

DAN WELCHER

# As Light as Bird from Brier

*Fantasy after Mendelssohn  
for B $\flat$  Soprano Saxophone and Piano*



AS LIGHT AS BIRD FROM BRIER is loosely based on Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which has haunted me since I was nine years old. My parents subscribed me to The Children's Record Guild, and every month a new 78rpm vinyl record would arrive in the mail. They were mostly fairy tales and "kids lit," but in this case it was a very condensed performance of the actual play, with Mendelssohn's music. I loved it immediately, and still do – I saw a performance in 2014 at the Stratford Festival that literally stalks my dreams.

When I was commissioned by saxophonist Stephen Page to compose a work for soprano saxophone and piano two years later, I channeled Mendelssohn as an inspiration: specifically, the *Overture*, the *Scherzo*, the *Intermezzo*, the fairy's song "You spotted snakes with double tongue," and the *Rustics' Dance*. But it's not a pastiche – most of the music is completely my own, though attentive listeners will detect snatches of Mendelssohn's haunting score throughout.

This piece joins MILL SONGS and FLORESTAN'S FALCON among works honoring my favorite 19th-century composers (in those cases, Schubert and Schumann) without ripping them off. As Stravinsky did in his ballet *Pulcinella*, I have borrowed fragments of melody from a much-loved composer, and made a fabric of harmonies and scales that are genetically related to Mendelssohn, but unmistakably Welcher.

In this work, the saxophonist is Puck – skittish, dazzlingly fast, and brilliant in the outer parts, and a mischievous Cupid in the long, central Love Song. (Remember how Puck anoints Titania's eyes with the juice from a magic flower, which causes her to fall in love with Bottom the weaver, who has been bewitched and wears a donkey's head?) The music traces Puck's magic flight, the finding of the flower, Titania's love-scene with Bottom and her fairies, and the rustic players – whose rehearsal of the funniest play-within-the-play in literature is interrupted by Puck's dirty tricks.

I greatly enjoyed the process of writing this piece, and often found myself quite moved even as I was writing it... which rarely happens. Stephen Page, who commissioned the work, is a consummate artist (and a bit of a Puck himself). The title comes from Oberon's final speech in the play:

*Through the house, give glimmering light,  
By the dead and drowsy fire.  
Every elf and fairy sprite  
Hop as light as bird from brier,  
And this ditty, after me,  
Sing, and dance it trippingly.*

— Dan Welcher  
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# As Light as Bird from Brier

Fantasy after Mendelssohn  
for B♭ Soprano Saxophone and Piano

DAN WELCHER

Duration: c. 10'

**Gently, mysteriously** (♩ = 50) **Presto** (♩ = 132)

B♭ Soprano Saxophone

Piano

*pp*

*p*

*p molto leggiero*

Puck's flight: "I'll put a girdle 'round the world in forty minutes!"

*mf* *poco f*

**Freely** (♩ = 72-90)  
(like a hummingbird - nervous, jittery)

*pp sempre* *fantastico, molto rubato*

**In tempo,  
not as fast as before (♩ = 120)**

Musical score for measures 4-10. The upper staff features a melodic line with dynamics *sfz*, *sfz*, *f sub.*, and *più f*. It includes two *poco* markings and two groups of nine notes. The lower staff provides piano accompaniment with a dynamic of *f stinging*.

Musical score for measures 11-13. The upper staff has dynamics *ff* and *f*. The lower staff features a piano accompaniment with dynamics *f cresc.* and *ff*.

**Freely (♩ = 72-80)  
measured....**

Musical score for measures 14-19. The upper staff includes dynamics *p*, *mf*, *pp*, and *p*. It features a melodic line with a *then flighty...* section and a *slow; accel.* section with a sixteenth-note group. The lower staff contains piano accompaniment.

**A tempo; scurrying again (♩ = 120)**

Musical score for measures 20-25. The upper staff has a dynamic of *f* and includes a sixteenth-note group. The lower staff features piano accompaniment with a dynamic of *f*.

17 **poco accel.** **In tempo (♩ = 132)**

*f* *dim.* *mp* *pp*

*sfz* *p*

21

*pp* *mf* *f*

25 **Freely again (♩ = 66-72)** *(measured)* *(flighty)* *slow again*

*p* *pp*

26 **Molto rubato (♩ = 60)**

*p* *mf*

**A tempo** (♩ = 132)

28

*mf* *f*

*poco f*

8va

33

*sfzp* *f*

**With renewed energy, determined**

38

*più f*

8va

*f*

8va

loco

8ba

42

*fp* *f*

46 *tr* *p* *più f* *ff* *mf*

50

54 *fp* *f*

58 *f* *ff* *rall.* *gliss.*

**Boldly, freely (molto rubato)**

62 *poco accel.* *molto rall.*

*passionately!*  
(The magic herb is found.) *p*

67 **Hesitant** (♩ = 60)

*tremulous* *p*

*mf* *very sweetly* *p (non arp.)* *mf*

72

*p* *mf*

76

*p* *fp* *fp*

*p* *mf* *mp* *p*



81 **molto rit.** **a tempo** (♩ = 60)

*fp* *pure and simple*

*p* *più p*

*And.*

85 ♩ = 60

*pp* very tenderly *unhurried* *poco cresc.*

Titania's song: "What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?"

*mf*

90 **poco rit.**

*p* *dolcissimo*

*p* *pp*

95 **Swaying gently** (♩ = 56)

"I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.  
Mine ear is much enamored of thy note."

*mp*

99

*p singing sweetly*

*p*

102

*mf*

*poco f*

105

*f*

*mp*

*mf*

*p*

108

*mf (but still sweet)*

*mf*

*p*