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Can We Not Hear the Birds That Sing?

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can we not hear the birds that sing?
for solo violin

Lisa Robertson

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(May 2019)

Lisa Robertson

Duration: c.11 mins

Performance Directions

-Pitch bends - glissando towards the note (ending on the right pitch) The glissando should start on the beat, rather than anticipating it.

-'sandpaper and leaves' - attach a piece of sandpaper to the sole of your shoe and move your foot against the ground (should be a hard surface) in a slow, circular motion. Alter the speed of the movement to follow the dynamics. There will also be a pile of dried leaves on the floor in front of you. Move your foot around in the leaves, sometimes stepping on them and sometimes scraping the leaves against the ground.

Alternate between the sandpaper and the leaves method ad lib. but smoothly to create a fluctuating soundscape of ambient natural sound.

-Tap strings with left hand ad lib. - bounce the fingers up and down on the strings (coming right off the string then pressing right down to the fingerboard) rapidly. Without the bow this should give a tapping sound with little evident pitch.

-'shell' - wear a shell bracelet on your ankle and stamp foot once in rhythmic position marked with a X. This will cause the shells to hit together in a percussive, shaker sound.

It is best to wear this on the same foot as the sandpaper, for stability. When the two techniques occur at the same time, stop moving the sandpaper momentarily while you stamp your foot, then continue moving the sandpaper.

-shake foot with shell bracelet - lift the foot and shake it so that the shells rattle together, as loudly and continuously as possible. Marked as a X on a tremolo stem. Lasts for the duration of the bracket.

-'gloves' - tie a pair (or two pairs for added volume) of leather gloves (tie at the base of the gloves, with all gloves in line) to the upper side of your left wrist so that the fingers of the gloves hang downwards when your hand is in playing position. When marked in the score, remove your hand from the violin neck and shake your hand so that the fingers of the gloves hit together (in imitation of birds flapping wings) You will have to do this as fast as possible to create a loud enough sound.

-Over-pressure - press with firmer than usual pressure with the bow so that the sound is harsher, but it should still retain its pitch. Marked with the double arch symbol (eg bar 50) This continues for the duration of the bracket which is marked above the staff.

-heel - indicates to play right at the heel of the bow until the indication ends.

-Lateral Bow Scrape (l.b.s) -scrape the bow laterally along the string from the fingerboard to the bridge and back again so that the sound produced is of the hair vibrating, not the string. Ideally no pitch should sound. In every case, the sound should not be overly aggressive. It should not have the extremely harsh sound of overpressure (even when marked with heavy pressure, which should produce a firm but still relatively pleasant sound)

B.156 - play on the reverse side of the bridge

B.161 - as high as possible on the G string. Lateral bow scrape - scrape bow laterally along the string from bridge to fingerboard so that the sound produced is of the hair vibrating, not the string. Ideally no pitch should sound. The sound should not be overly aggressive. It should not have the extremely harsh sound of overpressure

B.167 - as high as possible on D string

-gliss up and down very fast from highest note down about a fourth at heel, sul pont (nb. it is not a lateral bow scrape this time)

'Can we not hear the birds that sing?' juxtaposes the localised sounds of the RSPB Baron's Haugh nature reserve with the urban surroundings it finds itself enclosed in, including, in audible proximity, the M74 Motorway. The piece contains musical transcriptions of bird calls of the species which populate the reserve, following the variations which occur throughout the calendar year. These bird call motifs make up the basis of the piece. The arrangement of the bird sounds alters to depict the sonic characteristics of each season. In the first section, spring, the birds sing loudly and almost manically. In the summer section, the birds still sing loudly but there is a more relaxed, joyful feel. During the autumn section the sounds become more wild and dangerous and the birdsongs are becoming more sparse. During the winter section there is a lot of silence between the birdsongs and there are very wild sounds. Interspersed with these birdsongs are representations of human interference with nature. One shows a destructive relationship where humans are destroying nature – this uses clashing notes and harsh sounds and the other shows a more harmonious relationship – using broken fragments of a folksong entitled 'Clydes Water'. The piece also makes use of ambient sound and object-based instrumentation (leaves, shells and leather gloves mimicking sounds of wind and flapping bird wings) – suggesting music that exists in closer contact to nature.

The birdsongs from the reserve which you will hear in the piece are arranged: Spring - Teal, Woodpecker, Sand Martin, Nuthatch, Tuft. Summer – Ruff, Green Sandpiper, Black-Tailed Godwit. Autumn – Redwing, Lapwing, Kingfisher, Snipe, Fieldfare. Winter – Waxwing, Gadwell, Whooper swan, Widgeon

can we not hear the birds that sing?

for solo violin (2019)

♩=100

SPRING

Lisa Robertson

'sandpaper and leaves'

8va

tap strings with left hand ad lib.

ppp p ppp p pp ff squawky, messy

p soft, blurry

gliss. ord. p f p gentle f p

ff

ff strong

gliss. mp

ff interrupting

*a) Teal
 b) Woodpecker
 c) Sand Martin

35 *8va* *mf*

38 *8va* *ff*

41 *f* *d)

44 *mf*

48 II > *gliss.* *mp* IV (over-pressure) *f* breaking the sound

51 *mf* ord.

54 *8va* *p* *ff*

58 *8va* *p* *ff* breaking the sound

62 'gloves' 'sandpaper and leaves' tap strings with left hand ad lib. *hum* *ppp* *p*

*d) Nuthatch
e) Tuft

68 **SUMMER**

pp
lazy

mf

73

mp *mf* warm, lazy, happy

80

f *mf*

86

mf

*g)

90

f

96

mf

101

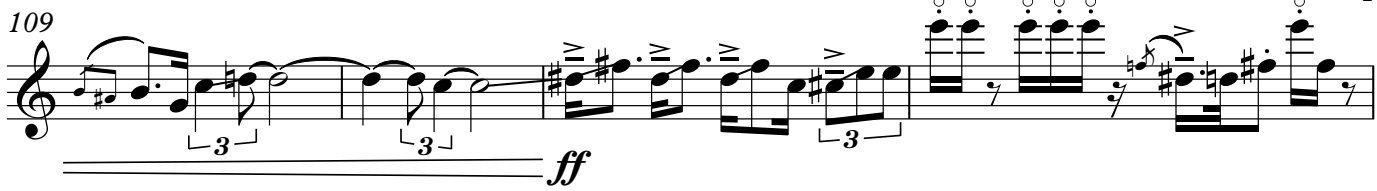
p *pp*

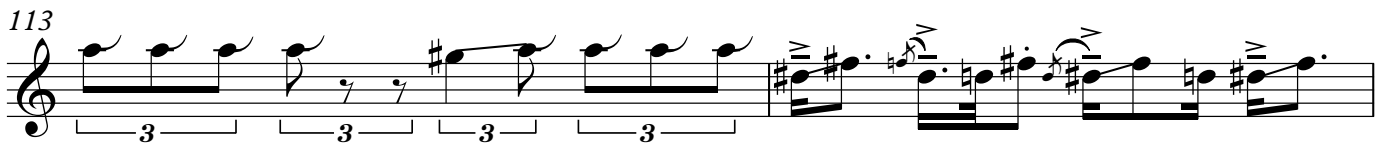
h)

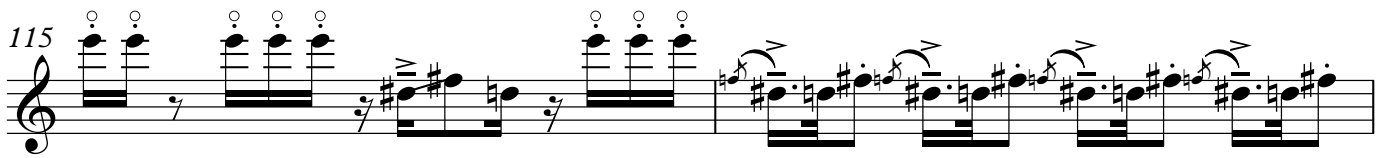
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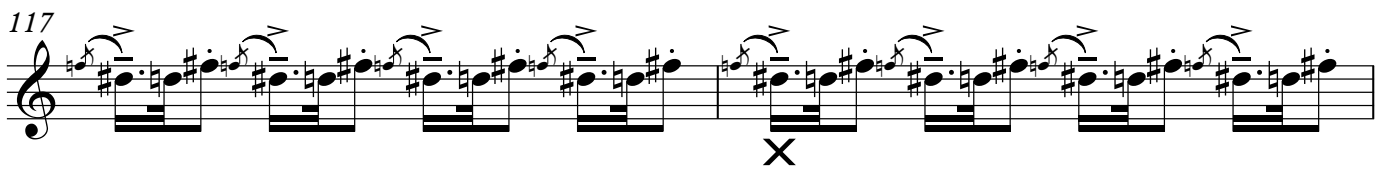
mp

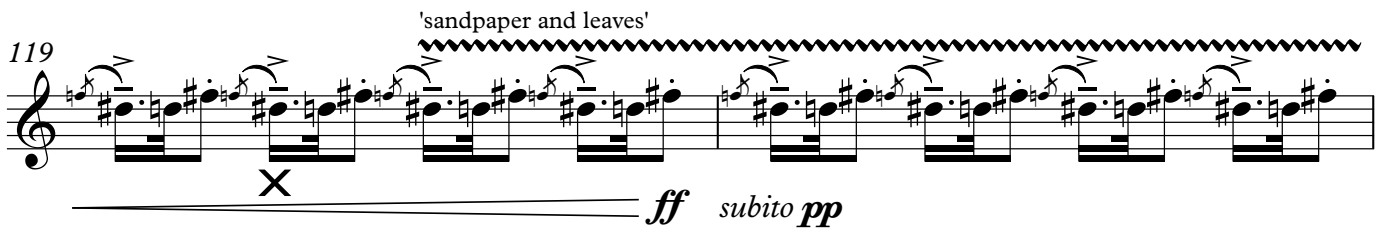
*f) Ruff
g) Green Sandpiper
h) Black-Tailed Godwit

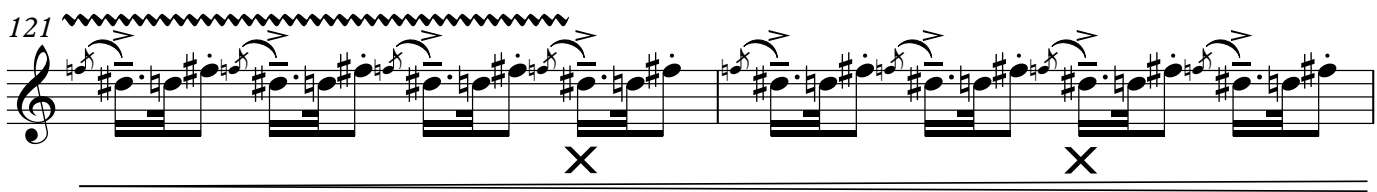
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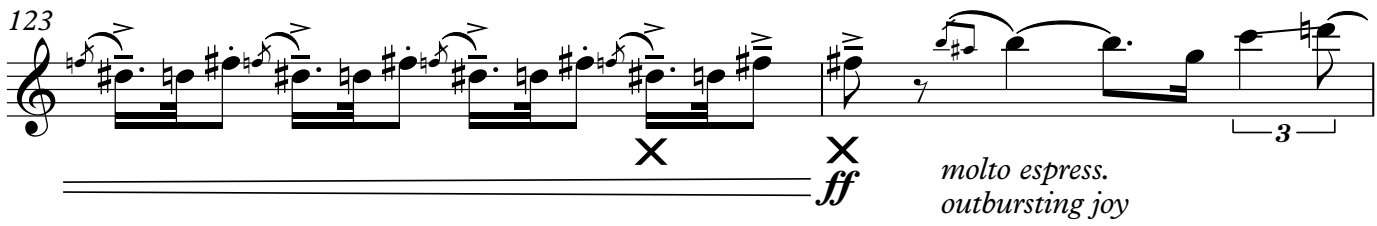
113 

115 

117 

119 

121 

123 

125 

AUTUMN

128 'sandpaper and leaves' 'gloves' heel

134 sul tasto, flaut. heel sul tasto, flaut.

138 heel sul tasto, flaut.

143 heel sul tasto, flaut.

147 heel ord.

152 sul tasto, flaut. heel ord. I

157 sul tasto, flaut. heel ord.

pp *f* *pp* *f* *pp* *mf* *pp*

*h) *pp*

*i) *pp*

*j) *mf*

*other side of bridge, E string

*h) Redwing
 *i) Lapwing
 *j) Kingfisher

161 lateral bow scrape at heel sim. heel sul tasto,⁶ flaut.

muffled *f* *pp*

165 lateral bow scrape at heel sim.

muffled

168 ord. sul tasto, flaut. heel, sul pont. III $\nabla\nabla\nabla\nabla$ (gliss.)

f *p* *shake foot with shell bracelet*

171 sul tasto, flaut. heel sul tasto, flaut.

f *pp* *f* *5* *p*

174 ord. at heel, sul pont. III $\nabla\nabla\nabla\nabla$ (gliss.) ord.

f *mp*

177 at heel, sul pont. III $\nabla\nabla\nabla\nabla$ (gliss.) ord.

f *ff* *f*

180 at heel, sul pont. III $\nabla\nabla\nabla\nabla$ (gliss.) (ord.)

f *f* *f*

184 'sandpaper and leaves' 'gloves'

f *f* *fff*

*k) Snipe
l) Fieldfare

WINTER

190 *8va*

pp pure and clear
(almost towards sul pont)

194 ⁽⁸⁾

p *f* *ff*

200 *8va*

pp pure and clear *mp* *mf* sul pont

204

ff

208 *8va*

p pure and clear *mp* *mf*

212

l.b.s. Barely any pitch

f *pp* Quacking, gentle

*m) Waxwing
n) Gadwell

217 ord. l.b.s. Barely any pitch 8

mf *f* *pp*

222 sul pont

pp pure and clear *f* *ff* rip

226 l.b.s. Barely any pitch

pp Quacking, gentle *mp*

230 l.b.s. Barely any pitch 8va l.b.s. Barely any pitch

pp *p*

233

mp *f*

237 ord.

fff rip *pp*

240 'sandpaper and leaves'

mp *pp*

*o) Whooper swan
p) Widgeon

*wild, energetic,
piercing squeaky core
but lots of airy sound too*

243 arco

mf *mp* *mf*

247

ff *mp*

251

approx. pitches, flaut II

l.b.s. Barely any pitch

mf *ff* *f*

255

approx. pitches, flaut II

sul pont

ff *f* *ff*

259

l.b.s. Barely any pitch

263

fff *ff* *fff*

266

ff

269

fff

hum

calming down

278

mf

282

286

'sandpaper and leaves' (dim. al niente)

hum (dim. al niente)

ppp

294