

A Robin in the Snow

for solo violin

by Andrew Hugill

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Composition notes

This is one of a set of pieces entitled 'Spectrum Sounds', written for various instruments and other sounds. It was commissioned by the BBC's 'Culture in Quarantine' strand.

Arising out of lockdown, 'Spectrum Sounds' is a collection of seven short pieces of music in the colours of the spectrum. As an autistic man, my listening has several distinctive features: heightened sensitivity to patterns or details that others do not always notice; the ability to decompose music or soundscape into its constituent parts; and the synaesthetic association of colours with certain musical and non-musical sounds. 'Spectrum Sounds' draws out the richness and beauty of sound colours that are associated with the colours of the autistic spectrum.

This piece features the colour red, which has always been associated in my mind with the top string of the violin. The red breast of the robin of course gives another strongly red colouration.

The piece goes through three different states.

The first section reproduces an internalised melody as heard while walking during lockdown and in the whiteness of snow. The music here is an example of hearing details: in this case a tiny piece of piano figuration from 'Erstarrung' from Schubert's 'Winterreise' is slowed down. In a performance this moment would fly past almost unnoticed, but here it seeds the generation of an entirely new melody.

The second section transcribes actual robin calls, which I analysed using a spectrogram. The silences between calls reflect the outdoor environment.

The final section uses the robin's redness and the transformative power of listening to the calls, as the basis for a more free-flowing melody. Now the full redness of the E-string may be heard.

The story of this little piece, then, is how hearing the red robin in a snowbound environment was able to transform my own creative listening.

Production notes

Audio should be close-miked and muffled for the first section, then outdoor reverb applied for section two. This should be fairly heavy, to give the effect of the calls echoing in the trees. The final section can stay outdoors, but the reverb should be toned down - back to a more internalised listening.

A robin in the snow

Violin

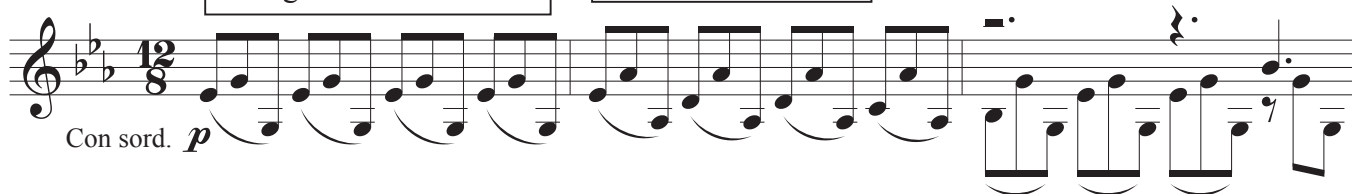
Andrew Hugill

♩ = 80

I am walking in the snow during lockdown.

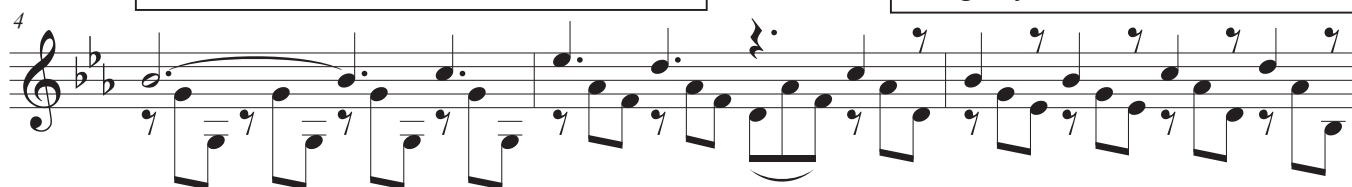
Everything is white.

I can feel that all the sounds are muffled, even if I cannot actually hear them.



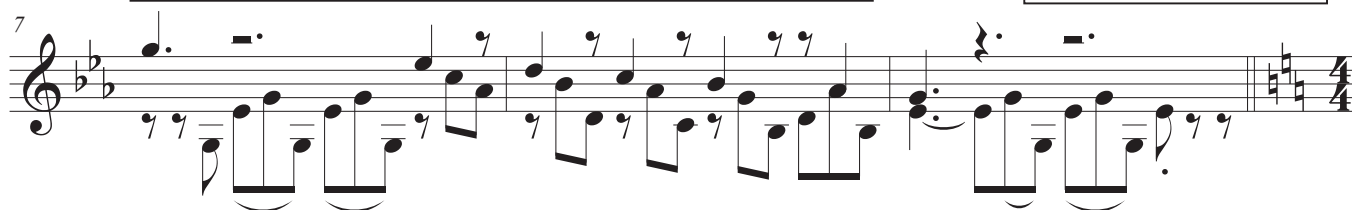
In my mind's ear, a melody begins to form.

It vaguely reminds me of Schubert.

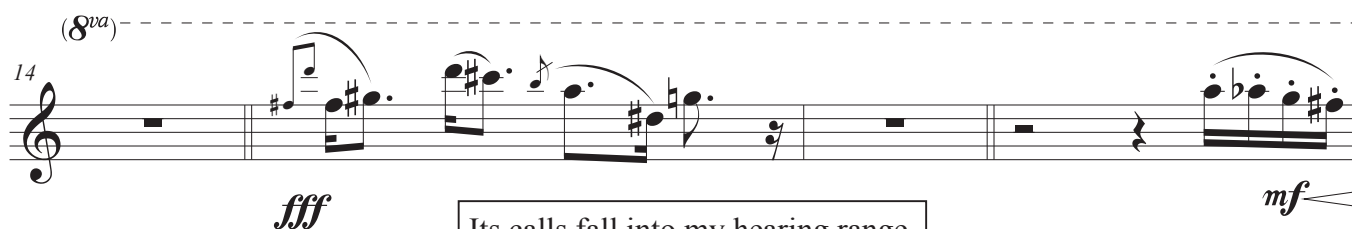


I am hearing this in my own head. An imagined melody.

But wait...what's this?



A robin! Calling loudly in the snow.



Its calls fall into my hearing range.



(8va)-----

23

ff *ff* *f* 3

I can hear it so clearly!

(8va)-----

27

mf *f* *mf* *f* *ff* 3 gliss

(8va)-----

31

ff *f* *ff* >

(8va)-----

36

f

I can hear the calls resonate in the open air.

(8va)-----

42

ff *f* 7 *ff* *ff* 3 quasi gliss.

(8va)-----

46

ff 3 *mf* *f* *ff* 3 jete col legno norm. col legno norm.

(8va)-----

51

ff 3

(8^{va})
jete norm. jete

54

ff *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

The robin flies away.

$\text{♩} = 92$ I continue my walk.

59

Con sord. punta d'arco norm.

pp *p* *ppp* *mp* *mf* *p*

But the robin's song has turned my inner melody...

65

Senza sord. *p* ... red.

pp *p*

It has become more open...

69

pp *mp* *p*

more fluid...

71

ppp *pp*

how my hearing has changed!

73

p *pp*