



Collier, Mike (2017) Singing the World. 26 Aug - 3 Sep 2017, Cheeseburn.

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# SINGING THE WORLD

## A Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn The Stables Gallery 26-28 August and 2-3 September 2017

### Catalogue with a brief description of work in the exhibition

This exhibition was inspired by listening to the Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn – a choir of sixteen birds heard early one morning in May 2016. Together their songs, represented here variously as digitally manipulated sonograms and musical transcriptions, form the basis of this show of screen prints, music, digital prints, relief sculpture, poetry and glass.

1. *The Song of the Wren*

**Mike Collier**

Produced in collaboration with EYELEVEL Creative

Digital print

2017; 100 x 100 cm

For sale: price £500

The circular text in this work is an onomatopoeic representation of the Wren's complex song. For such a small bird it has a remarkably loud voice – Mike's colleague, the natural historian Keith Bowey, calls it 'The Opera Singer of the Bird World'

2. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn (1)*

**Mike Collier**

Produced in collaboration with EYELEVEL Creative

Digital print

2017; 75 x 75 cm

For sale: price £300

The circular text in this piece lists some of the colloquial names for the sixteen birds in our Cheeseburn Dawn Chorus. The names are Northumbrian (or Northern if Mike couldn't find a Northumbrian name). His source was *All the Birds of the Air: The Names, Lore And Literature of British Birds* by Francesca Geenoak.

CHANCIDER – Spotted Flycatcher

TINNOCK – Blue Tit

WOOFELL – Blackbird

CRUSHET – Wood Pigeon

RUDDOCK - Robin

REDSTARE - Redstart

THUMMIE - Chiffchaff

SCOPPIE - Chaffinch

HECKYMAL – Great Tit

MIZZLY DICK – Mistle Thrush  
CUTTY - Wren  
WOOD CRACKER - Nuthatch  
SMOKEY - Dunnock  
PEASWEEP - Greenfinch  
KINGLET - Goldcrest  
THROSTLE – Song Thrush

3. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn (2)*

**Mike Collier**

Produced in collaboration with Geoff Sample and EYELEVEL Creative

Assisted by Tina Webb

One work; sixteen individual frames

Screen print onto glass (kiln-fired) framing pastel on paper

2017; total size 200 cm square

For sale: Price £4500

The sixteen birds here are the ones Mike heard between 4.30 and 7.00am at Cheeseburn in May 2016. The circular images have been loosely adapted from Geoff Sample's sonograms and 'placed' on staves. Running left to right, top to bottom, the birds here are:

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER  
BLUE TIT  
BLACKBIRD  
WOOD PIGEON  
ROBIN  
REDSTART  
CHIFFCHAFF  
CHAFFINCH  
GREAT TIT  
MISTLE THRUSH  
WREN  
NUTHATCH  
DUNNOCK  
GREENFINCH  
GOLDCREST  
SONG THRUSH

4. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn (3)*

**Andrew Richardson**

Digital sonic image, laser cut into Beech Ply

Eight pieces.

On the stairs from top to bottom; Blackbird, Chaffinch and

In the gallery from left to right; Dunnock, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Chiffchaff,  
Goldcrest and Mistle Thrush

2017. Various sizes

For sale

Edition of three; each individual bird £120

These images were created using a specially written digital programme created by Andrew to generate rings from a pre-recorded sound file.

Each shape can be read from the centre outwards - each ring in the shape represents a moment of time in the sound (the song of that particular bird) - the longer the sound then the more rings there are.

The distance between the rings is created by the sound levels of the song - so louder points in the sound create larger gaps - periods of silence are represented by tightly packed rings.

The shape of the ring is a representation of the sound 'spectrum' - a range of frequencies within the sound at a given point in time. 'Spikes' in the ring shape are created at the points in the sound spectrum which have the highest frequency - so low pitches of sounds will create spikes at different points around the ring compared to high pitch sounds

5. *The Dawn Chorus at Cheeseburn* (4)

**Mike Collier**

Produced in collaboration with Alex Charrington, Bennett Hogg and Geoff Sample

Assisted by Rachael Clewlow

Silkscreen on 410gsm Somerset paper

A set of ten pairs of monoprints (each different)

2017; 101 x 100 cm

For sale: price £650 (including CD of music) each or £1200 for the pair

The offer of an exhibition at Cheeseburn this year enabled Mike to realise a long-held ambition to make work based around the dawn chorus. 'For some reason', says Mike, 'this idea was always accompanied by a feeling that the work should be predominantly yellow. I imagined a yellow 'bloom' of colour and rhythm' he says, 'a multi-layered visual choir'.

This is a seven-layered screen-print of the sixteen birdsongs from the dawn chorus.

**Layer one** - background colour (yellow - or blue on Evening Chorus pieces)

**Layer two** - bands of colour; one each for each individual bird song

**Layer three** - a series of hand-drawn then printed staves

**Layer four** - notations of various songs of Blackbird, Robin, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Wren, Chiffchaff, Chaffinch and Great Tit neumatically notated from Geoff Sample's sonograms of the bird songs.

**Layer five** - all of the above with the addition of Dunnock, Nuthatch, Redstart, Blue Tit, Goldcrest, Woodpigeon, Greenfinch and Spotted Flycatcher, again neumatically notated.

**Layer six** (when used) is layer four turned 180 degrees  
**Layer seven** (when used) is layer five turned 180 degrees

There are ten different pairs of prints, developed in collaboration with *Charrington Editions*. Only one pair is displayed here.

6. *The Evening Chorus at Cheeseburn*

**Mike Collier**

Produced in collaboration with Alex Charrington, Bennett Hogg and Geoff Sample

Assisted by Rachael Clewlow

Silkscreen on 410gsm Somerset paper

A set of ten pairs of monoprints (each different)

2017; 101 x 100 cm

For sale: price £650 (including CD of music) each or £1200 for the pair

Geoff, Bennett and Mike explored the subtle differences between the dawn chorus and the evening chorus, which has a more 'laid back', spacious feel to it than the dawn chorus, though the 'choristers' are roughly the same. The idea for a musical and visual pairing of dawn and evening pieces grew from this discussion. Mike settled on blue as the dominant colour for this part of these Evening Chorus prints.

7. ". . . singing every minute high up in a golden-green blossom . . ." \*

**Bennett Hogg**

In collaboration with Mike Collier and Geoff Sample

Music for seven pianos

2017

7 mins

Geoff, Mike, and Bennett spent several days transcribing and refining the digital transcriptions of birdsong. This was originally transcribed into musical notation for contemporary singers. However, there was always a sense that the human voices, singing in chorus, somehow didn't "fit" the images. Bennett explained that:

*Mike's prints operate on a level twice removed from the original birdsong - the digital visualisations, and then the further refining and stylisation of these images into the prints you see on the walls. I decided to do the same, recomposing the original choral music into a complex and multi-layered piano piece (by co-incidence, Mike's prints have seven layers to them, and there are seven pianos overlain in my piece). This extra distance from the original sound of the birds was just what was needed to connect to Mike's images.*

Bennett's score for two voices and piano moves into a slower, more thoughtful and reflective phase as his new piece, accompanying the Evening Chorus print, draws to a close.

- From "The Friend of the Blackbird", by Edward Thomas written in 1911 but published posthumously in *The Last Sheaf*, in 1928.

## 8. *Pre-dawn Light*

### **Ayako Tani**

In collaboration with Mike Collier, Bennett Hogg and Geoff Sample  
Borosilicate glass, heat-shrunk tubes, steel and a lighting unit.  
Special thanks to: Natsumi Jones, Alise Stopina and John Smith  
2017; 1500 cm tall x 100 cm diameter  
For sale: price £6500

The opportunity to show work in the darkness of the Hayloft at Cheeseburn presented the artists with a unique opportunity to represent the transition from night to day, moving from darkness through to light. Ayako's glass chandelier of birdsong signals the dawning of a new day.

Ayako visited Geoff with Bennett and Mike and developed her own set of musical notations for each of the sixteen birds in the Cheeseburn dawn chorus, which she transferred on to glass rods of different lengths. These were then fixed into sixteen glass tubes at the National Glass Centre made to be lit and hung in the Hayloft as a chandelier.

## 9. *" . . . a note touched on the instrument of night . . . " \**

### **Bennett Hogg**

In collaboration with Ayako Tani, Mike Collier and Geoff Sample  
Electroacoustic – birdsong and glass  
2017  
7 mins

The piece of electroacoustic music that accompanies the chandelier in the Hayloft was composed by Bennett. He explains:

*I wanted to create a parallel sound piece for Ayako's chandelier hanging in the Hayloft next to Mike's prints. Because sound travels, it was crucial that this piece was synchronised exactly with the piano music to avoid one sound work interfering with the other. To achieve this, I radically simplified the piano piece into a "skeleton", in which only the absolutely essential notes remained.*

*This skeleton served as a template around which to compose a separate piece, in which the recorded sounds of Ayako's glass are digitally infused with birdsong, transformed, and then recombined with the bell-like original glass sounds to form a gradually changing soundscape that evokes the material of Ayako's chandelier (the glass), but also reintroduces the sound of birds that are encoded into the chandelier itself.*

*In this way, the sound piece and the chandelier use the same materials but in different sensory dimensions. The two pieces - the*

*restored piano piece and its electroacoustic "ghost" in the hayloft - can be heard together, or separately, depending on where you are in the gallery.*

\* From a short essay by Edward Thomas called "Insomnia", published in *The Last Sheaf* of 1928

10. *Dawn Chorus, Cleadon Village*

**Jake Campbell**

Poem laser-printed onto beech wood

2017; 60 x 40 cm

Edition of five; £75 each

Fusing lyricism and a sense of place with a bigger social and political landscape, this poem gently weaves together culture with nature, reflecting and complementing the approach taken by each of the artists in this show.



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