

# Three Birds – classroom ensemble teaching notes

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## Introduction

This is a catchy piece which uses riffs and rhythms derived from blues music. The swing style shuffle rhythms and blues scales emphasising flattened 7ths and the other bluesy/jazzy notes will be a familiar sound to many students.

The music can look rather daunting on the printed page but most phrases use just a few notes and there is much repetition – so less confident readers should find they can play their parts with some support and guidance.

## The Parts

### Parts 1 and 2

These are not too difficult, but there are a lot of accidentals (sharps and flats) in these lines – so a lot of concentration is required. Learning the tune by listening to the recording of the choir singing will help with this. The five bar phrase starting at bar 46 has the instruction to play an octave higher. If this is not possible, play at the written pitch.

### Part 3

A chugging blues type figure plays through most of the piece and this would be ideally suited to guitar or keyboard. The sustained chords towards the end are not too difficult – guitarists may want to refer to the tablature notation to see how to finger these chords.

### Part 4

These can be played on any combination of bass instruments. There is quite a bit of repetition in these ostinato figures, so reading the notation should not be that difficult. Tablature has been provided for bass guitarists.

This part has a lot of stopping and starting, which might make it a little harder to play. Rhythmic accuracy is especially important with this part!

## Adding extra parts

Percussion can be added to this piece - perhaps with bass drums playing on beats 1 and 3 and snare/tambourine on the off beats. A reasonably experienced kit player will have no trouble playing a standard blues shuffle rhythm with this – providing you can get them to play fairly gently!

## General ensemble teaching notes

These arrangements are for the accompaniment only to the song. You will still need singers or some melody instruments playing the vocal parts. You can download these from the *Friday Afternoons* website.

They are designed to be used flexibly, making them suitable for adapting to a range of classroom and extra curricular contexts. If you are working with a class, I would suggest that you have half of the class working as a choir and the rest taking on the accompaniment parts. Allocate several players to each part aiming for a good overall balance in the resulting ensemble. Download vocal parts for the singers from the Friday Afternoons website.

The reading skills required are not onerous since there is lots of repetition and some parts can be learnt by ear. For students who might struggle, suggest they play just the first note of each bar. For those who need stretching, suggest they work some of the phrases in different octave transpositions.

Some expressive dynamic marks are given. Make sure that the instrumental parts balance well (for example louder instruments may need to play more quietly). Generally speaking, the instruments play softer during the vocal sections and more strongly during the interludes between vocal lines.

To add some variety, consider varying the texture, with more instruments playing during the louder, stronger sections.

Consider complementing the ensemble sounds with judicious use of classroom percussion and music technology for devised synthesiser layers.

*David Ashworth, December 2016*