



Jonathan Dove

Flight

When April and I came across the true story of the refugee who lived in Charles de Gaulle airport for eleven years, we were struck by its almost mythic quality: a man trapped between two worlds, living in a kind of limbo. It made us think about what an extraordinary place an airport is, how full of stories, hopes and dreams. We wondered what kind of people the refugee might have met, and how he might have tried to enlist their help. We didn't try to tell his full story – it would be better to do that in a documentary – but instead, took his predicament as our starting-point.

The airport itself offered plenty of musical opportunities: obvious ones, like planes taking off and the storm that grounds everyone overnight – but also the operatic opportunity to eavesdrop on the thoughts and feelings of those ordinary people you see in airports, whose inner turmoil is usually invisible. We're very used to the banal interiors of airports, and maybe forget what extraordinary places they are, portals between the everyday world and the magical world of flying; people who seem to be just waiting quietly in an airport may be in the grip of an intense experience.

The characters are a microcosm, ranging through the social strata, and through the vocal spectrum, from the stratospheric soprano of the lofty Controller to the threatening bass of the Immigration Officer. Right in the middle is the Refugee, a counter-tenor whose other-worldly voice sets him apart from everyone else.

I was excited by the opportunities for vocal ensembles our airport story gave me. The voices are usually in the foreground, with the orchestra providing a colourful accompaniment. I have tried to write vocal lines that are simple enough to give the singers room to act. From time to time, the orchestra also has its moments – perhaps most dramatically whenever a plane takes off.

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