



# FLIGHT:

torn like a rose

A libretto by Ruth Margraff

*Grow wings and feathers for the soul;  
if not, burn all your hopes...*





The premiere of *FLIGHT: torn like a rose* was presented by Peggy Choy Dance in association with Kumble Theater for the Performing Arts, on January 27th and 28th, 2017, in Brooklyn, New York.

The performance was co-sponsored by Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, and made possible by generous funding from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School, Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, and Urban Land Interests.

Produced, directed and choreographed by Peggy Myo-Young Choy

Scenario by Peggy Myo-Young Choy and Ruth Margraff

Libretto by Ruth Margraff

Music by Graham Haynes, in collaboration with Haleh Abghari, with Mathias Kunzli

Dancer-Collaborators: Ze Motion, Ai Ikeda, Lacouir Yancey, Briana Butler Victoria Vikström

Costumes by Andrew Jordan with assistance by Asa Thompson

Video Collage by Andrew Jordan and Grant Worth

Lighting Design by Chris Hudacs

Make-up and Hair by Emanuel Garcia



## INTRODUCTION

*FLIGHT: torn like a rose* is a dance saga with video collage and music, inspired by the 12th Century Persian poem by Farid ud-Din Attar, *Conference of the Birds*. Our performance is an allegorical tale of the world's birds that fly off in search of the Rose of Love Sublime. Before beginning their journey, the birds come upon an Old Man—a street beggar. Appearing insane, he is a seer of love's truth. He is so embittered by society's crass oblivion that he burns himself up. A Phoenix is born from his ashes. Guided by the spirit of the Old Man and the Phoenix, the few surviving birds brave a brutal storm to reach the world's highest mountain, where they are transformed by their surprising discovery. The rose they have fought so hard to find, is none other than the supreme love that is and has always been within their own being from the beginning of time.

At a time when the West is anxious about the Middle East, and many draw boundaries between others appearing to be different from themselves, through *FLIGHT*, I am asking, can we live in a state of deep love in a time of chaos and violence? Despite our thorns of pain, can we feed our own sublime rose of love from within?

This booklet centers on the provocatively beautiful libretto written by Ruth Margraff. I have added staging notes based on our scenarios. Graphics include stills from the stunning video collage by Andrew Jordan and Grant Worth. The video and this booklet have incorporated paintings by Hieronymous Bosch that urge us to enter the ever-surprising world of the imagination. In homage to the world of birds, we include some intriguing facts about particular birds that appear in *FLIGHT*, as well as the starlings that inspired Scene 7, "Birds begin Flight seeking Rose of Love Sublime." Gracie Aghapour drew the wonderful bird drawings and crafted the beautiful booklet cover and layout.

-Peggy Myo-Young Choy

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How is it that we have no king?  
(prologue of Old Man)

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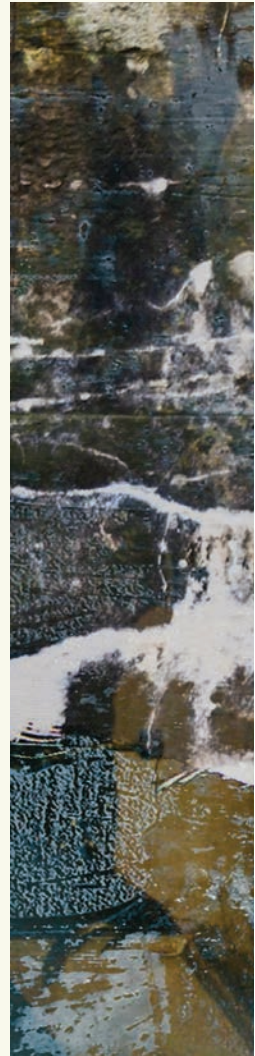
## Scene 1. How is it that we have no king?

*(At rise: OLD MAN appears on street in rags with begging bowl. His soliloquy would be mistaken as that of a lunatic, but OLD MAN is a wise being who understands the truth of all-consuming love. His flaw is that he is embittered and angry at those who cannot see or hear his truth. His song is sometimes incoherent, sometimes lucid.)*

OLD MAN:

How is it that we have no king?  
You say we had a king who let a feather float down  
on a moonless night? Rumors of his grace spread everywhere.  
I thought I knew that king. I bore his secrets  
— back and forth I flew.  
Thorns turned to seed and scorpions  
pierced thru' a thousand veils.  
I wandered mountains, valleys...  
No door open.

Now I'm old and this?  
Is this a king's world?  
Pecking for crumbs between beggars?  
Face down in the begging bowl?  
You bald eunuchs in love with your own beards—  
lust but have no lover!  
Comfort your bedsores,  
fleas by night  
and flies by day...  
What are your feathers for?  
Your wings? To rot and stay?  
Go count the profits of your merchant art!







OLD MAN (cont'd):

You think you're safe with your smug field and cunning?  
You sold your heart to home and trade but never lived!  
Homeless born and homeless leave.

*(OLD MAN is able to calm his own life-force energy still vibrant inside. He regains clarity, an agile warrior—tries to kill off the delusions, expectation and blame of the audience seated before him and the birds watching from their perches. Seeing that his warrior power cannot shake their passivity, he becomes exhausted with his efforts.)*

OLD MAN:

I can't endure this journey any more.  
I grew wings and feathers for the soul—  
now I burn my hopes.

*(OLD MAN decides the only way to stifle the pain of illusion in this world is to sacrifice himself. He sets himself on fire.)*

OLD MAN:

Burn your bed as i do.  
Clothe yourself in pain—  
Heaped ash, weeping  
Spill your soul.  
Melt as i do,  
Burn, burn

*(in Farsi: burn, burn)*

What use are wings  
charred through the  
Phoenix carcass musk of death  
or is my anguish nothing?

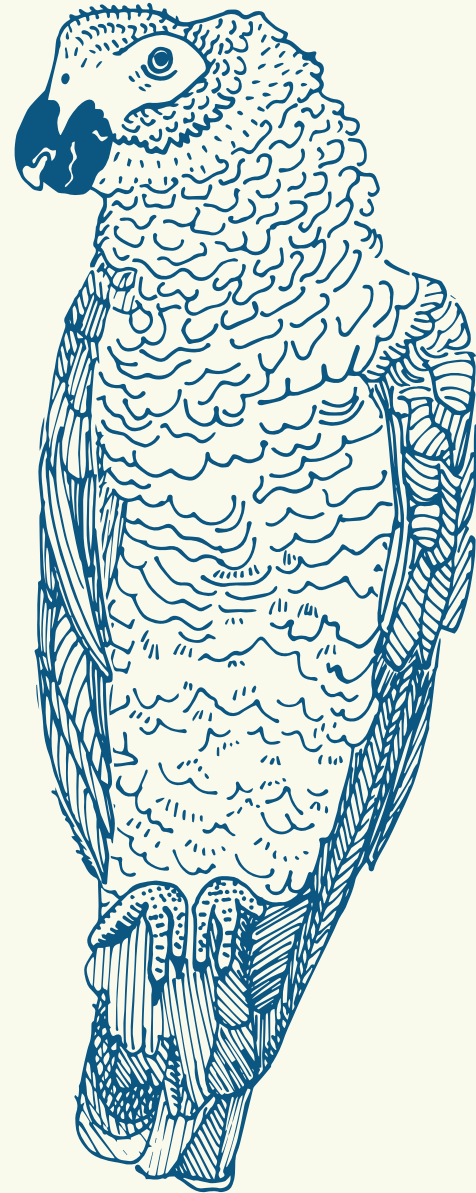






**African Grey Parrots sometimes forage on the ground eating plants, roots and even soil for food. Vulnerable to dangerous predators as ground-feeders, these parrots are keenly vigilant, responding to the slightest movements and any new objects appearing in the environment.**

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OLD MAN (cont'd):

Do you see nothing?  
Hear no agony?  
For nothing have I set myself on fire?  
...stupid beggar birds go back to sleep...  
But if you hear my call,  
pursue my torment!

*(Fearing the fire, BIRDS fly away. OLD MAN is now only a pile of ashes with embers smoldering. Unbeknownst to the BIRDS, a PHOENIX is born out of the OLD MAN's ashes, bringing his spirit of love, grace and beauty back into the BIRDS' world.)*

PHOENIX (foreshadow):

Spin away this world's thread with the next.  
Wait for love on the chill ridge of death,  
where no lips kiss.

## **Scene 2. Parrot has no wish to seek**

*(A PARROT returns to inspect the ash heap. Arrogant from caged security, PARROT boasts a perky, chatty, bright and sanguine exaggerating by repetition. PARROT is joined by PARROT BROTHER who also escaped captivity. The PARROTS are conflicted—happy to taste freedom, yet miss their caged security. Together PARROTS play; reveal their wild nature pressured by seeking.)*





Certain hawks do not always flap their wings, and can use the updrafts or the rising warm air to of the wind to enable them to soar.

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PARROT:

Poor old beggar...ugh...  
I have been caged by heartless kings myself,  
but plumage is the key to beauty  
Sugar in my mouth,  
gold collar, see—  
if I've got gold I'll never lack for friends.  
I'd love to reassert my reach but,  
the journey—makes me thirsty  
so I...have no wish... to seek—  
I have no wish to seek

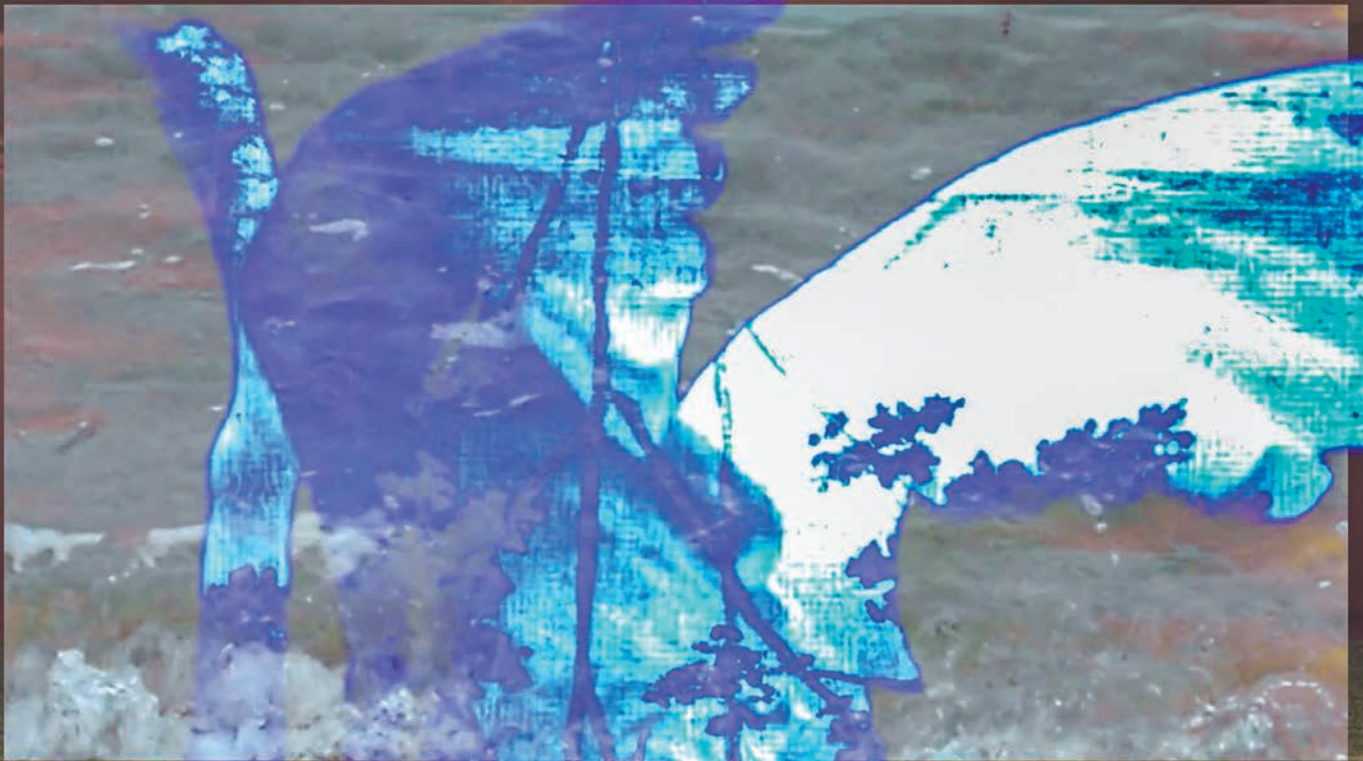
### **Scene 3. Hawk's Hunger**

*(A HAWK flies down to attack, showing her disdain for PARROTS baited by the seeds and berries of cages. She boasts of her sweeping prowess as a fearless killing machine who does not hesitate to protect herself against all creatures big or small.)*

HAWK:

You cringing parrot slave,  
snatching at a false crown.  
Can you die as i die?  
Head down, coming from the hunt  
to face the begging bowl?

Hunger bows me to the field's edge  
sud-den red-tail sha-dow—  
last-bloom-frost  
I climb the afternoon.





HAWK (cont'd):

I pierce the clouds' chrysanthemum  
of clotted dark...  
rainswept burial

#### **Scene 4. Heron's dreary, ashen shore**

*(A HERON sweeps in, hearing the ruckus. She dislikes HAWK, not only because she is a different species, but because she is a slave to the trappings of false wars.)*

HERON:

Stupid Hawk, your eyes are hooded  
You'd rather perch on the wrist of a false king...  
than struggle the wilderness,  
no end in view.

*(In the fight of HERON vs. HAWK –HAWK is ignorant and forced; HERON, though affluent and educated, is still unmated by the sea— a lover distant, cold and unresponsive. HERON's patience grows dull and lonely)*

HERON:

I have no mate,  
nobody hears my thin cry –  
My love is for the sea  
into which i cannot dive.

I can handle the journey's misery  
but I'd rather weep on the dreary shore



## Scene 5. Argument

*(Other species of BIRDS fly down to watch the growing argument— PARROTS are joined by NIGHTINGALE. They jump in to fight a species different from themselves, particularly disliking the aggressive HAWK.)*

PARROT:

I loved a wild flower once—

HERON:

I loved the ashen, burning sea  
like a gray rose.



HAWK:

Only I could make love to a perfect rose.

*(BIRDS all fight each other)*

OLD MAN *(haunting with his murderous secret):*

A black rose for Leyli and Majnun,  
the perfect lovers, in the clotted blood I drew.

NIGHTINGALE *(in horror):*

Your dagger pierced the king of roses!  
Fall into madness like a beggar then—  
jealous of my red rose





NIGHTINGALE (cont'd):

Dare to turn from what you are,  
yearn, die and burn for love...  
set yourselves on fire

*(Just as HAWK wounds HERON and one of PARROTS, and is about to attack the NIGHTINGALE and PARROT BROTHER, suddenly the voice of the OLD MAN haunts them. BIRDS are shocked but realize that his spirit is returning to give them a message.)*

OLD MAN / PHOENIX:

There will be roses, weighed with roses  
turned as one toward the thorn.  
Withered rose, and rose sublime  
bread and wine are roses, roses  
crown and palace are the rose, the rose...  
Love the grace you see  
fear not the darkness

*(NIGHTINGALE understands the OLD MAN's secrets. He remembers the depth of love he lost and is inspired to reveal his all-consuming love for the Rose.)*

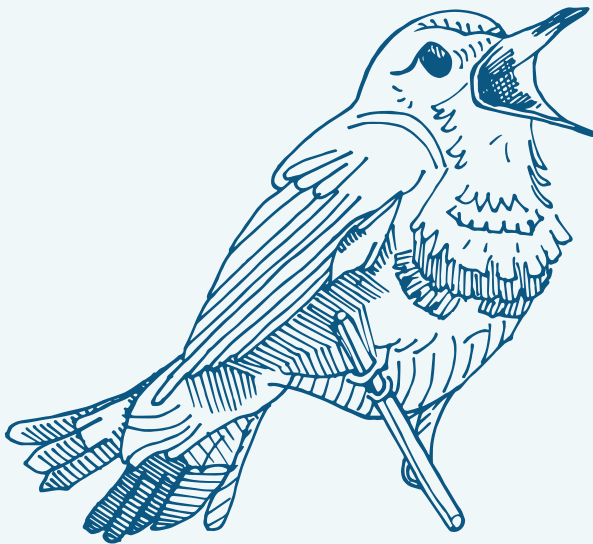
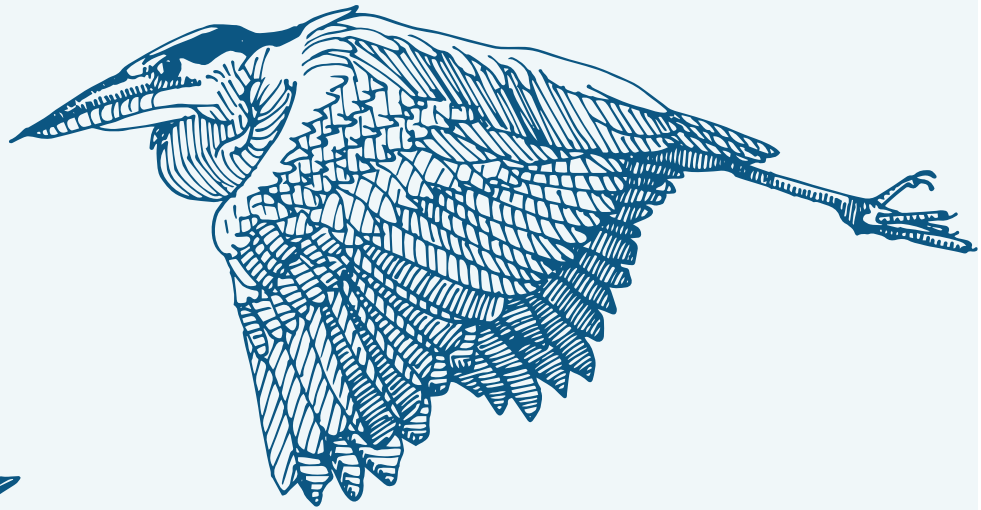
## **Scene 6. Nightingale & Rose**

NIGHTINGALE:

I was mated to a perfect rose,  
by heart's blood, bitter thorns...  
My love is for the rose who tore my soul.  
I thrive on pain that cannot quench  
I'm drowning, drowned in drunken love.  
No journey can beguile  
my life, my home—my rose.

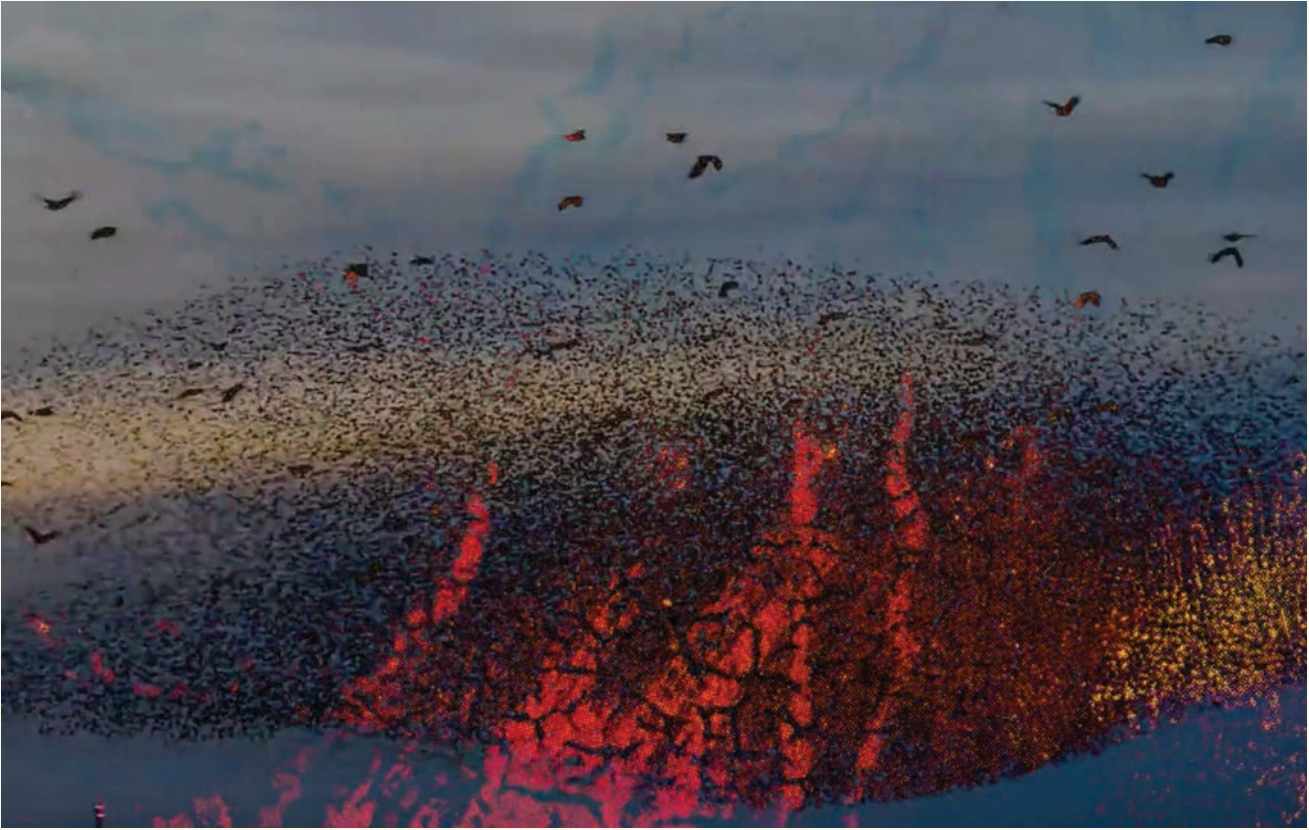
**The Great Blue Heron's wingspan can stretch to 80 inches, but because of their hollow bones, they weigh only 5 or 6 pounds.**

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**After they have migrated from Africa to Europe in May, male nightingales sing energetically for purposes of territoriality and attracting mates. Urban noise pollution causes the male nightingales to sing so loudly that they go beyond the limits of European regulations on noise pollution maximums.**

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**Scene 7. Birds begin Flight seeking Rose  
of Love Sublime**



## **Scene 8. Valley of Poverty and Nothingness (desolation)**

*(The BIRDS have flown across the world and are at a breaking-point. Many have died along the way, given up and returned to their homes. Others were too wounded, exhausted and hungry to continue the journey with the multi-species flock. The few surviving BIRDS come to rest in a valley of emptiness. Their spirits and wings are broken. The voice of the PHOENIX cuts through the desolation, distorted by the BIRDS' terror.)*

PHOENIX with OLD MAN'S VOICE:

Fear not the valley of  
poverty and nothingness.  
Come with me.

*(BIRDS follow NIGHTINGALE)*

## **Scene 9. Phoenix Rising (sick with longing)**

*(PHOENIX hovers over valley, flying closer to the BIRDS so they will see and hear more clearly.)*

PHOENIX with OLD MAN'S VOICE:

Risk all, and fly!  
See all that has been,  
all there is,  
all that will be—  
fly first in thirst,  
until you fear death more...  
See bones and stains of skies without end  
kings without heads, made blue with the whip—

PHOENIX (cont'd)

Dare to die before the first gate, shrieking,  
torn like a rose in bloom  
plunge naked, wingless, sick with longing...  
All of this, all this for love

*(BIRDS renew their courage to continue the great journey.)*

### **Scene 10. Flight up the Mountain (storm)**

*(Lightning pierces black clouds, caught in a dangerous windstorm vortex. Hardships through many days continue as the BIRDS strain to reach the summit of the highest mountain. NIGHTINGALE accompanies the flock but strength is flagging. He begins his harrowing spiral fall to death, hoping his sacrifice might enable the flock to arrive at the mountain top to see the perfect Rose.)*

### **Scene 11. Lake / Summit / Mirror**

*(BIRDS finally reach the summit and look for the Rose of Love. All they see is a lake. Confused, they search for NIGHTINGALE, ready to vent their anger at being cheated. The NIGHTINGALE cannot sing, focused on his own transition into death—making farewell gestures toward his friends. The BIRDS are disturbed by the departing NIGHTINGALE, and look back at the lake as it turns blood-red. At the moment of the NIGHTINGALE's death, a ROSE appears in the lake. The BIRDS then see what they missed at first glance—their own reflections in the water! In that instant they realize that the Rose of Love is the gift of the NIGHTINGALE. This inspires their discovery of a divine beloved that had always been and will forever be deep within their own being. The flight made it possible for them to see and know what was already there.)*



Thousands of starlings fly in pulsating, continually morphing flight patterns, that are called murmurations, a flying pattern that has no leader.

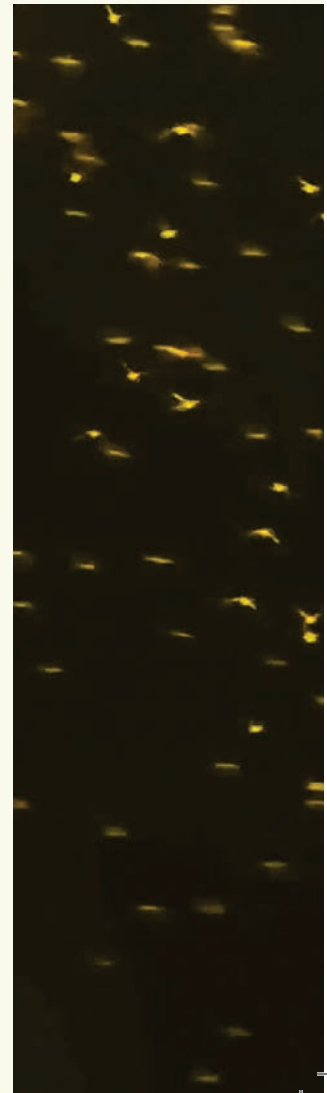
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**Scene 12. Dissolving into Nothingness**  
**(there is no two)**

PHOENIX with OLD MAN'S VOICE:

Fly with no thought  
outsoar flesh and soul  
Strive not to strive.  
Detachment is a flame  
your hope lies not in motion, not in rest.  
There is no I or you,  
there is no two.  
The world is a tear-drop  
and if the world has gone,  
where is the fear?





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The libretto is inspired by the English translation of *Conference of the Birds* by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis.

“Grow wings and feathers for the soul; if not, burn all your hopes...”  
is a quote from page 147 (2011, New York, Penguin Classics)

The facts about birds are from the following website links:

<http://www.africangreys.com/articles/overview/learning.htm>

<https://web.stanford.edu/group/stanfordbirds/text/essays/Soaring.html>

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great\\_Blue\\_Heron/lifehistory](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great_Blue_Heron/lifehistory)

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn4964-urban-nightingales-songs-are-illegally-loud>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/how-do-starling-flocks-create-those-mesmerizing-murmurations>





