

UNT College of Music

presents

Sounds Modern

performing

John Luther Adams: *songbirdsongs*

April 17, 2024 6:30 pm

Spec's Charitable Foundation Courtyard

songbirdsongs (1974-1980) by **John Luther Adams** (b. 1953)

- *Wood Thrush*
- *Morningfieldsong*
- *Meadowdance*
- *August Voices*
- *Mourning Dove*
- *Apple Blossom Round*
- *Notquitespringdawn*
- *Joyful Noise*
- *Evensong*

Musicians

Anne Dearth Maker and Elizabeth McNutt, piccolo and ocarina

Dave Hall, Nathan Siegel, Greg Beyer, and John Thomas Baker percussion

Andrew May, violin and ocarina

Nicole Ying, celesta

Program Note

These small songs are echoes of rare moments and places where the voices of birds have been clear and I have been quiet enough to hear. Now and then this magic finds me wandering (like one of Harry Partch's Lost Musicians) in search of my own voice.

If I have abdicated the position of Composer (with a capital "C") it is because, like E. E. Cummings: "I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing than teach ten-thousand stars how not to dance." After all, what do we really create but answers to Creation?

This music is not literal transcription. It is translation. Not imitation, but evocation. My concern is not with precise details of pitch and meter, for too much precision can deafen us to such things as birds and music. I listen for other, less tangible nuances. These melodies and rhythms, then, are not so much constructed artifacts as they are spontaneous affirmations.

No one has yet explained why the free songs of birds are so simply beautiful. And what do they say? What are their meanings? We may never know. But beyond the realm of ideas and emotions, language and sense, we just may hear something of their essence. From there, as Annie Dillard suggests, we can begin "learning the strange syllables, one by one."

- John Luther Adams

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