

Die Vögel [The Birds] by Walter Braunfels

Listening guide

Written for L.A. Opera by Olga C.G. Bezrukova

For this guide, the recording used was:
Braunfels Die Vogel- Conductor Lothar Zagrosek
Recorded by Decca Recording

If you have a chance, a full listening is recommended.

Prologue

CD 1, Track 1- 00:00- 00:50

Opening music to the *The Birds* by Walter Braunfels give us a glimpse of their world before the drama begins. Listen to the violin opening playing a dream like melody. The clarinets and bassoons join in. The violin melody repeats with clarinets and bassoons playing the accompanying harmony. What does this remind you of? Where does it take you? What is the music telling you?

CD 1, Track 1- 3:48- Track 2- 1:05 Nightingale entrance

Listen carefully to the entrance of the Nightingale. There is shimmering in the strings right before she starts to sing. What starts as a vocalization, imitating a bird, develops into a fancy melodic line with many leaps, and challenging slides and trills. A sense of longing can be heard in her passages. She sings:

Nightingale

Ah, ah, ah! My dear friends, greetings.
Today you shall be in our kingdom,
A world where life flows easily for those who are happy,
Where every hour brings new joys,
Where sweet song speaks from a full heart,
And where love is gentle and loyal
In a way that it is not with you -
You poor creatures, who labor night and day,
And yet never see the sky as I see it.

Questions for discussion: What is the music telling you as an audience member? What kind of a bird is this? Does the music support the ideas of what Nightingale is telling the audience? How so?

Act I

CD 1, Track 3- 00:00-01 :10

Good Hope and Loyal Friend, disenchanted with their fellow men, have traveled in search of the Hoopoe, king of the birds. The stage directions in the score indicate that there is rocky mountainous area. with scrubs and a few trees at noon. Good Hope is carrying a daw, and Loyal Friend a crow. In addition to having their hands full, they are covered with all sorts of cooking gear and bags, and naturally are having a hard time climbing over the rocks. This is what they are saying:

Good Hope [Hoffegut]

Do you mean straight ahead, where the trees are standing?

Loyal Friend [Ratefreund]

Go to the hangman! My bird is croaking: "Go back! Back the way we came!"

Good Hope

Why are we wandering aimlessly up and down like this, its not good. We will walk our selves to death!

Loyal Friend

Oh what a fool I was to trust the crow! Now my poor toes have had their nails worn right off with all of this walking!

Good Hope

That scoundrel at the bird market cheated us! How could he say, these two feathered wretches will lead us straight to the Hoopoe, the king of all the Birds.

In the beginning the music portrays their rhythmic walking. Then it seems like the two characters have stopped walking. You can hear the shift in the rhythm? Do you imagine that the two are trying to climb or did they stop to discuss their next step? What is the music telling you?

The two are highly discouraged that there is no visible path. But that does not stop them from complaining about their lot in life. Loyal Friend complains about how the Art was being disfigured on earth. He tells Good Hope that he is searching for a world where Art flourishes. Good Hope in turn tells Loyal Friend that he didn't like how girls mistreated him and that he hopes to find a kingdom where he would find a gentle mate, much more beautiful and affectionate than the malicious humans.

CD 1, Track 3- 4:07-4:26 **Calling out for Hoopoe** Very soon, the two come across something and decide to call out for Hoopoe. Listen how the music describes this scene. Strings are holding the same chord, while the woodwinds

imitate a birdcall. Good Hope sings, imitating a bird, “Hop-hop, Hop-hop.” At the end of his call, Good Hope laughs, and the orchestra follows him in a descending melodic line, picking up where Good Hope left off vocally.

Listen to the call response between the singing and the orchestra. At the end, it almost sounds like an echo.

CD 1, Track 4- 00:00-01:08 In answer to their call, an invisible voice of a bird, Wren, asks them “Who is there? Who calls out from my Master?” The question follows Wren, as she comes out. Can you hear the ascending runs in the orchestra as Wren comes out?

The two travelers introduce themselves to Wren and to the audience. They assure her that they are not bird catchers, nor are they men. Good Hope says that he is a bird from Africa, called Anxiety; and Loyal Friend tells her he is a cockatoo.

Good Hope and Loyal Friend manage to convince Wren to wake her Master, from his siesta sleep.

CD 1, Track 5 00:00-1:58 This is an introduction to Hoopoe, who is also invisible at first. Listen to the music. This is what the characters are singing:

Hoopoe

Open up the forest! I want to come out!
[Musical section as he is coming out]
Where are they who are looking for me?

Loyal Friend

Ha, ha ha, ha!
I must say, I never before saw a finer King—
Tousled, hackly, deloused in a kingly fashion!

Hoopoe

You mock my plumage? Let me tell you,
Once I was also a man, and yet it pleases me
To associate myself with the birds.

Listen to the various colors in the orchestra of the music accompanying different characters? What does the music sound like for Hoopoe? What about Loyal Friend?

The two travelers tell Hoopoe that they are from a city where “Art nourishes the people and the Muses bleed,” and that they want to live in the kingdom of

the birds. Loyal Friend tells Hoopoe that he wants to learn the way of singing, while Good Hope insists that such a melody cannot be learned, but Good Hope desires to be “released from the burden of the Earth.” Hoopoe tells the two travelers that the birds do not have a kingdom. The birds live in an “ethereal region, the realm of all creatures.” Loyal Friend gets an idea...

CD 1, Track 6- 00:00-1:11 This perhaps is one of the key moments in the drama. Listen to the music that accompanies the vocal lines. This is what they are singing:

Loyal Friend

The citizens of the Kingdom of the Birds are destined for high things, for exploits the like of which the world since its very beginnings has never seen, deeds greater than any race has ever witnessed, or achieved, or praised, or even dreamed of.

Hoopoe

So what is it that we're going to do?

Loyal Friend

Build yourselves a city!

Hoopoe

However can we birds build ourselves a city?

Good Hope

Are you quite sane, you old crank?

Loyal Friend

But yes, of course! You ... and your City!

With tremendous walls you must proudly encircle the very ether itself. You must build a great castle in the clouds able to defy the most fearsome storms.

Then you can starve the gods!

Hoopoe thinks that the idea presented to him by Loyal Friend is splendid, but he needs the birds to agree, since he can't do anything without them. Good Hope suggests that Hoopoe summons the birds. Hoopoe replies that it is an easy task. However, in order to do that, he will have to awake the Nightingale and when they both sing together, the birds will hear a united sound of voices, and make their way from far and near to see what is happening.

CD 1, Track 7- 00:00- 1:01 Hoopoe calls out to the Nightingale to wake up. We can hear a sweet melodic line played by the violin as she is waking. She makes brief sounds as she is waking, and then sings a chromatic (using all notes of the scale) descending line, which then skips up and down, just as a

cheerful bird would! (Listen to the last 10 seconds of this track to hear them singing together)

CD 1, Track 8 00:00-0:42 Hoopoe was right, as the birds are flocking and joining in the song. Listen to all the vocal sounds that are imitating the sounds of birds.

Unfortunately for the two travelers, the birds are not happy to see two men among their mist. It takes persistent Hoopoe to get the birds to listen to the idea that Loyal Friend has originally proposed.

CD 1, Track 11 00:00- 00:50 Loyal Friend tells his idea to the birds, playing on their emotions. Listen to this dialogue passage. Notice how Loyal Friend is being accompanied by strings and the birds are accompanied by wind instruments.

Loyal Friend

I am so sorry to see that you Birds are no longer Kings

Birds

Kings, we, rulers over whom?

L.F.

Over all that lives, over me, over him; yes, even, even over Zeus!

Birds

What, over Zeus, what over him?

L.F.

Of ancient race you are, older than Cronos and the Titans...

Birds

This is true, he speaks the truth. We are older than Cronos.

Loyal Friend is successful and paints a beautiful picture of the past golden age, when men revered birds, thus inciting the birds to reclaim their lost glory. Getting everyone into a frenzied excitement, Loyal Friend convinces the birds to honor him as their lord and master. Amid much rejoicing, everyone agrees. Birds embark on building this new city.

ACT II

CD 1, Track 14 00:00-00:30 Remember, the 1st Act started with a solo violin. Braunfels starts out the second act very quietly with almost the whole orchestra. Notice the string section. In this part of the music, string instruments have mutes on the strings. Listen to a shimmering sound in the strings.

CD 1, Track 14 1:55- 2:16 Just as the 1st Act was introduced by the Nightingale; we can hear her sweet voice floating dreamily with the orchestra in the beginning of the 2nd Act. Listen to how Nightingale starts to sing. It is very hard to pin point her first note. It is almost like she is one with nature, as the nature is waking up. Then, her melodic line skips up, and her voice is floating with the orchestra.

CD 1, Track 16 1:15- 3:10 During the night, Good Hope awakes to the sweet voice of Nightingale. Good Hope implores her to come closer and to teach him to see the world through her eyes. Listen to this segment of their dialogue. Notice the swelling strings in the orchestra, adding sweetness and longing to the melodic lines. Additionally, see if you can hear the change in the mood of the music as the Nightingale's line ends and Good Hope begins to sing. This is what they are singing:

Nightingale

Dear Friend, remain as you are! Never will you be able to see what moves my heart so joyfully, what so sweetly transports my soul,
Lost in dreams, to enchanted distances,
Where there is no trace of suffering of violent desire,
And where all creatures feel themselves
Conjoined with the universe.

Good Hope

How so? Is everything I feel, all that troubles this heart of mine, nothing? This wild delight and longing that your song arouses in me?
When I listen to you, Nightingale,
O intoxicated singer, unknown emotions and
Sweetness such as I have never felt rises within me.

CD 1, Track 17 00:00-00:40 Good Hope's declaration of love sways Nightingale and she imparts a kiss to his forehead, granting his wish, sings, "I give you my perception!" At this moment, all shimmers with light and Good Hope can hear the Voices of the Scent Flowers. Listen to how unique and ethereal the music is for the Voices of the Scent Flowers.

Nightingale

I give you my perception!
Voices of the Scent Flowers
We from the South, we create enchantment

The air is filled with the Voices of the Scent of Flowers, and Good Hope surrenders to their enchantment, sinking unconscious to the ground.

CD 2, Track 1 02:55 - 5:08 First light of dawn makes visible the city or the 'kingdom' in the air that can be seen on the horizon. Listen to the majestic trumpet sounds as well to as the glistening sounds of the harp. You can almost imagine the glorious city.

CD 2, Track 2 00:00-00:40 The Chorus of Birds now led by Hoopoe and Loyal Friend sing about their stronghold. Listen to the choral unity in the music. What does it remind you of?

Chorus of Birds

High stands, majestically, what we made,
Our stronghold, unlike any other.
That which we built proudly with strength,
May it be in praise of Unity!
The gods' advice we have abandoned...

Everyone is excited about the wonderful city, and the city's first wedding procession makes its way through the crowd. The mood is shattered when news come in that a stranger has entered through a barricade. The stranger reveals himself as Prometheus and utters a warning.

CD 2, Track 8 00:00- 01:01 Prometheus tells the birds that Zeus is giving them an opportunity to repent. However, proud birds do not want to listen. In no time, the birds see that war is on the horizon. Listen to their united chorus sound, followed by hurried lines of music in the orchestra between the sung lines.

Birds

War! War! War with unheard of power is approaching!
We, the many, finally liberated.
We, the small, but stand united formidably against the gods!

Eagle

I saw Zeus, saw his eye, flashing might and big in the sky!

Prometheus

Woe! Woe to you! Zeus awakens, now nears your punishment!

CD 2, Track 9 00:00-00:35 The Voices of the Winds holler as the storm approaches. The Birds are in terror.

Voices of the Winds

Hei! Hei!

Hoopoe
Oh, what is this?

Voices of the Winds
Hei! Hei!

Birds
Help! O pity, pity! A ghastly storm approaches!

CD 2, Track 9 1:15-3:07 Listen to this musical interlude of the storm. The announcement of Zeus can be heard in the majestic sound of the Trumpet. Everything seems to shatter as he sings. The Voices of the Wind answer his calls. A powerful bolt of lightning strikes the city, which instantly sets it on fire.

CD 2, Track 10 00:00-00:50 Gradually the birds reappear, shattered by what just happened. As before, the Nightingale begins the song, and all of the birds slowly begin to sing of Zeus' great power, "Great is Zeus, great is his Power," and then fly away towards the light.

CD 2, Track 11 00:00-00:25 Loyal Friend resurfaces, clearly putting on a façade as though this was quite an adventure, but he is ready to go home. Listen to how music relates to us his character. This is what he is saying:

Loyal Friend
What craziness, friend.
That was fun; I'm like a drowned rat!
Oh, what stupidity it was to come here, flirt with Hoopoe and to build a city!
In the clouds!
Oh, what horror, oh what stupidity!

CD 2, Track 12 00:00-00:45 Loyal Friends calls Good Hope to come with him, to the comfort of his own home. Good Hope agrees, but listen to the longing in his voice as he sings his parting words.

Good Hope
So has it all happened, and now come to an end?
Over nothing, a Dream, a dream, dreamed to dissolve.

CD 2, Track 12 6:10-6:54 Good Hope reminisces about the time he spent with the Nightingale and as he is leaving, sounds of Nightingale's song is heard.