

I Am Phoenix

Perusal Score

Not for performance

AJ Harbison

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Thank you for your interest in my music!

I Am Phoenix

A song cycle on poems for two voices by Paul Fleischman

I. The Wandering Albatross

II. The Actor

III. The Common Egret

IV. The Phoenix

for two female voices and guitar

AJ Harbison

Program Notes

Praised by William Vollinger as “uniquely lovely” and “evocative,” *I Am Phoenix* is a song cycle for two female voices and guitar. The text is from a book of poems for two voices (also called *I Am Phoenix*) by California author Paul Fleischman. They are intended to be read aloud by two readers at once, “the two parts meshing as in a musical duet,” and the text lends itself easily to a musical setting. I first discovered these poems during a music camp in Colorado Springs, Colorado when I was 11 years old, and was immediately struck by them.

During my studies at Cal State Fullerton, my composition teacher suggested I compose a song cycle using an accompanying instrument other than piano, and I took the opportunity to compose a piece based on these poems. *I Am Phoenix* was premiered by Aimée Martineau (voice I), Hannah Freeman (voice II) and Shawn Roah (guitar) at California State University, Fullerton on April 20, 2007.

Performance Notes

All performers read from the score.

This work may be performed with a classical/nylon-string guitar (with optional amplification), or with an amplified electric guitar. If an electric guitar is used, the performer is encouraged to experiment with light effects such as chorus or flange to enhance the tone quality, but the effects should never interfere with the clarity of individual notes and chords or phrases.

Duration

ca. 9 minutes

This work is dedicated to Paul Fleischman, with deep gratitude for trusting a young composer, and for allowing me to realize my childhood dream of setting these magnificent poems to music.

I Am Phoenix

by Paul Fleischman

I. The Wandering Albatross

Behold the wandering
albatross!
Roaming the loney
oceans

Believed to bear
the souls of lost
mariners

wandering albatross
Men lost to
storms and sharks
albatross roaming

arisen

a-soaring

Albatross!
Wandering
albatross
Wandering
wandering
albatross!

Behold the wandering
albatross!

albatross
wandering

wandering
Sailors swept overboard
wandering albatross

albatross roaming
The shipwrecked

The storm-drowned

Albatross!
Wandering
ceaselessly
journeying

Wandering
albatross!

II. The Actor

I

seem

seem

a shrike

I

ape

ape

the gull

I

sing just like

sing just like

the cardinal.

I

mimic

mimic

coots

I

mirror

mirror

crows

I

imitate

imitate

the orioles.

I

copy

copy

wrens

I

echo

echo

owls

I know by heart

I know by heart

the catbird's calls.

But all of that

is simply

sham

sham

For a mockingbird

is what

I *am*.

I *am*.

III. The Common Egret

common

Common!

As if to be so white that
snow

clouds

that milk

rates as ordinary.

Gold

should be so slandered

diamonds

scorned as worthless

rubies

spurned

egrets

common.

They call us

common

egrets.

The injustice!

snow

is filled with envy

clouds

consumed with spite

that milk

should seem molasses

Gold

diamonds

rubies

if common

egrets

are but

common.

IV. The Phoenix

I am Phoenix

Phoenix
everlasting!

I am Phoenix!

Immortal
eternal.

I live in
Arabia

eagle
My feathers are
scarlet,
purple,
golden.

one

there have never been more.

I am my own
daughter
granddaughter
great-granddaughter
I was

will be
my gravedigger.

I gather up twigs of
sweet-smelling spices
and build a nest
on the top of a palm.

Then I wait for noon—

fire
I flap my wings

burst
into flames

I am Phoenix
the fire-bird!
Phoenix

I am Phoenix!
Immortal
eternal
undying.

Arabia
I'm as large as an
eagle

scarlet,
purple.
There is but
one
Phoenix—

I am my own
mother
grandmother
great-grandmother.
I was
my own midwife,
will be

For each time I discover
I'm becoming old

sweet-smelling spices

I climb inside.

and when the sun's hot as
fire

till the twigs beneath me
burst

which I fan
with my wings
and fan

and I

Eight days pass.
The ashes cool.

in the morning,

just as the sun

I rise
from the ashes
and fly upward—

new

my own
mother
grandmother
great-grandmother
and on
and on
until the end of time.

which I fan
with my wings
and fan
and fan
till the fire

are no more.

Eight days pass.

Then, on the ninth day

at dawn,

rises in the east
I rise

a
new
Phoenix,

daughter
granddaughter
great-granddaughter

and on
until the end of time.

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to Paul Fleischman

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I Am Phoenix

I. The Wandering Albatross

Paul Fleischman (1985)

AJ Harbison (2006)

Majestically ♩ = 90

Voice I
Be - hold the wan - d'ring al - ba-tross!

Voice II
Be - hold the wan - d'ring al - ba-tross!

Guitar
VII
CVII
l.v. l.v.
f p mp mf

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7
Roam - ing_ roam - ing the lone - ly o - ceans

al - ba-tross wan - d'ring

l.v. l.v. sim.
mp mf

11
Be - lieved to bear the souls_ of lost mar-i-ners

wan - d'ring_ Sail - ors swept o - ver-board

mf mp p mf mp f mf mp

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15 *mp* *mf* *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *mp*

wan - d'ring al - ba-tross Men lost to storms and sharks

wan - d'ring al - ba-tross

f *sub. mp* *f* *mp* *fp*

18 *mf* *p* *mf* *f* ritard. a tempo

al - ba-tross roam-ing a-ris-en a-soar-ing

al - ba-tross roam-ing The ship-wrecked The storm-drowned Al - ba tross! n.b.

mf *p* *mp* *mf* *mp*

ten. *mp* *mf*

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22 *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Al - ba-tross! Wan - d'ring al - ba-tross Wan - d'ring wan - d'ring al - ba-tross!

Wan - d'ring cease - less - ly jour - ney - ing Wan - d'ring al - ba-tross!

quasi ritard.

CVII VII

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf*

II. The Actor

Allegro ♩ = 150

mf *f* *mf* *f* *mf*

5

seem *mf* *f* I

seem a shrike ape the gull_ *mf* sul B sul G

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9

sing just like *mp* *dolce*

sing_ just_ like the car - di - nal. *p* *mf*

14 *p* *mp*

mim-ic___ coots mir-ror

p *mp*

I mim-ic___ I mir-ror___

f mp

18 *mf* *mp* *mf* molto espress.

crows I im-i-tate He im-i-ols...

mf

I im-i-tate

mf dolce

mf *mp* *mf dolce*

23 *f* *f* *mf*

cop - y I ech - o I know by heart

mf molto espress.

cop - y wrens___ ech - o owls___ I know by heart the

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29

ritard. a tempo

cat - bird's calls.

f *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

33

mf

But all of her sham

mf

is simply sham

p *mf*

37

mf fp *mf* *p*

is what_ I am.

mp *p*

For a mock-ing-bird I am.

p *f* *mf* *f* *mp*

III. The Common Egret

Tempo Rubato ♩ = ca. 90 - 96

p *n* *mf* spoken, indignantly (pitches indicate inflection)

com-mon_ Com-mon!

mp *mf* *mf* spoken, indignantly (pitches indicate inflection)

They call us com-mon_ e - grets... The in - jus-tice!

all chords (3 or more notes) rolled in this movement *mf* *f*

6 *mp* *f* *mf*

As if to be so white that snow clouds_

f *mf* *f*

snow is filled with en - vy clouds con-sumed with

mf *f* *mf*

10 *mp* *f* *mf*

that milk rates as or - di-nar-y_

mf

spite that milk should seem_ mo-las - ses

f *mf*

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15

f *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

Gold should be so slan-dered dia-monds scorned as worth - less

f *mf* *f*

Gold dia-monds

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slight rit. a tempo

19

f *mf* *p* *n.*

ru - bies_ spurned e - grets com - mon. scoffingly

f *mp* *mf* *scoffingly*

ru - bies_ if com-mon e - grets are but com-mon.

f *mp* *mf* *mf*

CVII

IV. The Phoenix

Maestoso, broadly ♩ = 100

f
I am Phoe-nix Phoe-nix ev-er -
f
I am Phoe-nix the fire-bird! Phoe-nix
f

Detailed description: This system contains the first three staves of the piece. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle staff is the vocal line with lyrics, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is Maestoso, broadly, with a quarter note equal to 100 beats. The first staff starts with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *f*. The piano accompaniment features triplet patterns.

6
last - ing! I am Phoe-nix! Im - mor - tal_ e - ter -
I am Phoe-nix! Im - mor - tal_ e - ter - nal_ un - dy - ing.
mf
mf
mp

Detailed description: This system contains the next three staves. The vocal line continues with lyrics. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *mp*. A large watermark "PERUSAL SCORE ONLY" is overlaid on the score.

12
nal_ I live in A - ra - bia
A - ra - bia I'm as large_ as an
mp *mf* *mp*
mp *mf* *mp*
mf

Detailed description: This system contains the final three staves. The vocal line continues with lyrics. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings of *mp*, *mf*, and *mp*. The system ends with a fermata.

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17 *mp* < > *mp* *mf* > *mp* < >

ea - gle My feath-ers_ are_ scar - let, pur - ple, gold - - en.

ea - gle scar - let, pur - - - ple.

mf mp mf mp mf mp

23 *mf* < > *mf* *mp* < > *mf mp*

one there have nev-er been more. I am my own daugh-ter

mf mp mp mf

There is but one Phoe - nix- I am my own moth-er

mf mp mp

30 *f* *mf* *mp*

grand-daugh-ter great-grand-daugh-ter_ I was will

f mf

grand-moth-er great-grand-moth-er_ I was my own_ mid-wife, will

mf f mp

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35 **ritard.**

be my grave-dig-ger. I gath-er up twigs

be For each time I dis-cov-er I'm be-com-ing old

recit. *mf*

VIII VII *mf*

Tempo I *mp*

of sweet-smell-ing spic-es could build a nest on the top of a palm Then I wait for

sweet-smell-ing spic-es I climb in-side.

mp

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39 *f* *mf* *f*

noon— fire I flap my wings burst in-to

and when the sun's hot as fire till the twigs be-neath me burst

mf *f*

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47

mf *p* *mp* *p*

flames which I fan with my wings and fan and I Eight days pass.

mf *mp* *p*

which I fan with my wings and fan and fan and fan till the fire are no more. Eight days pass.

CXII

mp *mf*

56

mp *mf*

The ash-es cool. In the morn-ing, just as the sun

mp *mf*

Then, on the ninth day at dawn, ris-es in the east

p *mp* *mf*

64

f *mf* *mp*

I rise from the ash-es and fly up-ward— new my own moth-er grand-moth-er

f *mf* *mp*

I rise a new Phoe-nix, daugh-ter grand-daugh-ter

VII

ff *fff* *mf*

71 *mf* *mp*

great-grand-moth-er and on and on and on and on and on un - til the end

great-grand-daugh-ter and on and on and on un - til the end

CXII

PERUSAL SCORE ONLY

78 *p*

of time.

of time.

VII

p