

Gulls

treble voices a cappella

an aleatoric imitation by Sheena Phillips

"In many ways the wordless Gulls (from Sheena Phillips' Ocean suite) was more musically impressive - as a sonic experience, in this reverberant acoustic, as much as an exercise."

Keith Bruce, Arts Editor, The Glasgow Herald, 9 April, 2008, reviewing a performance by the National Boys Choir in St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh

perusal score
not for rehearsal or performance

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Instructions

In this piece, each singer represents one bird. Even if the whole choir is singing line 1, each singer cries or calls at his or her own speed, and taking as much or as little time in between cries as they like.

First, practice the cries one at a time, using an open 'o' vowel (as in 'Polly'). Start off in unison (following your director) and then freely, each singer choosing their own timing, pace, and dynamics.

Feel free also to vary the vowel towards 'oh' (as in 'Romeo'), or towards 'ee' for an extra piercing quality.

When you are used to the sound of everyone singing one line freely, try mixing two lines. For example, have half the choir sing line 1 (freely) and half sing line 7 (freely).

Some combinations will be harder than others.

One scheme that I think would be effective is written out below, but feel free to write your own schemes and try them out.

Gull performance scheme

Divide the choir into three groups A, B, C

1. Group A starts singing line 1, one at a time, freely (i.e. each person in their own time)
2. At a sign from the conductor, Group B starts singing line 2, freely. Meanwhile, Group A continues on line 1.
3. At a sign from the conductor, Group C starts singing line 3, freely. A and B continue.
4. At a sign from the conductor, Group A drops out of line 1 and takes up line 4 (freely, each person in their own time)
5. At a sign from the conductor, Group B drops out of line 2 and takes up line 5 (freely, each person in their own time)
6. At a sign from the conductor, Group C drops out of line 3 and takes up line 6 (freely, each person in their own time)
7. At a sign from the conductor, Group A drops out of line 4 and takes up line 7 (freely, each person in their own time)
5. At a sign from the conductor, Group B drops out of line 5 and takes up line 8 (freely, each person in their own time)
6. At a sign from the conductor, Group C drops out of line 6 and takes up line 9 (freely, each person in their own time)
7. Gradually fade out

At any time, the conductor may indicate an overall change in dynamic level, and/or an overall change in frequency (e.g. very rushed, or very laid back).

Gulls

an aleatoric piece

Sheena Phillips

1. *etc*

2. *etc*

3. *etc*

4. *etc*

5. *etc*

6. *etc*

7. *etc*

8. *etc*

9. *etc*