

(Codex) on the Flight of Birds

for violin and cello



Chris Williams

(Codex) on the Flight of Birds

Commissioned by the Bowerbird Collective
For 'Life on Land's Edge'

There are two, seemingly disparate, inspirations for this piece. The first, is Leonardo Da Vinci's short book on flight, Codex on the Flight of Birds, and the second is the epic journey of migration that inspired 'Life on Land's Edge'. At first glance, Da Vinci's book is just an acutely detailed observation of birds in flight, accounting for how every slight shift in the angle of a wing produces new motion through the air. But the book also contain moments of whimsy, myth, inexplicable fiction and poetry, too, reenforcing the book's broader significance, and Da Vinci's view that motion is nothing less than 'the cause of all life'.

And here we turn to the idea of migration - the motion of motion, and so the life of life. While the technical description of motion stands at one extreme of what flight means, the other end is the life produced and sustained by this motion, and in the case of the shorebirds the invisible connections, the global network of incredible, life-sustaining journeys and landscapes through which they pass. The piece (Codex) on the Flight of Birds takes the precision of flight as its starting point - exploring every 'angle' and shift in musical motion - to express what is also an emotional journey - harrowing and necessary, threatening as it is threatened - at the heart of the story of any migration. In the opening, I imagine the violin bow as a wing, taking flight, with urgency, excitement, and uncertainty in a way that produces the kind of irrepressible energy needed to sustain a journey as epic, as mythic, as the one ahead.

(CODEX) ON THE FLIGHT OF BIRDS

I. The search for home/The first flight/Great and uncertain things

$\text{♩} = 102$ *flickering light, flickering air -
primordial, primeval, circling,
soaring, ascending*

Chris Williams

sul tasto → ord.

Violin

Violoncello

5

poco meno mosso poco accel.

10

A tempo $\text{♩} = 102$

14

19

2 25

Treble staff: 6/16 (measures 1-3), 3/16 (measure 4), 2/16 (measure 5). Bass staff: 6/16 (measures 1-3), 3/16 (measure 4), 2/16 (measure 5). Dynamics: dynamic 'p' in measure 4.

30

Treble staff: Measures 1-3. Bass staff: Measures 1-3. Dynamics: 'mf' in measures 2-3, followed by 'p' and then 'mf' again.

34

Treble staff: Measures 1-3. Bass staff: Measures 1-3. Dynamics: 'p' in measures 2-3, followed by 'mf'.

38

Treble staff: Measures 1-3. Bass staff: Measures 1-3. Dynamics: 'p' in measures 2-3, followed by 'mf'.

43

Treble staff: Measures 1-3. Bass staff: Measures 1-3. Dynamics: 'mp' in measures 2-3, followed by a 16th note time signature.

A

mf

subito p
pizz

p

cresc.

cresc.

*gliss up from G to A. Don't pluck again until next notated rhythm

mf

f

4

66

mp

f

f

71

ff

ff

76

arco

ffmp =

B **meno mosso**

*suddenly suspended,
a gently evolving chorale*

81

p

sost.

p

88

rit.

tr.

<>

<>

3

3

$\text{♩} = 102$ lightly - but fierce

94

p col leg.

pizz. **mf**

p

mf

98

mf col leg.

* pizz. col leg. *

mf

pizz.

*Stop strings with left hand immediately after strike.

101

arco

f col leg.

f

105

C

109

pizz.

6 113

117

dim.

120

D

mp

124

f

f

129

E Meno mosso

mp

134

mf
arco

mf

140

rit.

F (a little under) **a tempo** ($\text{♩} = 92$)

p

p

146

150

$\text{♩} = 102$

fragile, airy

mp

154

poco meno mosso

mf

ord.

p

pizz.

ff

>

f

8

poco accel.**A tempo**

♩ = 102

Musical score page 8, measures 158-161. The score consists of two staves. The top staff uses a treble clef and the bottom staff uses a bass clef. Measure 158 starts with eighth-note pairs followed by sixteenth-note pairs. Measure 159 begins with an *arco* instruction. Measure 160 features a melodic line with grace notes and a dynamic *f*. Measure 161 includes dynamics *p* and *mf*, and a melodic line ending with grace notes.

162

Musical score page 8, measures 162-165. The top staff continues with eighth-note pairs and sixteenth-note pairs. Measure 163 contains a melodic line with grace notes. Measure 164 is marked *pizz.* Measure 165 begins with an *arco* instruction. Dynamics *f* and *p* are present in the later measures.

167

Musical score page 8, measures 167-170. The top staff shows eighth-note pairs and sixteenth-note pairs. Measure 168 contains a melodic line with grace notes. Measure 169 is marked *mf*. Measure 170 continues the melodic line with grace notes.

172

Musical score page 8, measures 172-175. The top staff shows eighth-note pairs and sixteenth-note pairs. Measure 173 contains a melodic line with grace notes. Measure 174 is marked *arco*. Dynamics *f* and *mf* are present in the earlier measures.

177

Musical score page 8, measures 177-180. The top staff shows eighth-note pairs and sixteenth-note pairs. Measure 178 contains a melodic line with grace notes. Measure 179 is marked *pizz.* Measure 180 is marked *arco*. The bottom staff shows bass notes with grace notes. Dynamics *f* and a measure repeat sign are present in the earlier measures.

181

3

3

185

mf dim.

189

G

ff

ff

f

192

3

3

3

195

3

3

3

10 **H**

197

soaring

f *mf* *soaring*

f *mf* *mp*

200

mf

mf

203

mf

mf

206

mf

mf

mf

209

I *Meno mosso*

mp

mp

212

216 **J** meno mosso

220

224

Circa 5 mins