

nestival talking birds



Song Cycle

As part of our Nestival celebration of Talking Birds' 30th anniversary in 2022, we commissioned writers with a connection of one sort or another to the company, to create song lyrics for us.

The brief was pretty open, with writers able to respond to world events or ignore world events entirely, but whichever way it went, we asked them to also reflect upon one or more of Talking Birds' values: Kindness, Brilliance, Impact, Curiosity, Wellbeing and Collaboration.

Composer (and Co-Artistic Director of Talking Birds) Derek Nisbet has set these song lyrics to music and now we are delighted to be able to invite you to hear our Nestival Song Cycle in full for the very first time.

The Sonoplasts

Piano Derek Nisbet

Vocals Amy Kakoura

Violin Simon Chalk

With Special Guest John Bernard

31.3.23

Playlist

Listening Place

Anthony Cropper was the writer on Wanderlust, made for Scarborough Underground Car Park during our 10th anniversary in 2002.

Treasures

Liz Mytton has worked with us on many projects, including Backstage at the Albany, The Female Warrior and Walk With Me. She was also writer in residence at Art for the People, our Citizens' Assembly.

Curiosity Does Not Kill the Cat

Lanaire Aderami was one of the writers we selected for the Humans of Cov commissions.

Build a Garden

Katie (Tom) Walters undertook a Nest Residency, writing a belter of a play - 'Planet Alex' - which is hopefully coming to a theatre near you before too long.

Impact

John Bernard was one of the writers we selected for the Humans of Cov commissions, and The Sonoplasts recently played a set with him for Springboard Festival at the Criterion.

Bonus track: Dream Do Achieve

The Story Keeps On Moving

Craig Stephens has been a friend for a long time, also performing in TBs legendary crowd-pleaser, Trevor Goose and his Dark Night of Lights.

[interval]

Collaboration

Ian McMillan wrote one of five radio play commissions for TBs 'Radio Daze' and the lyrics for 'Breadglove', our stab at a Christmas number one.

The Imaginary Friend

Cath O'Flynn's been a friend for a long time, and "What Was Lost" is arguably one of Derek's favourite books.

The Swimmer

Peter Cann has worked as writer and/or director with TBs on many different projects, including Malady of Migration, Disorder Contained and Ant & Cleo, the Musical.

Stuck Inside My Walls

Yara Richter was one of the writers we selected for the Humans of Cov commissions.

Song Cycle Lyricsheet

Listening Place

Anthony Cropper

Surprise yourself
Talk to your neighbour
Listen to what they say
To be heard
To belong
To be seen
Every brick, every window
Every door, every frame
There's a story just waiting, for an
ear, an exchange

Go on an adventure
Talk to your friend
Listen to what they have done
Those safe shells
Cover stories untold
But brittle we are
Like buildings in neglect
Scratch the surface and see
There's a power in listening
To people, and place
To stories untold, half-remembered,
untraced

Go on an adventure
Talk to your foe
Listen to what they have done
There's always a doorway
Between reluctant arms
Just waiting for your embrace

Together we can mend and surprise
With each breath inspire
Don't let it go, don't let that
chance go

Go on an adventure,
Talk to yourself
Ask what and who you could be
Watch the skies
Watch the stars
Watch the sun come and go
Watch the rain as it falls
Through the darkest of times
There's a story still to be heard
It's never too late
To stand tall and talk
It's never too late
To see the world's possibility

Treasures

Liz Mytton

V1.
Welcome to the garden
Where truth and joy resound
A multi-layered jigsaw built
With treasures underground

V2.
We need you here to witness
When nature lifts its voice
To scribe the ancient whispering
To see the trees rejoice

Pre-chorus

Then stroke your hand across the
grass
The sunrise has arrived!

Chorus

Dig deep, dig deep and you will know
Of secret paths where waters flow
Where endless inspiration grows
And dreams are given birth
Dig deep, dig deep until you find
The seeds that others left behind
The past and present, intertwined
Embedded in the earth

V3.

Ideas abound like seedlings
Away from rot and spoil
Prepare a sharpened pencil
A shovel breaking soil

Pre-chorus

Then stroke your hand across the grass
The sunrise has arrived!

Chorus

Dig deep, dig deep and you will...(etc)

Bridge

And let creating change you
As you let creation reign
Let nature wash away the walls
Then plant your words again

V4.

Bathing in a forest
Absorbing healing sound
Might be the start of symphonies
In octaves green and brown

Alt Chorus

Dig deep to reach the land below
Pick out the rocks, begin to sow
And when you're done, be free to throw
Your caution to the skies

Dig deep, dig deep, put on your gloves
And call their stories from above
Sojourners seeking light and love
Returning is the prize
(It's time to recognise
The garden never dies
The stories always rise)

Curiosity Does Not Kill The Cat

Lanaire Aderami

intro

when i was younger
they said don't ask questions
and when i asked why
they said just sit down

chorus

i always felt like that was unkind
they never let me question their
why
thankfully i found my answers
by playing with words - u can call
that banter
banter
banter
banter
banter

verse 1

they said curiosity killed the cat
i said curiosity's like that hat
you wear in winter or summer
rain or shine
outside and inside
all the time
i won't listen
won't listen to all your lies

that curiosity
curiosity killed the cat

chorus

i always felt like they were unkind
they never let me question their why
thankfully i found my answers
by playing with words - u can call that
banter
banter
banter
banter
banter

verse 2

they said curiosity killed the cat
i said curiosity's like that hat
you wear in winter or summer
rain or shine
outside and inside
all the time
i won't listen
won't listen to all the lies
that curiosity
curiosity killed the cat

outro

when has curiosity
curiosity killed the cat?
when has curiosity
curiosity killed the cat?
when has curiosity
curiosity killed the cat?

Build a Garden
Katie (Tom) Walters

Build a garden on the windowsill
Of the 13th floor apartment that you rent
Houseplants blooming with chlorophyll
In soil you smuggled through cement
Try to breathe in their oxygen
Hope they purify the air while you sleep
Tiny tender-stemmed dissidents
Tendrils yearning for the deep.

It's maybe going to hurt you for a while
The place where you were severed from your stem
But you know how to photosynthesise
And you'll grow again
So lay down roots
Lay down roots.

You don't own the ground beneath your feet
So you buy compost at the supermarket
Heady smell of leaf litter and peat
Dream of pouring it onto the carpet
Because it makes you feel human
Perhaps you could plant yourself in it
Deep down you know you won't do that
Can't afford to lose that safety deposit

It's maybe going to hurt you for a while
The place where you were severed from your stem
But you know how to photosynthesise
And you'll grow again
So cultivate shoots
Cultivate shoots

Bridge

Perfectly cultivated urban greenery
Outside the shopping mall, swelling like a fig
And it sure looks pretty. It sure is beautiful

But it tastes real bitter. Kinda makes you feel sick.
Because this isn't what trees are for.
Let them grow wild, let them grow BIG.
Let them crack through the paving slabs,
Let the forest back in

It's maybe going to hurt you for a while
The place where you were severed from your stem
But you know how to photosynthesise
And you'll grow again, you'll grow again.

It's maybe going to hurt you for a while
The place where you were severed from your stem
But you know how to photosynthesise
And you'll grow again
And bear fruit
Bear fruit.

Impact

John Bernard

Verse 1:

No one can buy you heart, no one can jumpstart
your courage into tiny sparks, and invoke a sense of
bravery to face the fears that ignite your past, the
pain might last for a moment and the worries may be
vast, forcing you to the ropes, with ferocious blows,
thrown with the intent to lay you flat like an open
palm, but you grew up facing odds, even when they
wrote you off, you held up your fist and charged, you
were built to disarm fear, and consider tears as sweet
refreshments to help you march, it's not how many
times you fall but how many times you get back up

Chorus:

It's not enough to just exist and live like this is all
there is

I hope the impact you make will be
loud in the lives you touch and not
just a whisper in the wind

Verse 2:

The gift we take for granted is
purpose, our reason for being, it's
never who can run the farthest
but who can fulfil their purpose,
you can be successful and yet be
unfulfilled, impact is found in the
legacy that we have built, toxic
environments can leave you feeling
hopeless, but look inwardly and
realign your focus,
remind yourself of what you love to
do, for a purpose driven life is
never comfortable, but the end
will be better than the start and
the middle, people with broken
dreams will expect yours to join
the crippled, by telling you it's
impossible, but you need to be a
bird and not a plane, for a bird un-
derstands its natural ability to fly
and just does it, but a plane needs
more than just a pilot to fulfil its
function, your natural abilities will
enable you to soar, so draw, from
the well of your intrinsic value and
fulfil the purpose you were created
for, impact is never about numbers,
but a hunger, to see others
transformed

Chorus:

It's not enough to just exist
and live like this is all there is
I hope the impact you make will be

loud in the lives you touch and not
just a whisper in the wind

This story keeps on moving
Craig Stephens

There's a chord from a piano
That's hoping to be heard.
And a corner of a street
That's waiting to be turned.
There's a scene in the darkness
That's looking for some light.
There are birds on the wire
They're ready to take flight.

CHORUS

This story keeps on moving, round
and round these city streets
Where walls that once were fallen
are shaped into something new.
This story keeps on living, round
and round these city streets
Where bridges over roads below
stretch across the sky blue.
There's a rare old name carved
into stone
We won't let wear away.
And a secret in a drawer
With so much that it could say.

There's a thread for us to follow
It leads us on and on.
There's a photo on a camera
It's the start of a new song.

CHORUS

There's a face across a table
Some one we've yet to meet.
And flashes of rare colour
Lighting days that seem so bleak.

There's a glow from a window
That can make our tired eyes wide.
And a hand in the darkness
Held out to be a guide.

CHORUS

There's a bridge across a river
That's been flowing on through time,
And a tree growing on its banks
Where light and life entwine.

There's a corner of a somewhere
That has always been around,
It just needs faces and voices
To light it up with sound.

CHORUS

There are words written into dust
That will take off on the breeze.
And footsteps on the pavement
That not all of us will see.

There's a voice behind a painted door
That's long since then been closed.
And there's humming in the wires
Where once full power flowed.

CHORUS

There are lives up there above us
Being carried on the wing.
There are calls from the branches
They're inviting us in.

There's a gathering along the line
As the sun begins to set.
And history is driving on
To times we've not seen yet.

This empty page is filling
With a melody that flows,
And if you listen closely
You can follow where it goes,

To a nest by the old canal
That's woven with words and
notes,
Among the bricks and water
It stays steadily afloat.

CHORUS

Collaboration

Ian McMillan

The voice collaborates with the air
The sun collaborates with the moon
The eye collaborates with the ear
And later, much later,
Later, much later
Collaborates with soon, very soon.

Let me help
Unfold that map
So the rivers don't spill;
Find our way
Along the road
And up that steepest hill

I had this idea, this little idea
And it couldn't breathe
But then you gave it
The kiss of life
And we both started
To believe
We all started
To believe
Everybody started
To believe:
We are the ladder
We're all the rungs
Now let's get this song sung!

Can you help
Me build that bridge
Right to the other side?
Find a plan
To share because
We're just here for the ride.

The paint collaborates with the wall
The dance collaborates with the floor
The shore collaborates with the sea
And later, much later
Later, much later
They push through an open door

The imaginary friend

Catherine O'Flynn

'Trust you to have an imaginary friend.' says Dad. 'Typical.'
I carry on making the sandwich.
'When I was your age I was out in the street kicking a ball.'
He says that quite often, like he wants me to be the same as him, but if ever I kick a ball he just shakes his head and says:
'Hopeless.'

'What's his name again?'
'Ibrahim.'
'Ibrahim! Classic. Couldn't be John or Steve or Dave. No. Having an imaginary friend isn't weird enough for you, you have to give him a weird name too. Ibrahim!' And he laughs his laugh which I always think sounds like a car that won't start.

'I mean it'd be bad enough if you were five or six, but you're ten now. You're supposed to have some sense. It's your mother's fault. She babied you - always did, right from the start...'

'But...'

'But what?'

'I suppose...I was a baby at the start.'

'No.' He shakes his head. 'She was hopeless and that's why you're like the way you are. It's one of the reasons your mother and I had to part ways. Difference of opinion on child-rearing.' Dad likes telling me all the reasons why he and mom 'had to part ways'. I thought it was because she left him for Derek, but he never mentions that one.

'Look at you, faffing about with that sandwich, making a right mess. The first time I caught you sneaking off with extra food, I thought it was because you were hungry. Growing boy. Big appetite. But course I was wrong. 'What are you doing with those biscuits?' I said. And what did you say? You looked at me with those big eyes of yours and said 'I'm just taking them up for....oh God...whatshisname again?'

'Ibrahim, Dad.'

'Ibrahim! 'Just taking them up for Ibrahim, Dad' you said!' And he starts laughing again. The car engine turning over and over and never starting.

I leave him in the kitchen and go up to my room. I put the sandwich on the floor by my bed and get out the road atlas. I look up where we're going tomorrow. Dad's an account manager for industrial safety equipment. I'm

not sure exactly what that means except that he has to drive around the country a lot trying to talk to men who are really busy. Usually too busy to talk to Dad, which puts him in a bad mood. In the school holidays, if it's one of his weeks to look after me, I often end up travelling around with him. I know the motorway network pretty well now. Tomorrow we're going to a business park in Kent. Even without looking I know that means M42, M40, M1, M25. M20. It's a long journey but I don't mind, you see some interesting things out on the road. You see some things you wouldn't believe.

The first time I ever heard of an imaginary friend was back in year two. David Gill was pretending to play with a robot called Rocky and Mrs Harper explained to the rest of us. She said lots of children had them and that we weren't to make fun of him for it. She said imaginary friends were very real for some children and they were good for the imagination and for developing something or other and then finished off by saying: 'Isn't that right Rocky?' I remember David looking really confused and saying: 'He's not actually there miss. I was just pretending.'

It's a bit like Dad. I never said Ibrahim was imaginary - it was Dad. It's like he's the one who believe in it all. The truth is that I don't. I only believe in real friends. School friends, friends from my street, friends you find hiding, shivering under a coat on the back seat of your dad's car in a service station in Dover.

The plate of sandwiches slides closer to the bed. A hand reaches out from under the bed and hesitates.
'It's peanut butter.' I say. 'Sunpat.'
'Excellent' Says Ibrahim. 'Much better than own-brand.'

The Swimmer

Peter Cann

In the Sherbourne once he dived for clocks and found a rusted compass pointing East. On the nearest bank the children ran and sang out to the swimmer as they passed.
"Coventry, Volgograd.
These notes are for those on the farther side"
When he stopped, sat him down upon the chilly Volga's misty bank the water that had seeped into his skin dripped down from his fingers to the keys and the smoke from distant cities was entwined and drifted through the melodies he made and drifted through the melodies he made.

Show me the river
he said,
I want to swim,
show me the river and I will find the sea.
Show me the river
he said,

I need to swim,
show me the river and I will find the sea.

In the Garavogue he swam upstream between the wasted fields of blighted crops. In the Shannon's flow he smelled the rot, saw hosts of bootless feet that traipsed the roads. Still he swam, on he swam through rain and gale beside the crowded boat. When he stopped, sat him down upon the filthy Mersey's hostile bank, the water that had seeped into his skin trickled from his fingers to the strings and the anguish of the exiled and the lost echoed in the space between the notes, echoed in the space between the notes.

He jumped into the harbour where the Flower of Angra moored and soaked himself in fado and saudade. He climbed out of the Kara sea when it began to freeze, off Actium he fled the burning boats. He swam along a vapour trail above the shrinking world; on choral voice the Whittle engine rose.

Show me the river
he said,
I want to swim.
Show me the river and I will find the sea.
Show me the river
he said,
I need to swim.
Show me the river and I will find the sea.
Show me the river

Through the wine dark sea between the stars
a million, million strokes to Ilium.
In the weightlessness between the stars

the mighty and forgotten swam with him.
When he sat upon the ground to write anew the music of the spheres, when he sat on Avon's bank the mighty and forgotten gathered round all the liquid that had soaked into his skin flooded from his fingers to the staves and a hundred different voices were combined to float away across the boundless sky, to float away across the boundless sky.

Show me the river
he said,
I want to swim
show me the river and I will find the sea.
Show me the river
he said,
I need to swim
show me the river and I will find the sea.

Stuck Inside My Walls

Yara Richter

(Verse 1)
How do I expand when I'm stuck inside my walls?
Why does my heavy head feel so large while the rest of me feels small?
They taught me space is infinite
But refuse to make space, use up my ways to escape.

(Pre-Chorus 1)
Tell me does a phoenix rise from concrete?
I tried to dive into a leaf.
I see it in storm-broken tombstones, that I was Born from a womb, just like you.

(Chorus 1)

Sometimes growth is painful, but it happens very freely.
Sometimes I need rest,
Sometimes I need to speak.

(Verse 2)

Couldn't go out. So I went inside.
Trying to ride my waves, in ups and downs of my whys.
Question marks painting vivid landscapes behind my eyelids.
Meanwhile rage and anxiety fed on my fire.

(Pre-Chorus 2)

Tell me does a grain of salt envy sweet?
I tried to melt into my dreams.
But something keeps pushing me up, get up, up, up, but
Climbing is tiring, I'd rather just be.

(Chorus 2)

Sometimes growth is painful, but it happens very freely
Whether or not I want it to, I grow me and we grow we us.
Sometimes I need rest, sometimes I need to speak.
It all falls into one, and life may just be being.

(Outro)

I lift my face towards the sky
Strain my neck, let my head fly
Open my mouth wide
Kiss everything through a smile.
Heard the birds talking, they urged my feet to walk
Into another step, words came out of my body
Out of the soul of the universe.
Maybe the whole purpose of this earth is in this...

About Talking Birds

Since 1992 Talking Birds has been producing thoughtful, playful, resonant, mischievous and transformative meditations on people and place. Our work is characterised by a distinctive blend of humour, music and visual flair in venues both conventional and unconventional across the UK and internationally - from the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank, to Kilkenny Livestock Mart; from a cavernous underground car park in Scarborough, to a decommissioned hospital in Coventry, to a giant aluminium whale which swallows up audiences one at a time.

We have created The Nest as a shared hub for Regenerative Creative Practice at heart of a green producing ecology. Within this open and caring environment, we aim to provide opportunities for dialogue and fresh perspectives; help develop and promote empathy, human connection, social and ecological responsibility, and international understanding; and nurture, support and help develop the next generation of artists and theatre makers (particularly via the Nest Residencies and F13 network in Coventry).

Our values (Kindness, Brilliance, Transformation, Curiosity, Wellbeing, Collaboration) combined with our 'six big ideas' (about artist process & support; access & participation; climate conscience; agency, equity & diversity; nurture & resilience) - weave through our work and guide our choices and interactions.

We put accessibility at the heart of our work and are pioneering affordable captioning/audio description with The Difference Engine. We call ourselves 'green theatre-makers' and strive to make responsible choices when making work, conscious of our shared responsibility to fight climate change in order to help ensure a sustainable future for our planet.



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