

BELFAST CITY CHOIR

*LITERARY  
LUNCHTIME*

*SONGBOOK*

Published in 2014 by Belfast City Choir  
for performers at *Literary Lunchtime*  
Sonic Lab, Belfast  
Thursday 2nd October 2014

Songbook instructions by John D'Arcy  
Copyright of lyrics lie with sources as credited  
Not for commercial use, broadcast or copying

Printed in Belfast, Northern Ireland

[www.belfastcitychoir.tumblr.com](http://www.belfastcitychoir.tumblr.com)

# *HOW TO USE THIS SONGBOOK*

This songbook contains the music to be performed  
by Belfast City Choir  
at the Sonic Arts Research Centre's Sonic Lab  
2nd October 2014.

Those in possession of this songbook will perform  
as members of Belfast City Choir for the afternoon.

There are ten songs in the songbook,  
each shown on a double-page spread:  
instructions on the left leaf,  
lyrics on the right leaf.

A bell will chime to indicate when  
it is time to change to a different song.

A number on screen shows  
which song should be performed.

Read carefully.  
Listen carefully.

Listen to others.  
Listen to yourself.

Take your time.

# I

*Find a place in the room to sit or stand on your own.*

Slowly breathe in.

Slowly breathe out.

Continue breathing slowly.

When you are ready,

let out a 'ssh' sound each time you breathe out.

Begin to 'ssh' louder as you breathe slowly.

When you are ready,

let out a long hum each time you breathe out.

Begin to hum louder as you breathe slowly.

Let the others hear you.

Continue breathing and humming slowly  
until you hear the chime for the next song.

LYRICS. I

s s h . . .

. . . m m m

# II

*Look around the room.*

*Choose your moments.*

Recite each line in order ;  
personally choosing your manner of speaking  
and the matter of time.

For each line:

breathe inwardly , read inwardly , listen inwardly ,  
look outwardly , listen outwardly , recite outwardly .

LYRICS. II

All this is in your head

Don't walk away in silence

This is not about horizons

This is not about the rhythm of a song line

There are other paths to follow

Everything is about you

N o w

l i s t e n

# III

Take your time performing the lyrics.

Break up words into syllables.

Repeat consonants in rhythms.

Hold vowels for long drones.

Listen to others and compose music from your looping phonemes.

Use the following elocution rules from Ciaran Carson's *Pronunciation Guide* \* to Old Irish orthography:

## Consonants

Initial consonants are pronounced approximately as in English.

C is always hard:

elsewhere, consonants are generally as follows:

b = v

c = g

d = dh, as in English 'then'

g = gh, a soft guttural, like a gargled ch

m = v

t = d

Final d and g are occasionally silent.

## Vowels

a as in English 'pat'

e as in 'pet'

i as in 'pit'

o as in 'pot'

u as in 'putt'

Long vowels, marked with an accent,

á, é, í, ó, ú, are pronounced

awe, ay, ee, owe, oo.

Final e is always sounded.

\* Excerpts from Ciaran Carson's *Pronunciation Guide* preceding his translation of *The Táin*  
Lyrics from *How Sweet the Tongue of the Gael* by Séathrún Céitinn



LYRICS. III

How sweet the tongue of the Gael,

By outside help untainted!

Brightly rings that voice,

A mild mouth's choicest music.

Though Hebrew may be older

And Latin more rich in learning,

Irish owes to neither

A single sound or loanword.

# IV

*Turn to look in  
toward the centre of the room*

this little poem  
sings from the tip  
of many pens  
above Belfast paper -

chirp words across  
the hall in call  
and response: let  
your notes spurt!

Lyrics are from various translations of old Irish poem *The Blackbird of Belfast Lough* by John Hewitt, Thomas Kinsella, Seamus Heaney, Ciaran Carson, David Greene, Frank O'Connor, Donald Murphy, Nollag Ó Muiríle, Máire MacNeill and Gerard Murphy

LYRICS. IV

the little bird  
that whistled shrill  
from the nib of  
    its yellow bill:  
a note let go  
o'er Belfast Lough -  
a blackbird from  
    a yellow whin

The little bird  
Let out a whistle  
From his beak tip  
    Bright yellow.  
He sends the note  
Across Loch Laig  
- a blackbird, a branch  
    A mass of yellow.

The little bird which has  
whistled from the end  
of a bright-yellow bill:  
it utters a note above  
Belfast Lough - a blackbird  
from a yellow-heaped branch.

Across Lock Laig  
The yellow-billed blackbird  
Whistles from the blossomed whin.

The little bird has whistled from the tip  
of his bright yellow beak; the blackbird  
from a bough laden with yellow blossom  
has tossed a cry over Belfast Lough.

What little throat  
Has framed that note?  
What gold beak shot  
    It far away?  
A blackbird on  
His leafy throne  
Tossed it alone  
    Across the bay.

Int én bec  
Int én bec  
ro léic feit  
do rind guip  
glanbuidi  
fo-ceird faíd  
ós Loch Laíg  
lon do craíb  
charnbuidi.

The small bird  
lets a trill  
from a bright tip  
of yellow bill.  
The shrill chord  
by Loch Lee  
of blackbird  
from yellow tree.

The small bird  
chirp-chirruped:  
yellow neb,  
a note-spurt.  
Blackbird over  
Lagan water.  
Clumps of yellow  
whin-burst!

The wee bird  
has let out a whistle -  
from the point of a beak  
bright yellow:  
it sends out a call  
above Lough Laig  
a blackbird from a branch  
yellow-heaped

An t-éan beag  
a lig fead  
de rinn ghoib  
ghlanbhuí;  
caitheann (sé) faí  
os Loch Laoi  
lon de chraobh  
charnbhuí.

# V

*Begin to navigate your way  
slowly around the room.*

It's twenty past one  
In the Sonic Lab. A soundscape  
Clops into the room

Coming perhaps from your voice  
Or the voices of others  
- the sound of High Street, Belfast, 1786.

Use your voice to read or sing  
The printed lyric, or conjure  
Sounds evoked in your head.

Fetch others hanging around and together  
Slowly shape your civic sound,  
Noise and text, tuneful tint.

LYRICS. V

It's twenty to four  
By the Public clock.

A cloaked rider  
Clops off into an entry

Coming perhaps from the Linen Hall  
Or Cornmarket  
Where, the civic print unfrozen,

In twelve years' time  
They hanged young McCracken -  
This lownecked belle and tricornered fop

Still flourish undisturbed

By the swinging tongue of his body.  
Pen and ink, water tint

Fench and fetch us in  
Under bracketed tavern signs,  
The edged gloom of arcades.

It's twenty to four

On one of the last afternoons  
Of reasonable light.

Smell the tidal Lagan

Take a last turn

In the tang of possibility.

# VI

Turn your back to the room.

Do not listen to others.

Navigate your way through the lyrics.

Interpret the typography musically in your own way.

Loud / Quiet

Fast / Slow

Sharp / Smooth

There is no right interpretation.

Lyrics gathered from *Northern Ireland's troubles: The Human Costs*  
by Marie-Therese Fay, Mike Morrissey and Marie Smyth  
and *Belfast Confetti* by Ciaran Carson

LYRICS. VI

The assumption that people  
'get over' such things in time  
is not true.



marks

Not talking about what has  
happened. Thinking too deeply  
about what has happened.

it was raining exclamation

Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the  
explosion



Our own hurt  
blinds us to the  
hurt we have  
inflicted upon  
others. None of  
us can retrieve  
what was lost.

- an asterisk on the map.

Often the needs and  
wishes of one group are  
directly opposite to the  
needs of another group.

----- This hyphenated line, a burst of  
rapid fire...

I was trying to complete a ● ● ● in my head, but it kept ● ● ●

Many individuals and groups have  
a sense of injustice and grievance.

We may  
o n l y  
l e a r n  
from it.

All the alleyways and side-streets blocked with stops and colons.



What is  
My name???

Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A  
fusillade of question-marks.

What will we remember?

# VII

*Turn to look into the centre of the room.*

*Form a circle with other performers.*

Privately choose one lyric for yourself (i, ii, iii, iv or v).

Listen sensitively to your surroundings and to others.

Choose when and how to sing or speak your lyric.

Remember to be sensitive to others.

You may repeat it if you like.

When you have finished your verse,  
step back out of the circle and  
walk to the edge of the room.



LYRICS. VII

i

Death holds the attention

iv

We are speechless

iii

The only honesty is silence.

iv

v

I get down on my knees and do what must be done

Kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son.

# VIII

If you are from Belfast,  
find someone who is not from Belfast.

If you are not from Belfast,  
find someone who is from Belfast.

Find somewhere comfortable to sit together.

With your new acquaintance, read the lyrics on the right.

Discuss your feelings about the lyrics.

If you have feelings about the lyrics,  
recite them for the room.

If you have feelings about someone else's feelings,  
recite them for the room.

So come, keep coming here.  
 We'll recklessly set chairs in the streets and pray for the sun.  
 Diffuse the gene pool, confuse the local kings,  
 Infect us with your radical ideas; be carried here  
 on a breeze from the European superstrate  
 we long to join; bring us new symbols,  
 a new national flag, a xylophone. Stay  
 the festering gap in the shipyard  
 the Titanic made when it sank.  
 Our talent for holes that are bigger  
 than the things themselves

See Belfast, devout and profane and hard,  
 Built on reclaimed mud, hammers playing in the shipyard,  
 Time punched with hole like a steel sheet, time  
 Hardening the faces, ventering with a grey and speckled rime  
 The faces under the shawls and caps:  
 This was my mother-city, these my paps.  
 Of minute sodden haycocks, of ship-sirens' moan,  
 Of falling intonations - I would call you to book  
 I would say to you, Look;  
 I would say, This is what you have given me  
 Indifference and sentimentality

I have returned after ten years to a corner  
 and tell myself it is as real to sleep here  
 as the twenty other corners I have slept in.  
 More real, even, with this  
 history's dent and fracture  
 splitting the atmosphere.  
 And what I have been given  
 is a delicate unravelling of wishes  
 that leaves the future unspoken and the past  
 unencountered and unaccounted for.  
 This city weaves itself so intimately  
 it is hard to see, despite  
 the tenacity of the river  
 and the iron sky; and in its  
 downpour and its vapour I am  
 as much home here as I will ever be.

A city built upon mud;  
 A culture built upon profit;  
 Free speech nipped in the bud,  
 The minority always guilty.  
 Why should I want to go back  
 To you, Ireland, my Ireland

# IX

*Walk slowly around the edge of the room.*

Read each line of lyric in your head  
before speaking or singing it aloud  
to yourself.

Keep walking around the edge of the room  
until you reach the final line.

LYRICS. IX

Happiness is good health and bad memory

And I never learned the name of anything

all I can see are weed-nooked rust-yards

cranes for all terrain

looking towards their unused elders hung  
in sorrow in the dockyards to the east; whether  
in sympathy, or saying up yours, I'm not sure

I've never come down  
since these tracks were laid

cling-wrapped in a thin film of cellophane.

all the features  
fuse into something whole but shifting

No wonder I'm astray, a little bit this way  
and that way

as the missing months and years dredge  
past washed-out slogans,  
sleek towers, ghosted union buildings,  
the river overrunning its own ledge

under drizzled rain

the shifting terrain

I'll never leave here, or come back again.

# X

*Move to a new space in the room.*

*You may sit or stand.*

Read the instructions fully and then act on them in order,  
in your own time:

Look in all directions.

Listen in all directions.

Inwardly recall your performance from start to finish.

Recall one phrase you have sung today  
and sing it aloud just like before.

Close your songbook and leave the room.

[ THIS IS A BLANK PAGE ]

**BELFAST CITY CHOIR**

2014