

StreetBirds

This piece came out of the early morning just outside my apartment, where I'm lucky to have a dawn chorus of street birds helping me greet each day. Many Australians take these birds for granted, I think – these magpies, currawongs, lorrikeets, wattlebirds and others who layer the sunrise hours with song. Having lived in a colder part of the United States, where birds are quiet and fewer, I savour every note (well, maybe not the really early ones). But I'm also acutely aware of how lucky I am to have so many trees in my neighbourhood to feed and protect these birds. And as our human need for housing grows, of how so many places are losing tree after tree – and of what will happen when the birdsong falls to silence.

Wake up! Wake up! Dawn calls
on a pink-rose flush of song
from ruffled-feather-throats.

Wattlebird squawk and lorrikeet cra-a-ak
and an F-sharp currawong glissando,
the opera singer in the gum tree.

Get up! Get up! Vivaldi's songbirds
have nothing on this lot,
screeching summer-spring-autumn-winter
with not a shred of sympathy for shift workers
or hangovers.

Bleary eyes meet beady through a haze of coffee steam
A head cocks, dappled feathers flutter,
and noise transforms into song.

Out on the hard-glare edges of town, though,
where trees are sacrificed to bitumen and money
there's a different song.
A low roar, like a hydra primed with gasoline
The whine of a leafblower
And silence.

Clearing someone's home to build your own
is a tricky choice. Before we decide
to silence the dawn chorus
shall we ask the streetbirds?