CITY RECITAL HALL IN ASSOCIATION
WITH GWB ENTERTAINMENT

THIRTEEN WAYS TO LOOK AT BIRDS

With Paul Kelly, James Ledger, Alice Keath and Seraphim Trio

Saturday 1 June 7.30pm
Duration: 1 hour and 25 minutes, no interval
MESSAGE FROM PAUL KELLY
Anna Goldsworthy approached me two years ago about the possibility of doing a show with her trio Seraphim. She suggested a collaboration with our friend James with whom we’d both worked before. Being a big admirer of James and Anna’s work, I needed no second invitation. After a few discussions we decided on our frame – to set poetry about birds to music.

Birds have fascinated poets for centuries, not just for their song and flight but as symbols: of hope, freedom, love, communication, peace, luck – good and bad - and migration. And what better way to honour them than by sending songs out into the air?

We started tossing poems, old and new, back and forth and James and I set to work. Long distance, mostly, sending sketches between Melbourne and Perth with a few face to face, mano a mano sessions.

We recruited Alice Keath for her distinctive singing and instrumental skills on banjo, auto-harp, glockenspiel, percussion and synthesizer. James fired up his electric guitar with effects pedals and at our first workshop in July 2018 we sensed a hybrid winged beast emerging from the pages of our poets via our muscles, brains, hearts and mouths.

We’ve aimed to create an evocative soundscape, each poem its own world, delicate and intimate at times, colossal and grinding at times.

This show would not have been possible without the glorious impression made by birds on the artists. To our great dismay, these wild creatures - our magnificent muses - face threat worldwide. We have many vulnerable bird species that need attention in New South Wales, including the Regent Honey Eater which is impacted mostly by habitat loss. We ask that you please learn more about how you may assist in the protection of birdlife near you - for the sake of the birds and for the beauty they bring.

More information can be found at www.birdingsw.org.au

Composed by James Ledger and Paul Kelly
Piano Anna Goldsworthy
Violin Helen Ayres
Cello Tim Nankervis
Voice and acoustic guitar Paul Kelly
Electric guitar, synthesizer and percussion James Ledger
Vocals, banjo, autoharp, glockenspiel, percussion and synthesizer Alice Keath
Lighting design and operation Christopher Petridis
Sound design and operation Bob Scott
Cover image by John James Audubon
Company biographies can be found at cityrecitalhall.com

BLACK COCKATOOS
Judith Wright
Each certain kind of weather or of light has its own creatures. Somewhere else they wait as though they but inhabited heat or cold, twilight or dawn, and knew no other state. Then at their time they come, timid or bold.

So when the long drought-winds, sandpaper-harsh, were still, and the air changed, and the clouds came, and other birds were quiet in prayer or fear, these knew their hour. Before the first flash lit up, or the first thunder spoke its name, in heavy flight they came, till I could hear the wild black cockatoos, tossed on the crest of their high trees, crying the world’s unrest.

LEDA AND THE SWAN
W. B. Yeats
A sudden blow: the great wings beating still Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill. He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push The feathered glory from her loosening thighs? And how can body, laid in that white rush, But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there The broken wall, the burning roof and tower And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up, So mastered by the brute blood of the air, Did she put on his knowledge with his power Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

BARN OWL
Gwen Harwood
Daybreak: the household slept.
I rose, blessed by the sun.
A horsefiend, I crept out with my father’s gun.
Let him dream of a child obedient, angel-mind-
old no-sayer, robbed of power by sleep. I knew my prize who swooped home at this hour with day-light riddled eyes to his place on a high beam in our old stables, to dream light’s useless time away.

I stood, holding my breath, in urine-scented hay, master of life and death, a wisp-haired judge whose law would punish beak and claw.

My first shot struck. He swayed, ruined, beating his only wing, as I watched, afraid by the fallen gun, a lonely child who believed death clean and final, not this obscene bundle of stuff that dropped, and dribbled through the loose straw tangling in bowels, and hopped blindly closer. I saw those eyes that did not see mirror my cruelty.
TO THE NIGHTINGALE
John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk;
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Pannonian song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves;
And such a one hadacut the heart
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

A BARRED OWL
Richard Wilbur

The warping night air having brought the boom
Of an owl’s voice into her darkened room,
We tell the wakened child that all she heard
Was an odd question from a forest bird,
Asking of us, if rightly listened to,
“Who cooks for you?” and then “Who cooks for you?”

Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,
Can also thus domesticate a fear.
And send a small child back to sleep at night
Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight
Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw
Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.

HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS
Emily Dickinson

‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all—
And sweetest— in the Gale—is heard—
And sore must be the storm—
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm—
I’ve heard it in the chillest land—
And on the strangest Sea—
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb—of Me.

AS IF ALL TIME WERE THEIRS
Instrumental

PROUD SONGSTERS
Thomas Hardy

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales
In bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.

These are brand new birds of
twelvemonths’ growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

MUDLARKING
Instrumental

MURMURATION
Instrumental

A PROUD SONGSTERS

Their tiny torrent of flight
Sounds in the trees like rain
Flicking the leaves to the light—a
Scattered handful of grain,
In bushes
Pip, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.

These are brand new birds of
twelvemonths’ growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

THORNBILLS
Judith Wright

Their tiny torrent of flight
Sounds in the trees like rain
Flicking the leaves to the light—a
Scattered handful of grain,
The thornbills are as little as bees.

I hear in the blowing trees
The sudden tune of their song.
Pray that the hawk not sees,
Who has scanned the wind so long
For his small living food.

Oh let no enemies
Drink the quick wine of blood
That leaps in their pulse of praise.
Wherever a trap is set
May they slip through the mesh of the net.
Nothing should do them wrong.
THE FLY
Miroslav Holub Translated by George Theiner

She sat on a willow-trunk watching part of the battle of Crecy, the shouts, the gasps, the groans, the tramping and the tumbling.

During the fourteenth charge of the French cavalry she mated with a brown-eyed male fly from Vadincourt.

She rubbed her legs together as she sat on a disembowelled horse meditating on the immortality of flies.

With relief she alighted on the blue tongue of the Duke of Clervaux.

When silence settled and only the whisper of decay softly circled the bodies and only a few arms and legs still twitched jerkily under the trees, she began to lay her eggs on the single eye of Johann Uhr, the Royal Armourer.

And thus it was that she was eaten by a swift fleeing from the fires of Estrees.

THE DEATH OF THE BIRD
A.D. Hope

For every bird there is this last migration: Once more the cooling year kindles her heart; With a warm passage to the summer station Love pricks the course in lights across the chart.

Year after year a speck on the map, divided By a whole hemisphere, summons her to come; Season after season, sure and safely guided, Going away she is also coming home.

And being home, memory becomes a passion With which she feeds her brood and straws her nest, Aware of ghosts that haunt the heart's possession And exiled love mourning within the breast.

The sands are green with a mirage of valleys; The palm-tree casts a shadow not its own; Down the long architrave of temple or palace Blows a cool air from moorland scarps of stone.

And day by day the whisper of love grows stronger; That delicate voice, more urgent with despair, Custom and fear constraining her no longer, Drives her at last on the waste leagues of air.

A vanishing speck in those inane dominions, Single and frail, uncertain of her place, Alone in the bright host of her companions, Lost in the blue unfriendliness of space.

She feels it close now, the appointed season: The invisible thread is broken as she flies; Suddenly, without warning, without reason, The guiding spark of instinct winks and dies.

Try as she will, the trackless world delivers No way, the wilderness of light no sign, The immense and complex map of hills and rivers Mocks her small wisdom with its vast design.

And darkness rises from the eastern valleys, And the winds buffet her with their hungry breath, And the great earth, with neither grief nor malice, Receives the tiny burden of her death.

THE WINDHOVER
Gerard Manley Hopkins

I caught this morning morning’s minion, kingdom of daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimping wing

In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing, As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding Stired for a bird,—the achieve of; the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear, Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.

BLACK SWAN
Instrumental

THE MAGPIES
Denis Glover

When Tom and Elizabeth took the farm The bracken made their bed, And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle The magpies said.

Tom’s hand was strong to the plough Elizabeth’s lips were red, And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle The magpies said.

Year in year out they worked While the pines grew overhead, And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle The magpies said.

But all the beautiful crops soon went To the mortgage-man instead, And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle The magpies said.

Elizabeth is dead now (it’s years ago) Old Tom went light in the head; And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle The magpies said.

The farm’s still there. Mortgage corporations Couldn’t give it away. And Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle The magpies say.
CITY RECITAL HALL

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COMING UP

CONCERTOS ON FIRE
City Recital Hall
Friday 7 June 7.30pm
A dynamic new classical concert featuring one of Australia’s most well-known violin concertos: Maninyas by Ross Edwards alongside the premiere of Tale of The Firebird composed by Chloé Charody. Featuring fire-taming violinist Sonja Schebeck and the interdisciplinary acrobatic ensemble The Freestyle Orchestra.

THE IDEA OF NORTH: HARMONIC HISTRIONIC
City Recital Hall and The Idea of North
Thursday 8 August 7pm
Take a deep dive into the history of vocal harmony with world class a cappella quintet, The Idea of North! Explore vocal harmony throughout the centuries, from Gregorian Chants, Bach, Madrigals and the Andrew Sisters!

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