

Fictional Migrations

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: June 17, 2019, Naumburg Orchestral Concerts, NYC. Commissioned by the Seattle Chamber Music Society Commissioning Club and premiered July 10, 2017. Orchestral arrangement commissioned by The Knights.

Duration: 14'

Instrumentation: Flute/Piccolo; Horn; Strings at 5,4,4,3,2

Just as I was starting this work, I attended a performance of Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, also composed for an odd (or deemed odd at the time) assemblage of instruments. But their collaboration was borne out of a much less felicitous confluence than mine: they were all prisoners of war in Germany in 1941, and their community audience was comprised of inmates and guards. Instrumentation by circumstance. Messiaen was a big influence on me as a child. My mother is an organist, my father was a composer, and both of them revered Messiaen. In observance of the 25th anniversary of his death, *Fictional Migrations* is dedicated to his memory and informed by a couple of reveries in his honor. The first concerns speculative fiction, and the new surge of minority and feminist writers and media artists who are embracing this form – a cousin of science fiction that poses the question “What if?” in relation to current cultural narratives, rather than positing a remote reality in the future. This paradigm allows artists to create works that transform oppressive energies into sparkling, fanciful or even optimistic and regenerative world-views. This transformation reminded me of the story of Alcyone, the mortal in Greek mythology who, thinking her lover Ceyx is dead, throws herself into the sea, only to find herself transformed into a bird, flying towards him (also now in bird form). Which brings me back to Messiaen, an ornithologist as well as a composer, who wove actual birdsongs into his *Quartet* and into so many of his works. And so, there are birdsongs all over this piece. But – given my own “indoorsy” orientation and lack of any authentic attachment to the birds in nature – they are made-up birds, “What if?” birds, created in the spirit of speculative fiction. The six continuous sections of the piece bear subtitles to suggest possible bird embodiments to the players as they go: “Birds from Neighboring Universes”; “Birds That Live 1000 Years”; “Three-Winged Birds Flying in Circles”; “Birds That Fly While Sleeping”; “Birds That Fly Through Walls”; and “Birds the Size of Zeppelins.” These birds exist in a world where prisoners fly out of captivity effortlessly, and we all magically transcend death and suffering.

Fictional Migrations invites you to exist in this world, just for a little while, together.

– Lisa Bielawa

Publishing & Management: Daniel Brodney | 917.676.1858 | brodney@prodigy.net

Press Contact: Christina Jensen PR LLC | 646.536.7864 | christina@christinajensenpr.com