

Christopher Tin

The Lost Birds - An Extinction Elegy

Featuring Voces8 and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra



The planet is so, so fragile. Sometimes even the simplest change has devastating effects on it. And that includes the wildlife. Since time began birds have given man their gifts of beauty, their song, and most important of all, their offering of hope as they demonstrate the power of flight. We are so in love with rising wings that we mimic them in all of our efforts. Sadly, the birds have suffered for so long. It is paramount that we give them the consideration they need and deserve. And before it is too late. Bringing attention to their questionable plight is well-known composer **Christopher Tin** through his latest release **The Lost Birds - An Extinction Elegy**. Read the whole title carefully for it is ominous as well as factual. Mr. Tin presents twelve contemporary and post classical tracks that paints a rather vivid picture of the past, present, and future of the birds. The music is alive with warmth, weightlessness, and promise as voice and instrumentation soar aloft with our avian allies.

When explorers first came to America the most abundant species of bird was the passenger pigeon. They were hunted for their meat and by the turn of the century, they were no more. **Flocks a Mile Wide**, Christopher Tin's opening track reminds us of a time when man came to unfamiliar places and were mesmerized by the sheer number of birds that appeared in the sky. There was a beauty to their flight, their movement, and their numbers. In the U.S. alone, we have lost nearly three billion birds since 1970. Tin uses a bright, majestic theme to begin the experience. The music swells with this imagined flight, rising above the clouds, and watching the earth below.

**The Saddest Noise** is a lament featuring **Voces8**, the renowned British vocal group that acts as the voices of those birds from which there is no longer a song. What we hold so dear in each day, a chirping, a warbling, a sweet cacophony can no longer be heard. The lyrics state:

*"It makes us think of what we had,  
And what we now deplore.  
We almost wish those siren throats  
Would go and sing no more."*

Would we punish ourselves for our own thoughtless cruelty? A truly beautiful requiem is one with many unanswered questions. This is just one song waiting inside of one with a modicum of hope.

Imagine if you will a murmuring of starlings. An uncountable number of starlings that react to an unseen, unheard cue and form and reform again in an anomalous, heavenly dance. Tin's dizzying choral track **A Hundred Thousand Birds** put me immediately in mind of these free form aerialists that dazzle the eyes and the heart with their mysterious antics. Along with the blissful

chorus, the music is a combination of subtle piano, a tangible bass, and strings that flow like grace in a celestial anthem.

Christopher Tin offers a resplendent rest in the orchestral track **Intermezzo**. As we take a breath, we hear bells tolling in the distance, the strings swell with elegance, and the main theme revisits, but this time in the guise of a prayer, a hymn asking humbly for the tender touch of the hand of God in saving the birds, and our planet. There is an innate sadness to this work that affects the heart in a very deep recess. This is my favorite track on *The Lost Birds*.

The next track is called **Thus in the Winter**. Adapted by a poem from Edna St. Vincent Millay, Voces8 croons the remorse of the disappearance of the birds no long upon the branch like leaves. The vocal is high and rising, like a bird in an endless gray sky, then ever higher and out of sight.

*“Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree, Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one, Yet knows its boughs more silent than before.”* - Edna St. Vincent Millay

**There Will Come Soft Rains** is an ever so gentle tune with a soft piano lead, a whisper of strings, and the Voces8 vocal ensemble offering the cleansing power of the rains. Cleaning to the earth and cleaning to our spirit. There is sense of turmoil as uncertainty creeps into our souls, but then the music builds with hope and we are encouraged. Another beautiful tune.

**In The End**, as its name implies, is terribly sad. At less than two minutes long, it manages to impart the despair at realizing the extinction of the birds is a real thing. And it could get much worse without our help. Its lyrics are blatantly straightforward and few.

*“All that could never be said, all that could never be done, wait for us at last, somewhere back of the sun.”*

The final cut is called **Hope is the Thing with Feathers**. The power and refinement of the **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra** comes to its full potential as does the chorus on this tender finale. Tin’s enthralling composition suggests that birdsong, the ultimate gift, needs no words. Just the very sound is that which soothes the soul. And how we need that sound in our lives.

Additional tracks include *Bird Rapture*, *Wild Swan*, *All That Could Never Be Said*, and *I Shall Not See the Shadows*. The overall theme of *The Lost Birds* is one of abject loss. The loss of a friendly chirp, a good morning peep, a flurry of colorful, sun lit wing. One could easily hear every part of this work as a solemn requiem inside Christopher Tin’s incredibly beautiful, yet mournful score. And without skipping a single beat equate it to the works of Mozart or Berlioz. Its ominous splendor is a reminder that change must be the answer. Let us once again take delight in the cry of the wren, the night song of the owls, and the flight of the eagle. Let us change. Highly recommended.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews