
Las aves

Ana Gerhard/Cecilia Varela

Margaret Jull Costa

The book is intended as a children's introduction to classical music. Its theme is birds and birdsong and how birdsong has inspired composers over the centuries. It opens with a short passage about the importance of birds to mankind, as symbols and as a possible spur to human beings creating their own music. It also explains how and why birds sing.

There follow forty 'chapters', each one featuring a particular composer and a particular piece of music, for example, Vivaldi's Flute Concerto 'Il gardellino' or Clément Janequin's 'Le chant des oiseaux'. Each chapter includes a biographical note about the composer, a note about the bird or birds represented in the music, and a listening guide – which instruments are playing, what to listen out for, how the composer has used different instruments to convey the sound or movement of the bird. The accompanying CD contains an extract for each piece of music described. At the back there is a glossary of musical terms and a chronology of the different composers. Each chapter is also beautifully illustrated.

Ana Gerhard is a concert pianist and an enthusiastic propagandist for classical music, and her particular enthusiasm is bringing classical music to school children. This book would work equally well for parents to read and listen to with their children at home or for junior school teachers interested in combining a little zoology with music. My one quibble is that the extracts on the CD are sometimes too short and occasionally truncated. This may be a copyright issue, but could be remedied I think. Otherwise, it could be a very useful and entertaining way of getting children interested in classical music.

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