

**SIOBHAN  
DAVIES  
DANCE**

# **BIRD SONG**

**GCSE Creative Insights**



## **INDEX**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION: Career Context</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>2. BIRD SONG: General Principles</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>3. INITIAL REHEARSALS</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
<b>4. BIRD SONG: A Sequence</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>5. THEMES</b>	<b>Page 21</b>
<b>6. IMPRESSIONS</b>	<b>Page 22</b>
<b>7. CREDITS</b>	<b>Page 23</b>

## **1. INTRODUCTION: CAREER CONTEXT**

*Bird Song* is a full-length piece that was designed to be seen with the audience on all four sides. As such, it is part of a body of Davies's work marked in particular by two previous developments: *Wild Air* (1999), Davies's first full-evening work, and *Plants and Ghosts* (2002), her first piece specifically for a non-proscenium stage. In departing from her customary working methods, Davies was trying to generate new creative challenges for herself, to develop her work by asking different questions, in different contexts and with different collaborators.

Davies often develops ongoing collaborations with composers and designers; but with *Plants and Ghosts* she made a deliberate decision to bring together people she had not worked with before as a way of starting with a 'blanker' canvas. Some of these collaborators went on to work on *Bird Song* (Andy Pink, sound score; Genevieve Bennett, costume).

Underlying these changes of context and format, there remains one of Davies's consistent concerns: her passion for exploring what is inherent in the medium of dance itself – what movement can express, how it can be shaped and phrased – rather than, for example, taking its cue from a musical score or a narrative plot.

The phrasing, composition and qualities of the dancers' movement and performance are, therefore, very important to her work: it is from these that her choreographic ideas emerge, rather than from representing specific characters or situations. In working without a single stage 'front', and without an audience of a certain size at a certain distance from the proscenium, Davies wanted to bring audiences closer to experiencing these details of the performance and composition – to the very texture of dance and movement that she has always valued. And by removing a 'front' to the choreography, she also wanted to enliven the dancers' sense of inhabiting their whole bodies: their performances, seen from all sides, become more three-dimensional, their awareness of both themselves and the audience becomes richer.

In this process, the dancers themselves are integral to the creation of the work. As such, they retain a sense of individuality, of separateness. Even in group sections, Davies is sparing with unison or uniform movement. This is partly a result of her working process: the dancers are involved from

the beginning in creating their roles and in generating choreographic material. And it is partly a result of her own concerns: without delineating straightforward 'characters', she is nevertheless often interested in maintaining a sense of the dancers' individuality within a larger web of interactions.



Siobhan Davies Dance, *Bird Song*, (2004). Photographer: Joel Chester Fildes.  
Dancer: Henry Montes. *Creative Insights* reference: Bird Song

## 2. BIRD SONG: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

### 2.1 *Composition: concentric rings*

Before looking at *Bird Song* in detail, it is important to grasp its overall framework. Before it was even begun, Davies had an image of a stone falling in water and waves (of sound, of movement) spreading out concentrically from that centre point. *Bird Song* has the same format: the centrepiece is the '*Bird Song*' section (the first section to be choreographed) and the other sections ripple out from it. So *Bird Song* consists of a sequence of distinct sections leading up to the central section, following which those sections appear again in reverse order.

The symmetry is not exact – Davies found that she couldn't simply reverse the sections out of the centre the same way they came in. Moreover, it would be labouring the point to repeat each whole section. So she shortened the sections on the 'far side' of the centre, and adapted them choreographically to suit the arc of the piece and to accommodate transitions between the sections. The fundamental idea of concentric layers or ripples emanating from a central moment remains. But when the sections return after the centre point, they are shorter, more overlapping, more coherent, and often set to different music and lighting. So the sections on the 'far side' appear in altered forms and contexts – not simple repeats, but more like echoes or memories.

### 2.2 *Unconscious music and second nature*

Sound is fundamental to the world of *Bird Song*. Davies chose the song of the Australian Pied Butcher Bird as the centre piece, and as she says, the birdsong works on several levels. It is of course a song – a recognisable sequence of musical notes that are repeated, varied and reshuffled, a sequence of sounds and silences. But the bird is not consciously 'making music' - the song is simply 'second nature' to the bird. In singing, the bird is performing a physical action (producing sound from its body), and it is also sending a signal (a display, for example, or marking territory). The song of the bird, then, is simultaneously a form, an action and a communication. In a sense, the 'music' of the song – its form – is an effect of rather than the intention behind the song.

This idea of birdsong has clear links with dance: it too is made of form (composition), action (movement) and communication (meaning); and if sound is a certain measurement of time, then movement also measures space. Rather than simply using the birdsong as a musical score for a dance, Davies was more interested in these underlying ideas that birdsong suggest: of movement as an action that arises viscerally within the body; or as a signal or sequence that passes from one dancer to another.

### **2.3 Worlds of light**

The sections of *Bird Song* present distinct, contrasting environments, not only in terms of movement and music, but also in terms of light and colour. From the beginning, it was decided to use video projection as a light source: by suspending the projector above the stage, it would light the floor from above. Rather than projecting images as if using the floor as a cinema screen, artist David Ward and production designer Sam Collins filmed real lighting (shadows through a window, for example, or trails left by moving torches) and manipulated these on a computer to produce abstract shapes and patterns. These retain the shading and graininess of real lighting, in contrast to the more geometrical, mathematical precision of computer-generated images.

One result of the overhead projection was that it tended to shadow the dancers' faces and obscure their outlines. To offset this, lighting designer Adrian Plaut used lights set above the audience to illuminate the stage from the sides, blending the colours and washes so that the side lighting is effectively indistinguishable from the vertical projected lighting.

Another result was that the costumes needed to be versatile enough to be seen in many lighting states. Costume designer Genevieve Bennett used mostly neutral grey/blue colours that could adapt to different lighting, with added features of bright neon colours and dipped edges to the trousers and tunics to help the dancers stand out.

### 3. INITIAL REHEARSALS

As preparation for the piece, Davies and sound artist Andy Pink listened to many different kinds of music. Davies was immediately struck by the clarity and simplicity of the song of the Australian Pied Butcher Bird, and chose this for the centrepiece.

But the initial rehearsals were improvisations with the dancers using a whole series of different birdsong recordings. Davies was interested in the directness of birdsong, and wanted to explore with her dancers how to respond to a kind of song that is not shaped by 'musical' preparation and phrasing, but has an organic, animal quality to it. The dancers worked on visceral response, on immediacy of action, cutting out elements that looked like preparations or roundings-off of phrases.

Davies, together with composer Andy Pink, then selected many other types of sound as material for the dancers to work with. Though most of the sound was not used in the final piece, these initial sessions with birdsong and with other sound generated much of the movement material for *Bird Song*.



Siobhan Davies Dance, *Bird Song*, (2004). Photographer: Joel Chester Fildes.  
Dancer Gill Clarke. *Creative Insights* reference: Section 2a

## 4. BIRD SONG: A SEQUENCE

Note: Apart from the Beginning, Improvisation, *Bird Song* and End sections, the other sections are numbered according to their distance from the central '*Bird Song*' section (i.e. the nearest section to the centre is named Section 1). Those appearing before '*Bird Song*' are numbered 6a to 1a; those following it are numbered 1b to 6b.

Beginning	6a	5a	4a	3a	2a	1a	Improvisation 1	Bird Song	Improvisation 2	1b	2b	3b	4b	6b	End
-----------	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----------------	-----------	-----------------	----	----	----	----	----	-----

**Note: This numbering is the Siobhan Davies Dance numbering and does not refer to the numbering sequence used by AQA or any other person.**

### ***Beginning***

#### **Choreography**

A driven, chaotic group section for the whole company, in which the dancers are impelled about the stage by the disparate 10-second splinters of sound. The dancers react as if hitting walls of sound, shifting suddenly between directions and levels, often with short, obsessively repeated actions like splinters of motion. It's as if each blast of sound propels them into an entirely different world.

**Sound [credit: 'Infinite Monkeys' by Mannlicher Carcano 3' 50" from the CD 'Musicworks 84' Track 10, All rights reserved 2002 Godot Hall Happening]**

Highly contrasting 10-second fragments of sound, with regular intervals of silence. The sudden shards of sound are entirely distinct, and seem to come from different directions. The uniform eruptions and interruptions of these sound fragments provide a strict metrical framework within which the actual sound and motion varies wildly and unpredictably. The contrast between the rigid framework and the unpredictable content generates a high level of tension and energy.

#### **Projection/lighting**

A spot of light opens the piece like a wayward searchlight leading the dancers on stage. The rest of the lighting is a blueish wash that gradually darkens to lead into the following section.

## **Section 6a**

### **Choreography**

The stage is divided into quadrants, each with a different kind of choreography.

**Quadrant 1:** empty.

**Quadrant 2:** a slow, floorbound duet for Henry Montes and Gill Clarke. They keep close to the floor and to each other, often touching the full length of their bodies. They have a characteristic wing-like movement with their arms brushing against the floor. Rather than imitate a bird's wing directly, the effect is more of a pulse or heartbeat, the visible effect of an internal impulse or breath. The movement is instinctive and exploratory rather than formal or phrased. This is a physically close and emotionally intimate partnering, motivated by slow shifts of weight and support.

**Quadrant 3:** a more separated duet for Sasha Roubicek and Sarah Warsop based on an idea of signalling. It was initially made by Roubicek and Warsop making completely separate phrases, drawing a visual code of these on paper, and then interpreting each other's codes in movement. The movements often indicate the square planes of the quadrant they are in. Roubicek and Warsop are not physically close, nor do they often relate directly to each other; but there is a sense of connection between them through signals and angles.

**Quadrant 4:** a quartet with a more formal composition. The idea of the square is much more to the fore, as is the idea of metered time and measured phrases. The dancers often mark out an arm's length of space around them, as if measuring the territory they occupy.

### **Sound [credit: Andy Pink]**

An exploration of how our ears perceive sound in terms of pitch and volume. Beginning with a low rumble of background 'noise' we then hear muted bell-like chimes. As the background noise continues we hear sounds that gradually become more distinct and recognisable- electronic melody, steam-like hisses, scratches, industrial noises and crashes. A loud electrical sparking leads to the return of the chimes, now clear and distinct, followed by a Bach violin melody that is thin and distant, as if played elsewhere or heard through an old gramophone. The background rumble finally fades.

### **Projection/lighting**

A deep blue wash with white lines that divide the floor into quadrants. In the floorbound duet, the lines do not seem to affect the dancers much: they

are more involved with each other than with the space around them. In the other duet and the quartet, the lit lines more clearly delineate or contain the range of the dancers' actions.

### **Other comments**

The different compositions in each quadrant highlight different qualities in relation to the idea of music, and to space. The first duet, with its physical motivation, emphasises physical action and the intimate connection between the partners. With its signals and responses, the second duet suggests signalling and communication. And the quartet is based on a form. Notice that these reflect the different qualities of birdsong mentioned in the introductory text on 'sound as unconscious music' (see section 2.2).

## **Section 5a**

### **Choreography**

A choreographic accumulation, for the whole ensemble of dancers. The dancers start on the floor in a rough diagonal line, their rocking movements gradually building in force and amplitude as they pull away from and are dragged back towards its axis, as if tugging against an elastic force that keeps pulling them back.

### **Sound [credit: Andy Pink]**

As the violin fades we hear the slow dripping of water beneath a gradual crescendo of rain and other watery sounds. As the sounds build they are abruptly cut to silence. Yet this 'silence' is not silence- we can faintly hear the violin melody as it concludes. As in the Beginning section, the silences are like gaps filled with anticipation, and serve to increase overall tension of the sound. When the sounds resume they increase in volume and intensity of texture. Each time the energy gains momentum it is cut to what is now genuine silence in the score, but in performance we immediately become aware of the sounds of the dancers moving. A new sound of electrical sparking is then introduced producing a loud and dense texture which then grows into a rhythmic drum like crescendo.

### **Projection/lighting**

A series of diagonal lines on the floor, emphasising the diagonal axis in the choreography that seems to exert a magnetic pull on the dancers.

**Other comments**

The key word here is 'volume'. The gradual crescendo of sound is echoed visually in the projected lines on the floor, which – like a crescendo – emphasise a single direction. The dancers cross more and more of these lines as they increasingly move away and back towards this diagonal – so that we get a sense of increasing spatial volume alongside the increasing sound volume.

**Section 4a****Choreography**

Based on an idea of splitting an arc of movement into separate constituent positions – as if seeing a movement through the pages of a flick book. The dancers form an undulating line, the 'head' peeling off and trailing its 'tail' behind it until another frieze is formed – at which moment the head spirals away again so that the line is in constant, restless motion. In this way, the arc of movement is spread out across separate dancers, as showing the audience the units from which the movement is made. It is as if we see only the visible ripples of an underlying wave.

The contrast between movement flow and held positions is another example of a compositional device that generates a high degree of tension.

**Sound [credit: Andy Pink]**

There is a short linking passage of wind and a sine wave melody before this piece begins. The sound consists of an underlying arrhythmic bass pulse overlain with the sounds of various clockwork or electronic devices, along with sharp 'whip-like' or 'hissing' sounds. The overall effect is of a dense, highly charged continuous noise. At the end the sine wave melody returns.

**Projection/lighting**

A pinboard of pulsing dots. Although not readily visible, the dots are in fact a visual grid placed over a film of birds in flight. It is this underlying film that produces the flickering in the dots. This structure replicates the choreographic idea, of a continuous underlying arc of movement being split into discrete units.



Siobhan Davies Dance, *Bird Song*, (2004). Photographer: Joel Chester Fildes.  
*Creative Insights* reference: Section 4a

### **Section 3a**

#### **Choreography**

A variation of the idea in Section 4 (above). Davies was interested in the frame-by-frame photos of people in movement, made by the pioneering photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904). Here she took the idea of movement presented as a series of snapshots, like a stop-motion film. In creating this segment, a single dance phrase was split up and recomposed as a quartet. Consecutive moments in the phrase were spliced into separate movements and spread in sequence across the quartet. So the audience sees the arc of one movement spread across four different dancers – as if a trail of afterimages to a fleeting motion were being held in place rather than vanishing away.

#### **Sound [credit: 'Muybridge' by Andy Pink, all rights reserved]**

Consists solely of the sound of the shattering of a wine glass on impact with the floor. This sound was then edited into tiny slivers of various lengths and interspersed with equally tiny slivers of silence. This creates a stuttering sound but is also a direct parallel to the photographic ideas of Eadweard Muybridge.

**Projection/lighting**

Dark starbursts flash on the neutral white floor, leaving brief afterimages – like astronomical events and their aftershocks registered as short-lived imprints on the floor. The afterimage effect is reflection of the choreographic idea for this section.

The starbursts also echo the dark shadows cast by the dancers as they are lit from above.

**Section 2a****Choreography**

A solo performed by Gill Clarke. Rhythm is the key element to this marvellously detailed, sputtering solo. It was made by asking the dancer to experiment with a particular rhythm, and then to distribute that rhythm around different parts of the body – the hands, elbows, hips, feet, and so on. During the performance, the dancer could then play with that rhythm in relation to the regular rhythm on the sound score, for example by anticipating or delaying her timings.

**Sound [credit: 'Crash' by Andy Pink, all rights reserved.]**

'Crash' is a violent explosion of sound that begins quietly and then builds to a deafening cacophony.

**Sound [credit: 'Scratch' by W Mark Sutherland 2'53" from the CD**

'Musicworks 85' Track 7. Copyright The Barking Boys Music Co: The Socan Foundation]

A looped series of clicks with a distinctive syncopated rhythm.

**Projection/lighting**

A strip of light sweeps from one side of the stage to the other like a scanner line, wiping away the shadow in front of it, and pulling a wash of intense yellow behind, like a sunrise.

**Section 1a****Choreography**

A quartet based on the idea of theme and variation. One dancer, Sasha

Roubicek, has a complete phrase, while the other three, entering one by one, take one aspect of that phrase and use it to make their own movements, with a different imaginary 'music' in their minds. Thus Mariusz Raczynski takes the footwork and develops it into a complex, scattered pattern; Sarah Warsop uses a sustained, long line as if making a melody; and Pari Naderi makes short, isolated positions.

There is a sense here of a code (as used in the third Quadrant of section 6a, see above). Roubicek's phrase acts as a code or template from which the other dancers develop their own movements.

**Sound [credit: Language Universal(1[0])' by Audio.nl 4'19" from the CD 'michaux' Track 1, distributed by Kompakt in Germany.]**

Pulses of sound with repeated rhythmic riffs that gradually become overlaid and increase in density.

#### **Projection/lighting**

A dark blue wash, mottled with patches of grey, like the surface of the moon. The wash gradually fades to a pale grey as the section continues.



Siobhan Davies Dance, *Bird Song*, (2004). Photographer: Joel Chester Fildes. Dancer Pari Naderi  
Creative Insights reference: Improvisation b

## ***Improvisation 1***

### **Choreography**

A group section for the whole company. The dancers had each chosen a particular rhythm from a piece of music or sound, and made movement from that. In performance, they can choose what and where to move, and with whom to interact, as long as they keep that internal rhythm in their bodies. So they are imagining sound score to their dance – but they dance in silence. Whereas in the Beginning section the dancers are driven as a group by external sounds, here the reverse is true: there are internal sounds hidden within each of them.

### **Sound [credit: Andy Pink]**

Mostly in silence, with only the occasional sound of a gust or whistle. The silence here is longer and feels more open than in previous sections, where it is often feels more contained by the sounds surrounding it.

Davies wanted the sections on either side of the centrepiece to be quiet in order to emphasise and offset the central '*Bird Song*'. The silence forms a kind of penumbra around the central section – like the stillness around a sound, or the shadow cast by an object.

### **Projection/lighting**

A few long curved lines slash across the floor, like comet trails. This idea of light leaving a trace is a visual echo of the idea of sound leaving traces on the dancers' movement.

## ***'Bird Song'***

### **Choreography**

This solo, performed by Henry Montes, was the first section to be choreographed. Montes experimented with the idea of movement coming from the lungs, thinking of instinctive reflexes, such as a gasp or a cry, and from this basis began to shape the solo with Davies. They aimed for direct physical action, without ornamentation or decoration. Just as Davies was attracted to the idea of birdsong not as music but as instinctive action or signal, here she wanted Montes to find an interior physical motivation for movement, so that the movement is 'second nature' rather than conscious dance.

Many movements originate from within the thorax. Some of the impulses are caught and blocked, while others ripple outwards from the centre into open-armed stretches. The solo has a sputtering rhythm with long pauses – like gasps or hiccups, with deep breaths in between. It's a natural rhythm that comes from the movement, not a regular or metrical one (as 'dancing to music' often produces).

Montes's brilliantly nuanced performance does seem to come from a place deep within his body – as if arising from the stirrings of life itself within him.

**Sound [credit: 'The Pied Butcher Birds of Spirey Creek' 4'03" on the CD 'Mutawinji/Pied Butchers of Spirey Creek' by David Lumsdaine, Track 1. Copyright Tall Poppies "]**

Davies chose the song of the Pied Butcher Bird as the centrepiece for its clarity and simplicity. It uses clearly defined pitches and sequences of notes. Again the background sounds act as a counterpoint for the main song. The song is calmer and more regular than Montes's solo, overlaying a sense of quietness onto Montes's more juddering body. The song finishes with a note outside the previous pentatonic melody.

### **Projection/lighting**

A simple wash of light, leaving the stage spacious and uncluttered so the audience can register the details of the solo.

## ***Improvisation 2***

### **Choreography**

A shorter version of the first Improvisation.

### **Sound**

Silence is disturbed by a shocking whiplash sound every 60 seconds.

### **Projection/Lighting**

Dark red and black circles appear and fade. The designers positioned and timed these differently each night, to enliven the dancers' sense of a changing environment.

**Section 1b****Choreography**

A shortened version of the earlier section.

**Sound [credit: Andy Pink]**

The whiplash sound becomes continuous and is joined by electronic pulses. The frequency of the whiplash is doubled, then doubled again and is supported by sounds from section 1a. This has the effect of building up the tension and energy again after the calmness of the central section. The sound also makes this section feel like a continuation from the previous one (Improvisation 2) rather than a contrast (as it is in the first half).

**Projection/Lighting**

A plain lighting wash rather than the textured surface used previously.

**Section 2b****Choreography**

The solo is made of the same elements as in Section 2a, but here the dancer chooses only some elements to perform, capturing only certain moments. It seems like a slower, reflective memory of the earlier solo, its gaps and stillnesses filled only by the remembrance of the earlier dynamism.

**Sound [credit: 'When I'm 84' 3'04" on the CD When I'm 84 by Walter Zimmerman, performed by Ian Pace]**

The sound here is softer, calmer and more obviously 'musical' (limpid piano chords, whispering voices). It has a much more emotional quality than the hard-edge clicks of the earlier section.

**Projection/Lighting**

The sweep of light is now diagonal, dragging deep blue behind it. So where the first solo appeared to draw the sun over the horizon, the reprise seems to draw across a blanket of night.

Unlike the earlier solo, this solo stays hemmed in by the scanline of light that opens up and then draws a veil of darkness over the stage, so that the dancer's space seems restricted to a dwindling line on the horizon.



Siobhan Davies Dance, *Bird Song*, (2004). Photographer: Joel Chester Fildes.  
*Creative Insights* reference: Section 3a

### ***Section 3b***

#### **Choreography**

This section is shorter than its earlier versions, and contains more unison. Where that had more sequential shapes, here the 'frames' of movement are composed more in square floor patterns than in consecutive movements. This gives a much more regular, harmonious appearance.

**Sound [credit: Canon BWV 1073' 1'43" from the CD 'Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin Vol 1' by J S Bach Track 13 performed by Lucy van Dael, Baroque Violin, Musica Antiqua, Köln. Naxos 8.554422]**

Solo violin and chamber orchestra, which sets the metre for the choreography. The orchestra's blended sound and fugal composition gives a cohesive, integrated feel to the section, and a more human, intentionally 'musical' quality to the sound.

#### **Projection/Lighting**

A simple wash of light, without the distinctive dark starbursts of the Section 3a.

***Section 4b*****Choreography**

This section also has more unison and coherence than in its first appearance. Rather than a restless, undulating line that moves waywardly about the stage, here the dancers mostly form two lines, and move in more ordered, upright positions than before.

**Sound [credit: Andy Pink]**

Similar to Section 4a but more energetic than before with a new and repeating sound of 'thunder tubes' (a percussion instrument) with more hissing and rattling than before. The section ends with 'vinyl' sounds.

**Projection/Lighting**

The hot red floor projection is slashed by curving comet lines, like those in Improvisation 1.

**Note: there is no return of Section 5a**

***Section 6b*****Choreography**

The two duets from Section 6a reappear in similar form. But the quartet from that section is now replaced by four dancers in a brief return of the Beginning section that travels diagonally between the two duets.

**Sound [credit: Andy Pink]**

Echoes of the musical fragments from the Beginning section accompany the choreographic quartet, and give way to a return of the musical ideas of 'Four Corners 1'. The background 'noise' or rumble returns, along with the bell-like chimes and selected sounds from section 6a. This completes the musical structure that began with section 6a - an 'arch form'.

**Projection/Lighting**

The lighting now divides the stage into two diagonal halves rather than four quadrants.

***End*****Choreography**

As Montes and Clarke continue their floorbound duet from Section 6b, Laurent Cavanna enters. As in many of the sections, there is a sense of dancers occupying different and contrasting worlds. Clarke and Montes still occupy an enclosed environment, enfolded in upon each other, returning to their earlier material. Cavanna on the other hand, has a whole new set of movement that hasn't been seen before in the piece. His arms gesture widely, indicating expanses of space around him. And as with the musical silences in the piano score (see below), he moves between phrased dance movement and simple walking around. The entire stage is much more open to him than it is to Clarke and Montes, who remain interlocked with each other.

**Sound [credit: The Three Traumerei Variations' by John Rea 2'12" on the CD 'Musicworks 84' Track 1 performed by Richard Raymond from 'Las Meninas' Productions Riche-Lieu/Radio Canada Ric 2 9975]**

A recording of a well-known piano piece by Robert Schumann, punctured by silences and gaps. Structurally this section can be seen as making up the weight lost by the 'missing' section 5b or as a structural counterpoint to the Beginning ['Infinite Monkeys'].

**Projection/lighting**

A pinboard of lightly pulsing dots, more spacious and open than in Section 4a.

## **5. THEMES**

*Bird Song* is a complex piece, with many different sections and styles. But a few key themes recur throughout the piece:

### **Presence/absence**

The idea of presence and absence runs through many sections, such as the alternations between sound and silence. Above all, there is the idea of absence not simply as a void, but as something hidden or obscured that leaves an imprint or trace. The gaps between held positions (such as in section 3) reverberate with the arc of a movement phrase; in the improvisation section, there is a hidden music that nevertheless leaves its trace on the movement.

### **Sequencing and signalling**

Just as a sequence of notes in a song 'hold' the whole song, Davies explored how sequences of positions could 'hold' an entire phrase, as in Sections 3 and 4. Signaling is simultaneously a trace and a transformation – witness the second duet in section 6, quadrant 3, where a stimulus (a signal, a code) is transformed as it leaves a trace on another body.

### **Form, action, communication**

These different aspects of music and movement (described in the section above on unconscious music) are also explored in the choreography – and laid out especially clearly in section 6.

### **Different worlds**

*Bird Song* has distinct sections, with different sounds and environments – it often seems as if we're moving through different worlds. In the Beginning section, the music drives the dancers as a group into different states. Elsewhere – as in the improvisation section - the dancers may inhabit the same space, but they are moving to a different beat. So these different 'worlds' can be both external surroundings (the different lighting and sound environments) or different inner worlds (the different rhythms that the dancers imagine to themselves as they move).

## **6. IMPRESSIONS**

Davies characteristically prefers to stimulate her audience with images and sounds rather than to state what her work is 'about' – and Bird Song is no exception. It is not 'about' birds or songs. Instead, it is the result of a series of explorations by Davies, her dancers and collaborators, into some key themes linked to her questions about birdsong, sound, movement and space.

Apart from the central section, there is no birdsong in the piece – indeed most of the sound is electronic, manipulated. Likewise, the lighting and projections have no easy associations with the organic, pastoral world, but instead evoke physics and science.

So too does the composition: the concentric circles leading into a centre point and then spinning out again is like a galaxy turning, or a planetary system. The sections, then, come to seem like distinct worlds that we pass through, witness to different kinds of inhabitants.

Indeed there is ultimately something cosmic about the scale of Bird Song. And at the centre, in Henry Montes' solo, some spark of action arises from a hidden place within his body, like an intimation of life itself.

If the original conception was a kind of compositional symmetry – to move in towards a centre and to reverse back out of it – the final piece has a slightly different trajectory. The sections in the 'leading edge' are more chaotic and more physically dynamic and immediate: they seem to drive forward towards the central section. The returns of these sections are shorter, more cohesive and more reflective, with smoother transitions and less choppy contrasting. So the second half of the piece does not have that same dynamic forward drive, but rather seems to be looking backwards – as if leaving something behind. Or as if it were a selective remembrance of the first half that has smoothed away the harder physical edges, as memory does.

And the final solo introduces a new element altogether. Until this moment, the piece has a self-contained composition, one sequence following the next and then returning in reverse order like an enclosed system. By the introduction of a new, spacious ending leaves another opening: the ending is not simply a closed return to the beginning, but also an opening out to other possible horizons.

## 7. CREDITS

**Choreographer** *Siobhan Davies*

**Assistants to Siobhan Davies** *Deborah Saxon and Sarah Warsop*

**Movement material** *The Company dancers*

**Contributing artist** *David Ward*

**Production design** *Sam Collins*

**Lighting design** *Adrian Plaut*

**Sound score and design** *Andy Pink*

**Costume design** *Genevieve Bennett*

**Dancers** *Tammy Arjona, Laurent Cavanna, Gill Clarke,  
Henry Montes, Pari Naderi, Mariusz Raczynski,  
Sasha Roubicek, Sarah Warsop*

The world première of *Bird Song* was presented at the Island Arts Centre, Lisburn, Northern Ireland on Saturday 3rd April 2004, as part of the EarthQuake Festival of International Dance.

The above biographies can be found on the website [www.siobhandavies.com](http://www.siobhandavies.com). Those listed below do not feature on the website.

### **COLLABORATORS**

#### ***Contributing artist***

**David Ward** attended the Wolverhampton College of Art and the Winchester School of Art. Initially a painter, his work has developed to involve a range of media including light, photography, performance, sound and glass. David has been Artist in Residence at King's College, Cambridge and the Cambridge Darkroom (1991), Harvard University (1994) and Durham Cathedral (1997-98). He was also a research Fellow at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds (1996). David has previously collaborated with Miranda Tufnell, Dennis Greenwood, Sue MacLennan, Catherine Tucker, Bruce McLean and Gavin Bryars. He has recently initiated the symposia *Terpsichore* and *the Architects* for the Royal Academy Forum. Public commissions include works in Lowestoft, Coventry,

Bristol, Wolverhampton and Reading. Recent solo exhibitions took place at BBC Broadcasting House, Sir John Soane's Museum, Kings College Chapel Cambridge.

### ***Lighting Design***

**Adrian Plaut** has been responsible for relighting and design realisation for Siobhan Davies Dance Company productions *Wild Air*, *Of Oil and Water*, and *Plants and Ghosts*. As associate lighting designer to Peter Mumford he has worked on Davies' *13 Different Keys*, *Lautrec* at the Shaftesbury Theatre, *God Only Knows* at the Vaudeville Theatre, and Ashley Page's *This House Will Burn* at the Royal Opera House. Original designs include *Because I Sing for Artangel* and *Channel 4* at the Roundhouse, and for Mark Baldwin Dance Company, Jeremy James & Company, Rambert Dance Company and Australian Dance Theatre.

### ***Sound Score Composer***

**Andy Pink** specialises in sound and music design for arts performances. He began work at London's Royal Court Theatre and progressed to freelance commissions from theatre groups including seminal companies such as *Lumière & Son* and *Station House Opera*. Andy has also covered a broad range of assignments including work with English National Opera, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the first Native American Fashion Showcase at The Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Recent projects include *Escapade*, a Hindi style film extravaganza on the South Bank, with South Asian Arts.

### ***Costumes***

**Genevieve Bennett** has been inspired by the work of artists such as Rebecca Horn, Jean Tinguely and Stelarc. Her training at the Glasgow School of Arts in *Embroidered and Woven Textiles* developed into more conceptual pieces during her postgraduate study at the Royal College of Art. Since then she has established herself as a freelance designer and worked in a variety of contexts, first in the creation of conceptual pieces for the body and for galleries, then as part of the Intelligent Fibres Division at Phillips Design in the development of wearable electronics, and finally in collaboration with fashion designers globally. *Bird Song* is Genevieve's second collaboration with Siobhan Davies Dance Company.

***Dancer***

**Gill Clarke** was a founder member of Siobhan Davies Dance Company. She has performed and collaborated with other choreographers including Janet Smith, Rosemary Butcher, Rosemary Lee and leads masterclasses internationally for professional and dance companies. Gill is a joint NESTA fellow with Fiona Millward, her codirector of Independent Dance, and is currently Head of Performance Studies at Laban.



Siobhan Davies Dance, *Bird Song*, (2004). Photographer: Joel Chester Fildes.  
*Creative Insights* reference: Section 6b