His piano cycle *Catalogue D'oiseaux* (Catalogue of birds) is comprised of thirteen pieces;

Each piece is written in honour of a French province. It bears the title of the bird-type of the chosen region. It is not alone: its habitat neighbours surround it and also sing... its landscape, the hours of day and night that change this landscape, are also present, with their colours, their temperatures, the magic of their perfumes.³²

Messiaen biographer Peter Hill states that “Messiaen was probably proud of the fact that he had studied nature in a detail that nobody else had bothered to do, it’s an incredible fad given that we’re surrounded by the potential for music in nature, yet Messiaen is virtually the first person to go out there... and actually listen to birdsong really carefully.”³³ Throughout much of his career, Messiaen devoted his art to birdsong, all of his later pieces included birdsong in some way. His *Réveil des oiseaux* (‘Dawn Chorus’/‘The Awakening of the Birds’) is Messiaen’s collection of thirty-eight different birds as they appear from 12 a.m. right through the night to the dawn chorus, and then on to the morning birdsong. Messiaen had a prolific knowledge of birdsong and was able to identify musical values such as pitch, rhythm and harmony and therefore was able to create music that perfectly imitated the birdsong.

The second category, recorded birdsong, was said to have been first used in composition by Ottorino Respighi, with his work the *Pines of Rome*.³⁴ The original score mentions a specific recording that according to author Martin Brody was a “nightingale [that] was recorded in the yard of the McKim Building of the American Academy in Rome situated on Janiculum hill.”³⁵ Since Respighi, there have been several works both classical, contemporary and popular that have pre-recorded birdsong as part

³² David Kraft, *Birdsong in the Music of Olivier Messiaen*, (London: Createspace Independent Publisher, 2013) pp.119

³³ Peter Hill as quoted in, “Olivier Messiaen 1908-1992: Messiaen’s use of Birdsong.” Philharmonia Orchestra, 19th February, 2008. Time: 3:00 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MgLXeaf3zc> accessed 11/1/22

³⁴ Ottorino Respighi, *Pines of Rome / Fountains of Rome*, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Fritz Reiner, RCA Victor Red Seal, 1960, compact disc

³⁵ Martin Brody, *Music and Musical Composition at the American Academy in Rome*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014) pp. 87

of their music. From the likes of Pink Floyd and Kate Bush to Einojuhani Rautavaara's *Cantus Arcticus*,³⁶ which makes extensive use of recorded birdsong from the Arctic.

The third category, birdsong as music, was pioneered by the aforementioned Beatrice Harrison in 1924, when Harrison broadcast herself playing the cello in her garden alongside nightingales who were attracted by her music.³⁷ Nearly eighty years later, philosopher and jazz musician David Rothenberg played an improvised duet with a laughingthrush in March 2000. The duet inspired Rothenberg's book *Why Birds Sing* which is recommended for further research on the topic of birdsong as music.³⁸

Birdsong within both Western Classical and Popular music has been extensively researched, from its origins to how composers are influenced by birdsong in their works. Whilst I predominantly researched birdsong specifically for my portfolio of compositions, it must be said that further research is needed, but due to the constraints of this essay there are limitations as to what research should be included. I will further expand upon specific research during my analysis of *the dimming of the dawn chorus*.

Composition: *the dimming of the dawn chorus*

The dimming of the dawn chorus is the largest work in my portfolio, with eight movements totalling to fifteen minutes, it is the composition in which I did the most extensive research for. I began by researching exactly what bird species were on the red list, according to the RSPB there are sixty-seven species now on this list, with twenty birds having been added in 2015.

³⁶ Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Cantus Arcticus*, Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Max Pommer, BMG Music, 1994, compact disc

³⁷ Sam Lee, *The Nightingale: Notes on a Songbird*, (London: Century, 2020) pp.5.

³⁸ David Rothenberg, *Why Birds Sing: A Journey Into the Mystery of Bird Song*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006)



Figure 3. RSPB list of endangered bird species on the 'red list' as of 2020³⁹

The six movements named after birds were chosen specifically as they are found on the RSPB endangered list, and I wanted to raise awareness of them through the form of music. Once I had chosen my birds, I used YouTube to hear recordings of each of these birds. I have notated each of their calls and featured them throughout each movement. With the exception of the Yellow Wagtail, I will insert images of each motif that represents each bird.

Movement I. Dawn

The string quartet begins with extended technique known as 'the seagull,' I first recall performing this technique (as a cellist) in my County Youth Orchestra in 2014 but was unable to source the specific

³⁹ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/join-and-donate/appeals/birds-on-the-red-list.pdf> accessed 20/09/21

piece of music I learnt of it from. Nonetheless, I was able to source notation and use of this effect in George Crumb's *Vox Balaenae* shown in figure 4.

Figure 4. George Crumb *Vox Balaenae*, Archeozoic [Var I]⁴⁰

This technique, as the name suggests, uses the cello's harmonic sequence to create a squawking 'seagull' like sound, I felt it was extremely appropriate to utilise this technique to open the quartet with. The viola then mimics the cello and creates the same effect until violin I and violin II join with glissandi. The violins are instructed to perform these glissandi at slightly differing speeds so that the alignment of common harmonic is subtly out of sync, thus creating a 'glistening' effect. The aim of the first movement is to portray light glistening in through the gaps in leaves, as though you are looking up to the skies, looking out for these birds, and the sun is slowly rising. Due to the first movement having the focus on a soundscape rather than dictated music and harmony, I have used scoring found in contemporary works of the likes of John Cage and Steve Reich to show that instead of playing measured bars, the performers are to play set times. The first movement is to be performed for twenty seconds, each moving part being given a specific time in which they must perform a certain technique. The piece ends with all four instruments reaching a final 'E' together at fortissimo, symbolising the birds leaping off their branches for their first flight in the morning.

⁴⁰ <https://www.chambermusicociety.org/about/news/a-crumb-score-demystified/> accessed 11/1/22

Movement I.
Dawn

The musical score is for Movement I, 'Dawn', and features four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Each instrument part includes a glissando (gliss.) marked with a diamond symbol and a triangle. The dynamics range from fortissimo (ff) to pianissimo (pp). Timing markings in measures include 'ca. 10\"', 'ca. 5\"', and 'ca. 15\"'. The Viola part includes 'sul A' markings. The Cello part includes 'sul A' and 'gliss.' markings. The score is set in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C).

*Violin I, II and Viola: Glissandi should be of slightly differing speeds, alignment of common harmonics should be subtly out of sync. However, all four instruments should reach their notated 'E' together.
**Beginning note for each instrument should be the highest playable note on each instrument, notation is not accurate for desired given note, as such players should begin at the very edge of the fingerboard.

Figure 5. *the dimming of the dawn chorus*, movement 1, 'Dawn'.

Movement II. Yellow Wagtail



Figure 6. Yellow Wagtail, unnamed artist, RSPB

The Yellow Wagtail is a bird that is small in size with a long tail that has a 'wagtail' way of moving upwards and downwards continuously. They have a constant shifting of their head, moving forwards

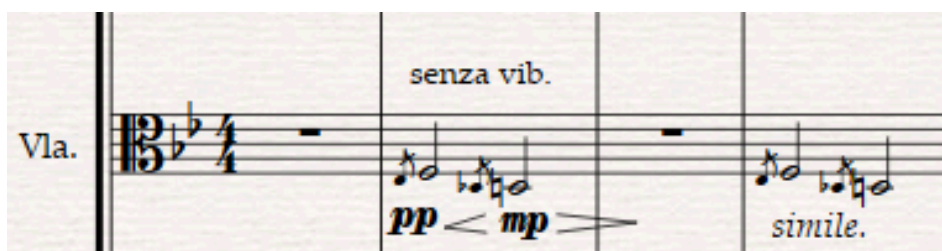
and backwards as they move along the ground, they often take to the air in sudden, unsuspecting bursts, yet they stop frequently to perch.⁴¹ They are said to have no distinctive ‘call’, it ‘chirps’ as I have notated in the violin I line, bars 1-2. However, when watching videos of them, I noticed their movements to be very rhythmic and almost dance like which I have reflected in my composition. There is no real distinctive melody, but the piece invites the string quartet to perform several techniques all of which created the soundscape of this petite bird and it’s evermoving tail.

Movement III. The Puffin



Figure 7. The Puffin, unnamed artist, RSPB⁴²

As we move towards the cliffs of Dorset, the Puffin can be found nesting. A solitary bird that has a low descending birdcall, represented throughout by both the viola in bar 2, and violin II in bar 7. The Puffin is described as a predominantly quiet bird, but it has a low groaning and often respective ‘ahh’ when near its nest.



⁴¹ The ideas set out in this paragraph have been drawn from <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/yellow-wagtail/> accessed 11/1/22

⁴² <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/puffin/>

Figure 8. *the dimming of the dawn chorus*, Movement III, The Puffin. Viola Bar 2-4

As the Puffin is described as quite a solemn bird,⁴³ I thought it most appropriate to compose a solemn melody that first arrives on the cello at bar 9, violin I then joins in with a countermelody at bar 17. The movement is rather repetitive for the reason that the Puffin's call is also extremely repetitive, yet I wanted to still convey emotion behind the repetitiveness and so by subtly changing the octave of what is being played, I aim to give the listener a sense of tension. This tension deriving from of course, the bird being endangered and us not knowing when it will become extinct.

Movement IV. The Lesser spotted woodpecker

Figure 9. Lesser spotted Woodpecker, unnamed artist, RSPB⁴⁴

The lesser spotted woodpecker is described as a 'playful' bird, one that spends a great deal of their time pecking wood and chiselling bark off of trees in search for wood-boring arthropods.⁴⁵ As such, the triplet motif that the cello plays throughout is supposed to be playful, giving the movement an element of fun to both play and listen to. Violin II and the viola both alternate between col legno notation, representing the beak drilling into bark. The pizzicato/col legno stabs at bar 5 are representative of the woodpecker 'plucking' an insect from between the bark. Similarly with the Yellow Wagtail, the Lesser spotted woodpecker does not have a distinctive bird call, yet it is extremely

⁴³ Ibid[^]

⁴⁴ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/lesser-spotted-woodpecker/> accessed 11/1/22

⁴⁵ Ibid[^]

percussive and rhythmic with its pecking and chiselling of wood, and so I have focused on those elements throughout this movement.

Figure 10. *the dimming of the dawn chorus, Movement IV, The lesser spotted Woodpecker, Bars 4-6*

Movement V. The Lapwing



Figure 11. Lapwing, unnamed artist, RSPB⁴⁶

The Lapwing is often found in pairs, their calls often similar yet slightly dissonant. This call is represented by violin II and the viola from bars 5 onwards. The call and response between the two instruments are a direct transcription of what the lapwing's call sounds like. They are quite a delicate bird despite not being delicate in size, they have a large wingspan that helps them soar for minutes at a time. The delicate pizzicato played by violin II gives the music an almost waltz like feel as it accompanies a wide melodic motif played by the viola and cello.

⁴⁶ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/lapwing/>



Figure 12. *the dimming of the dawn chorus*, Movement V, the Lapwing, bars 5-8

Movement VI. Arctic Skua



Figure 13. Arctic Skua, unnamed artist, RSPB⁴⁷

Arctic Skua's are referred to as 'avian pirates,' being known for steal much of their food from terns, puffins and other birds that are carrying fish back to their nests. They are a seemingly aggressive seabird that attack mid-air, forcing their bird victims to drop their food in flight. They are feisty, often chasing other birds for 'fun' and they often team up to overwhelm the birds in which they are stealing food from.⁴⁸ The use of trills and octave portamento throughout this movement are to give a cheekier feel to the music, again, the portamento encourage the performers to have a bit of fun whilst performing, the physical act of this technique can be quite humorous which is why the movement is abundant in them. The Arctic Skua, in my opinion, is a very humorous bird, one can only imagine it swooping in and stealing hard-earnt food by its other bird companions.

⁴⁷ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/arctic-skua/>

⁴⁸ *Ibid*[^]

Figure 14. *the dimming of the dawn chorus*, Movement VI, bard 32-37

Movement VII. Starling



Figure 15. Starling, unnamed artist, RSPB⁴⁹

Starlings are small petite birds, often found in large groups that soar about the sky creating beautiful imagery, yet their characters have been described as pugnacious, driving native birds out of their territories. Despite this, their brown-green hue makes for a beautiful sight to the human eye. I have used the violin I to imitate the birdsong of the starling, being the smallest of the birds, I have featured throughout this work, and their song being audibly very high in pitch, I felt that the violin I best represented this bird.

⁴⁹ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/starling/>



Figure 16. *the dimming of the dawn chorus*, Movement VII, Starling, Violin I bar 46-47

Movement VII. The Dimming of the Dawn Chorus

The final movement is a reflection of the bird motifs heard in previous movements. The bird calls suddenly stop, indicating that one day, their songs will just stop with no warning. Section B begins takes place at bars 24-39 are supposed to be a 'lament', the mourning of the birds. Section C begins at bar 40-end and are a recapitulation of section B, however snippets of bird song can be heard throughout this section, representative of the longing we have to hear them call again, or perhaps a reminder to listen to them whilst we still can. The ending of the piece calls for performers to make their own artistic decision as to how long they hold the pause for. This pause is encouraged as part of the performance to evoke stillness, hopefully encouraging both performers and the audience to listen to their surroundings and reflect on what we are soon to lose.

Conclusion

It must be said, that I have thoroughly enjoyed composing works themed around birds, it has challenged me creatively, to compose music that covers a wide range of ways in which birdsong has been used in Western Classical and Popular music. I feel as a composer, I have strengthened the ways in which I write for String Quartet. As a cellist and someone who has a history of performing in string quartets for most of my life, I felt as though I was stuck in a narrative of how music for ensemble strings was supposed to sound. By stripping the composition for string quartet down to focusing on the birdsong imitation, I found it freeing. It enabled me to take a deeper look at the instruments and how to use every part of them to best imitate the sounds of nature. Exploring extended techniques

such as the 'seagull' effect, trills with simultaneous glissandi etc, I feel I have challenged myself to look 'beyond music' so to compose and imitate nature as best I can.

From a research perspective, there is much more I wish to do, to better not only my compositional understanding, but my environmental and societal understanding. As mentioned in my introduction, I have always been passionate about the preservation of nature and its relationship to music, how we can use it to educate and inform others of the challenges we are facing but not in such an abrupt way that it makes people necessarily uncomfortable, as it would be if you had an activist shouting at you all the time. The ways in which music can be used as a tool to connect humanity with nature is something I intend to keep researching, with my next project focusing on Bees, and how different behaviours/states of bees can be translated into music whilst simultaneously raising awareness for the Save the Bees movement.

Upon reflection, I would actively try to go and seek more field recordings and interview, gather more first-hand accounts of people who work amongst environmental science to improve my knowledge. With this project being the first time in which I have had any opportunity to gain insight into a specific field, I would next time, write down and record conversations with the people I interviewed in person (Sarah Briggs) to further support my research. Accurately documenting these conversations also gives longevity and could perhaps be of use to someone else wishing to divulge in a project similar to mine.

To summarise, music is absolutely a tool in which we must utilise more to promote and encourage change in our societal behaviours that cause damage to the planet. It is one of the most accessible art forms and should be made more accessible by being introduced into the education system more when topics of environmental concerns need addressing. Teaching younger people about our planets by having them listen to all the aforementioned works may inspire them to not only create music themselves, but to share knowledge of how wonderful our planet is therefore wanting to protect it.

Appendices

Appendix A: 'Adar Môn y Mynydd/Little Mountain Bird' lyrics traditional, translated by Richard B. Gillion

The Nightingale and the spotless lark
And the little birds of the mountain,
Wilt thou go as messenger to summer's colour
Which is suffering from a new illness?

I have no gifts
Nor expensive jewels to send
To remind you of him who loves you,
But a pair of white globes.

The little birds did go
On their distant journey they flew
And then facing Gwen's bed
On the tree they sang.

Said Gwen the colour of the foam
'Ah me, what thing is the bird
Which is here warbling now so prettily
And I terminally ill?

'We are messengers please believe
Sent on behalf of the one who loves you
To let him know how you are faring
Whether you are growing pale or not.'

'Tell him softly
That short will be my lifetime,
Before this summer ends sadly
I am going to be among soil and gravel.'

Appendix B: 'a lonelier sky' lyrics by Amber Frost (2022)

It's been a long ten years since you left,
Since the blooming heather filled the air.
When the small birds whistled,
their truth lay bare
When I think too much about it, I could cry

Oh grief, oh grief have I,
for the Nightingale's who have lost their flight.
The tree's feel lonely,
as I search for you,
The sky feels a little more blue

These woodlands were once your home,
Now these branches dance all alone
For we've forced you out
So early in the spring
No longer do your symphonies sing

Oh grief, oh grief have I,
for the Nightingale's who have lost their flight.
The tree's feel lonely,
as I search for you,
The sky feels a little more blue

How I wish
I could hear you one last time,
One more of your lullabies.
Now you're gone, I long to hear your song.

Oh grief, oh grief have I,
for the Nightingale's who have lost their flight.
The tree's feel lonely,
as I search for you,
The sky feels a little more blue,
The sky feels a little more blue

Appendix C: 'The Turtle (Fare Thee Well) lyrics traditional, Peter Bellamy version (1968)

Oh don't you see yon little turtle dove
Sitting under the mulberry tree
And a-making mourn for his own true love
As I shall mourn for thee, my dear,
As I shall mourn for thee.

So you must suffer grief and pain,
'Tis but for a little while.
And wherever I will go I will return,
Though I go ten thousand mile, my dear,
Though I go ten thousand mile.

Ten thousand mile it is too far
To leave me all alone,
While I must lie, lament and cry,
And you'll not hear my moan, my dear,
And you'll not hear my moan

Well the tide it shall seize to beat the shore
And stars shall fall from the sky,
Yet I will love thee more and more,
Until the day i die, my dear,
Until the day i die

Then let the seas run dry, my dear,
And rocks all melt in the sun,
Yet here I'll stay and never from thee part,
Till all these things be done, my dear,
Till all these things be done

Oh don't you see yon little turtle dove
Sitting under the mulberry tree
A-making mourn for his own true love
As I shall mourn for thee, my dear,
As I shall mourn for thee

Appendix D: 'The Darkling Thrush' poem by Thomas Hardy (1900)

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-grey
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead.
In a full-hearted evensong
of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware

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