

(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 contains moments of whimsy, myth, inexplicable fiction and poetry, too, reinforcing 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

♩ = 102 *flickering light, flickering air -
primordial, primeval, circling,
soaring, ascending*

Chris Williams

sul tasto → *ord.*

Violin

Violoncello

mf *mp*

5

mf *mp*

10

poco meno mosso *poco accel.*

mf *mp* *mf* *mp*

14

A tempo ♩ = 102

mf

5/16 5/16

19

mp

6/16 6/16 6/16 6/16 6/16

2 25

6/16 3/16 2/4

p

30

mf *p* *mf*

34

p *mf*

38

p *mf*

43

mp

7/16

47 **A**

mf *subito p* *pizz* *p*

51

55

cresc. *cresc.*

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

59

mf *mf*

63

f *f*

66

mp *f*

71

ff *ff*

76

ffmp

B *meno mosso*
suddenly suspended,
a gently evolving chorale

81

p *sost.*

88

rit. *p*

♩ = 102 *lightly - but fierce*

94

p col leg. *pizz.* *mf* *p* *mf*

98

mf col leg. *mf* *pizz.* col leg. *pizz.*

*Stop strings with left hand immediately after strike.

101

arco *f* col leg. *f*

105

C *f*

109

pizz. *f*

6 113

113

9/16 6/16

mp *f*

117

3

6/16

dim. *mp*

120

3

2/8 6/16

mp *f*

124

9

9/16 6/16

f *mp*

129

129

2/4

mp *f*

134

mf arco

mf

140

rit.

F (a little under) *a tempo* (♩ = 92)

p

p

146

150

♩ = 102

fragile, airy

mp

154

poco meno mosso

mf

ord.

ff

p

pizz.

f

poco accel.**A tempo** ♩ = 102

158

espr.

arco

f *p* *mf*

162

pizz.

arco

f *p*

167

mf

172

pizz.

arco

f *mf*

177

pizz.

arco

f

181

3

3

185

mf dim.

189

G

f

ff

ff

192

195

10

H

197 *soaring* *f* *mf* *mp*

200 *mf* *mf*

203

206

209 **I** **Meno mosso** *mp* *mp*

212

216 **J** meno mosso

220

224

Circa 5 mins