

MUSICAL THEMATIC CATALOG OF WESTERN BIRD SONGS

Arthur A. Birkby
Department of Music
University of Wyoming
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Objectives

I wish to prepare a thematic index, or catalog, of the bird songs of the Rocky Mountain area. This catalog would be based upon a musical premise, the contents of which would list and identify those bird songs which could be notated with the musical symbols of staff notation. The catalog could serve, among others, two chief purposes: one would be as an identification aid to the naturalist who is interested in ornithology; the other would be a source of subject matter for musical composition. The latter consideration has been pursued by the "dean" of French contemporary composers, Olivier Messiaen, who researched bird life throughout his own country, and incorporated bird songs in sophisticated manner in his compositions.

Methods

Using a system of musical shorthand, my procedure is to notate the bird songs as they occur in nature in order to discover not only their melodic and rhythmic content, but also whatever harmonic implications might be revealed as a result of combinations within a species or among a variety of species. Peterson's Field Guide to Western Birds is used to verify visual and aural identification.

Results

My enthusiasm for my project exceeded my knowledge of procedures for nature study in its initial attempt. Armed with new knowledge as a result of conferring with other investigators at the Research Station as well as from reading, I hope to produce more tangible results in future investigation by visiting various appropriate locales during more propitious seasons of the year.

Significance

When such a catalog as described above is completed, its benefit to the bird-watcher could have considerable value. More importantly, perhaps, would be its inestimable source of thematic material for original creative composition that I may want to undertake, as well as being a matter of pure research into the relationship between the science of ornithology and the art of music.