

Concert Piece on
El Cant dels Ocells

(‘Song of the Birds’ – ‘Canción de los Pájaros’)

for Violoncello Solo

David Johnstone

EL CANT DELS OCELLS / SONG OF THE BIRDS

for Cello Solo

The old Catalan melody EL CANT DELS OCELLS (translated 'Canción de los Pájaros' in Spanish or 'Song of the Birds' in English) was handed down, generation by generation, during many hundreds of years. However, its fame worldwide (and especially amongst cellists) came about by the countless performances of the theme by the great historical cellist Pau Casals (1876 – 1973), at first as a delightful encore melody, and then (after the coming to power of the Franco regime) as a defiant gesture as a prayer towards a 'free' Catalonia, especially from the town of Prades just across the French border. The special magical and introspective nature of this simple but beautiful melody has survived, indeed one could say has almost grown in popularity, since the passing of the universal cello master.

Normally it is heard instrumentally as a cello solo melody with a very simple piano or string orchestral accompaniment. However, this new version by the cellist/composer David Johnstone entrusts both the lyrical melody and the implied harmonic accompaniment to the possibilities a solo cello. It is a subtle virtuoso edition; *subtle* because the performance should never sound laboured, and the string crossings (especially) should be very lightly executed. That is to say, although this version is indeed much more difficult than the 'usual' version that Pau Casals used to play, one here should *never* forget the essence of innocence and elegance whilst performing Johnstone's creation.

There should finally be a mention that this quite new version of June 2008 was made holding in mind the North-American cello virtuoso Wells Cunningham, whose form of playing Johnstone much admires and praises ...

El Cant Dels Ocells

21 *mp* *Poco* ;

Poco animato

25 *mf*

26 *sim.*

27 *legato*

28 *più tranquillo*

30 *mp* *p*

33 *mp* *p* *pp* *restez*

(con fantasia)

35 *mp* *p* *pp* *restez*

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