

Composer's note

The poet Charles Bennett and I had for quite some time discussed the possibility of writing an extended dramatic work for young singers. Charles had the basis of the story in his mind, and we agreed that we wanted to write a piece not only about singing but also about what it means to have the courage to sing with your own voice, thus ultimately being true to who you really are. We were thrilled when Jon Cullen from Magdalen College School in Oxford, alongside Lucy Farrant from the Young Norfolk Arts Trust and Alison Corfield from Norfolk Music Hub, agreed to be partners with us by commissioning this piece. Thus *Birdland* came to life and received its first performances concurrently in the summer of 2020 at the Oxford Festival of the Arts and at the Young Norfolk Arts Festival, in Norwich Theatre Royal.

For us a major consideration was to make the piece as flexible for performance as we could. We have tried to make the solo roles interchangeable, in that they can be sung by any voice part. Even though the piece is fundamentally designed for young singers, the solo roles can equally be sung by adults or by young voices and adult voices combined. The work is scored for an ensemble of ten players, but it can also be performed with just piano or piano with the help of percussion and bass guitar or double bass. In the same way we have tried not to be too prescriptive about stage directions. Even though we have tried to imagine the temporal shape and pacing of the piece through the scoring and narrative, we hope that there will be plenty of scope for creative staging. We imagined that the piece could include dance and movement, from the possibility of an occasional dancing chorus to perhaps a more formal dance routine in movement eight, 'Downwards.' We hope that, ultimately, the nature of the piece might be able to stimulate and encourage as imaginative and broad a palette of ideas as possible, when bringing it to life.

As well as the commissioners, I would like to thank a number of colleagues who have helped this piece come to life. Thanks are due to Val Withams from Choral Connections and also to Griselda Sherlaw-Johnson and Jenny Wegg at Oxford University Press. I would especially like to thank our editor, Laura Jones, for her tireless work on this piece, not only for her careful work on the score but also for her masterminding of all the learning materials for the work, which she has done with grace, good humour, and endless patience.

Bob Chilcott
November 2019

Duration: c.45 mins

This note may be reproduced as required for programme notes.

BIRDLAND

Charles Bennett (b. 1954)

BOB CHILCOTT

1. Prologue (Pip, SATB Chorus Birds)

SCENE 1—Early morning in Birdland. Pip is awake, standing centre stage.

Waking ♩ = 92

PIP

UNISON VOICES

SOPRANO ALTO

TENOR BASS

PIANO REDUCTION

7

PIP *p*

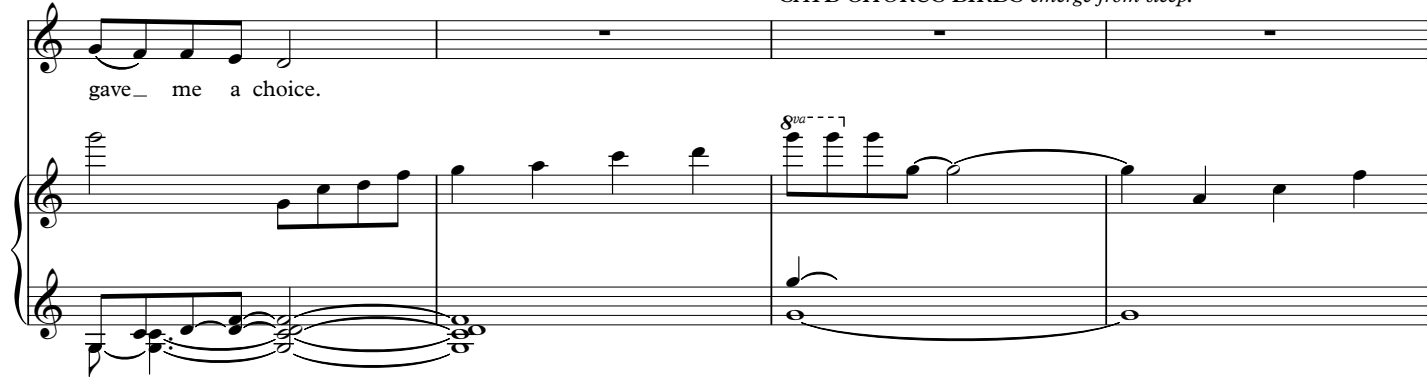
My fea - thers are brown, but what

11

col-our is my voice? You could lis-ten to a rain - bow, — if you

15 SATB CHORUS BIRDS *emerge from sleep.*

gave_ me a choice.



19 SATB CHORUS BIRDS *p*

S. A. *00*

T. B. *p* *00*

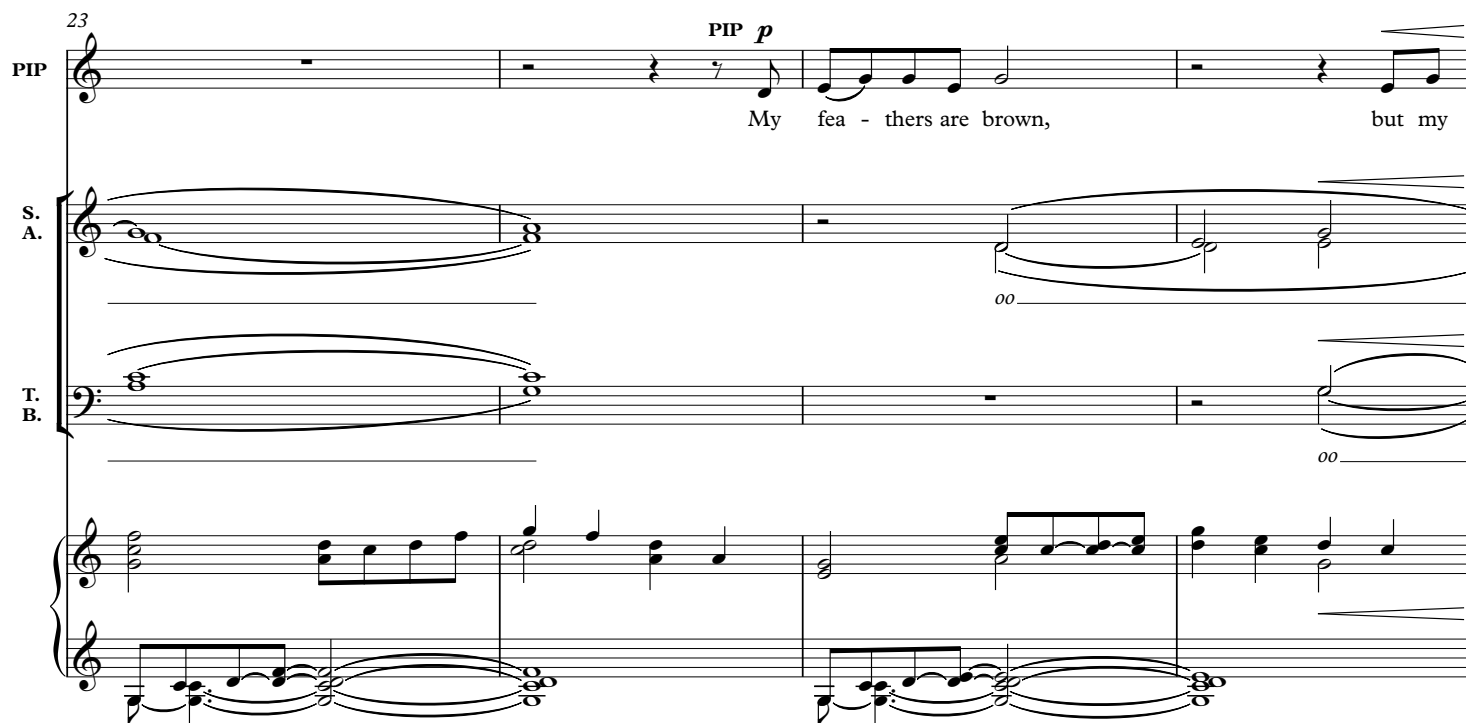


23 PIP *p*

My fea - thers are brown, but my

S. A. *00*

T. B. *00*



27 *mp*

song will dance in your ears to - night, _____ if you

mp

mp

mp

31 *Exit*

give me a chance.

UNISON CHORUS BIRDS emerge from sleep.

p

attacca

3. Feathered Perfection (Highnote, Solo Birds)

Slower ♩ = 104

HIGHNOTE

"Well done, everyone! Another perfect start to the day in Birdland. And tomorrow will be even better, I'm sure."

UNISON
VOICES

SOLO BIRD 1

mf

SOLO BIRD 2

mf

It's not ea - sy be - ing per - fect.

But___ some - one has___ to be!

SOLO BIRDS 1 & 2

And that's us!

And that's___ us!

SOLO BIRD 3

"I just can't wait for tomorrow. Dawn chorus on Midsummer's Day."

SOLO BIRD 4

"Just to be a part of it."

SOLO BIRD 3

SOLO BIRD 4

23 *mf* It's not our fault we're the best. *mf* It's the dream of ev - 'ry bird.

SOLO BIRDS 3 & 4

ALL SOLO BIRDS

27 And that's us! And that's__ us! We're

fea-thered per - fec - tion,

And that's us!

32

HIGHNOTE

"And remember, we have to make sure that our ineffable beauty of song keeps the wannabees and aspiring singers out of the running for ever.

36 *p*

5. I have a song

(Pip, Unison Chorus Birds, SATB Chorus Birds, Highnote)

Easy tempo ♩ = 60

"Excuse me. Morning. Don't mean to interrupt. I have a song. It goes like this."

PIP

UNISON VOICES

SOPRANO ALTO

TENOR BASS

Easy tempo ♩ = 60

p sost.

(♩ = ♩)

8

f

But par - don me, aren't you a low - ly, use - less, good - for - no - thing spar - row who will

f

But par - don me, aren't you a low - ly, use - less, good - for - no - thing spar - row who will

f

11

PIP "But this song,

Inside me.

Like this."

ne - ver a-mount to a - ny-thing?

ne - ver a-mount to a - ny-thing?

ff

sub. p

15

PIP *p* very nervous and unsure

I feel my song ... of this

(intake of breath) *f*

uuh!

(intake of breath) *f*

uuh!

(intake of breath) *f*

20

day ... now at last ... *f*

(shout) *ff* *f*

NO! Aaargh! The ve - ry best part

(shout) *ff* *f*

NO! Aaargh! The ve - ry best part

(shout) *ff* *f*

f

25

mp *f*

So let us all ...

ff

is the si-lence be - fore the start.

ff

is the si-lence be - fore the start.

ff

ff *mp*

10. Time to move on

(SATB Chorus Birds, Pip, Unison Chorus Birds, Solo Doc Rock Peacocks 1–3)

Like a blues ♩ = 56

**SOPRANO
ALTO**

**TENOR
BASS**

Like a blues ♩ = 56

p

TENORS & BASSES

p

3

3

3

3

3

We've done what we could to make him a star, But still he re-sist-ed, per-

6

mp

3

3

3

3

-haps we went too far... Now there is no-thing more we___ can do..

mp

9

Time__ to move on to some - thing new.__

3

12

PIP
mp

In__ my dreams I sang so fair.__ I heard my mu - sic

mf

15

ev - 'ry-where. But this is-n't right, this is - n't true.__

mf

18

PIP

Time___ to move on to some - thing new.___

UNIS.

mf

Time___ to move on to some - thing new.___

S.
A.

mf

Time___ to move on to some - thing new.___

T.
B.

mf

20

S.
A.

You'll_ ne-ver do it on_____ your own.

T.
B.

16. One Note (reprise)

(Unison Chorus Birds, SATB Chorus Birds)

Bright ♩ = 120

UNISON VOICES

SOPRANO ALTO

TENOR BASS

Bright ♩ = 120

f

⁵ *f*

One note, to be-gin, let the___ light in. One note, now's the time,

f

One note, to be-gin, let the___ light in. One note, now's the time,

f

8

let your song shine!

let your song shine!

To-

mf

11

- day as you know is Mid-sum-mer's Day, when all the birds may have their say.

mf

15

15 *f*

One note, to be-gin, let the light in. One note, now's the time,

One note, to be-gin, let the light in. One note, now's the time,

One note, to be-gin, let the light in. One note, now's the time,