

Ethan McGrath

# AT THE CRY OF THE FIRST BIRD

*for SATB voices, unaccompanied*

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2010



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## **Introductory comments by the composer:**

As is often the case with my work, this music seemed to naturally grow out of the text—a haunting medieval poem about the death of Jesus Christ. The poem’s enigmatic symbolism and otherworldly affect resulted in what was for me an unusually mysterious and ethereal composition. Some of the inspiration for the work came from Renaissance sources, such as Tudor composers William Byrd and Thomas Tallis. Some of their work, though certainly “ethereal,” contains dissonances that are almost as brash as some of those that I have used here. Another source of inspiration was the prospect of a performance by The Kinge’s Quire, a small ensemble that focuses on Renaissance music and therefore sings with great clarity and minimal vibrato. With that type of choral sound in mind as I composed, I felt unusually free to concoct unusual sonorities and dissonant combinations of notes that I knew such an ensemble could bring to life in a special way.

## **About the composer:**

A composer of diverse influences, Ethan McGrath seeks to write music that will help break down barriers between people and have the potential to convey a depth of meaning to anyone who hears it. A requiem entitled *That They May Rest*, a *Missa Brevis*, and a *Magnificat* are among Ethan’s most significant compositions to date, as well as an anthem called *The tabernacle of God*, which had its premiere at the 2016 Southern Division ACDA Conference. His compositions have been featured in workshops lead by Rodney Eichenberger and have been performed by such groups as the Capitol Hearings in Washington, DC, the Taipei Chamber Singers, and the Choir of Robinson College, Cambridge (England). Ethan earned his bachelor’s degree in composition at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where he studied under Jonathan McNair and Roland Carter, and went on to pursue graduate work in choral conducting at the University of Cambridge under the tutelage of Stephen Layton, Timothy Brown, and Graham Ross, among others. For more information, visit [www.ethanmcgrath.com](http://www.ethanmcgrath.com).

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For The Kinge's Quire  
Gerald Peel, director

# At the cry of the first bird

Lyrics from  
*The Speckled Book, 12th century*  
translated by Howard Mumford Jones

Music by  
Ethan McGrath

Slowly, freely ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 50$ ;  $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 100$ )

Soprano *p*  
At the cry of the first bird They be - gan to

Alto *p*  
At the cry of the first bird They be - gan to

Tenor *p*  
At the cry of the first bird They be - gan to

Bass *p*  
At the cry of the first bird They be - gan to

Piano (for rehearsal only)  
Slowly, freely ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 50$ ;  $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 100$ )

5  
cru - ci - fy Thee, O Swan! *pp*

cru - ci - fy Thee, O Swan, O Swan! *pp*

8  
cru - ci - fy Thee, O Swan! *pp* O Swan, *p*

cru - ci - fy Thee, O Swan! *pp* O Swan, *p*

5  
*pp*

At the cry of the first bird

10 *mp*

Nev - er shall la - ment cease \_\_\_\_\_ be - cause of that. \_\_\_\_\_

O Swan, O Swan, O Swan!

O Swan, O Swan, O Swan!

10

16 *p*

O Swan, O Swan, O Swan,

O Swan, O Swan, O Swan,

*mp*

It was like the part - ing of day from night. \_\_\_\_\_

It was like the part - - - ing of day from night. \_\_\_\_\_

16

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "At the cry of the first bird". The score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 10-15) features a vocal line with lyrics "Nev - er shall la - ment cease \_\_\_\_\_ be - cause of that. \_\_\_\_\_" and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The second system (measures 16-21) features a vocal line with lyrics "O Swan, O Swan, O Swan!" and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The third system (measures 22-27) features a vocal line with lyrics "It was like the part - ing of day from night. \_\_\_\_\_" and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The score is marked with dynamics such as *mp* and *p*. A large watermark "FOR PERUSAL USE ONLY" is overlaid diagonally across the page.

At the cry of the first bird

22 *mf* *poco rit.* *fp* *stringendo* *f* *poco rit.*

O Swan! Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

8 O Swan! Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

8 O Swan! Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

22 *poco rit.* *stringendo* *poco rit.*

27 *a tempo* *ff* *, sub. p*

sore was the suf-fring borne, borne By the bod - y of Ma-ry's Son, \_\_\_\_\_

8 *a tempo* *ff* *, sub. p*

sore was the suf-fring borne \_\_\_\_\_ By the bod-y of Ma-ry's Son, \_\_\_\_\_

8 *a tempo* *ff* *, sub. p*

sore was the suf-fring borne, borne By the bod - y of Ma-ry's Son, \_\_\_\_\_

8 *a tempo* *ff* *, sub. p*

sore was the suf-fring borne, borne By the bod - y of Ma-ry's Son, \_\_\_\_\_

27 *a tempo*

At the cry of the first bird

4

SOLO: *mp* But sor - er still to Him *TUTTI p*

was the grief Which for His

was the grief Which for His

But sor - er still was the grief Which for His

was the grief Which for His

32

*poco rit.* *a tempo piu p* SOLO: up - on His *pp* mo - ther.

sake Came up - on His mo - ther.

sake Came up - on His mo - ther.

sake Came up - on His mo - ther.

sake Came up - on His mo - ther.

sake Came up - on His mo - ther.

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