

LIFE IS FLASHING BEFORE MY EYES  
AND I REALIZE THAT IT ALL  
STARTED WITH A BLACKBIRD

Winner of the 6th Composition Contest for the 2019  
11th USA International Harp Competition

by  
UNO ALEXANDER VESJE



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## About the Composer

Uno Alexander Vesje (1989) is a Norwegian harpist and composer. Uno studied harp performance at the Manhattan School of Music in New York City and earned his Masters Degree at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo. In 2017, Uno earned a Masters Degree in Composition at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology with the project “Harp – from solo to bigger format.”

Uno has won a number of prizes and scholarships for his harp compositions, as well as his performances on the instrument. His accolades include third prize in the *International Edvard Grieg Composition Contest* for his solo suite for harp (2014), semifinalist at the *World Harp Competition* (2018), and receipt of two Norwegian Art Councils Art Grants, both as a harpist and as a composer. His harp concerto, *Bragi's Harp*, was selected to be performed with the *Bergen Philharmonic Youth Orchestra* at the final gala concert at the *Young Nordic Music Festival* in 2018.

Uno has performed as a soloist with orchestras such as the *Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra* and performed the world premiere of his own harp concerto with the *Trondheim Symphony Orchestra and Opera*. He has performed as a soloist of his own compositions in venues around the world including the *Hong Kong Jockey Club Amphitheater at the World Harp Congress*, in the *Oslo Concert Hall at TEDx*, and at *TivoliVredenburg* in Utrecht for the *Dutch Harp Festival*. His international debut performance as performer/composer took place at *Carnegie Hall* in New York City in 2016. Uno has contributed to a number of recordings as both a harpist and composer. He has released two albums, “Poems From a City” (2014) and “Oslo(ve)” (2017).

[www.unoharp.com](http://www.unoharp.com)

## Welcome Note

As an artist, my highest goal is to compose and perform new music for the harp that appeals to a broader audience, develop the possibilities of this amazing instrument, and tell musical stories through my compositions. I usually compose more rhythmical parts using the percussive elements of the instrument, but in this piece I rather embraced the resonance and the ringing sound of the harp. The piece *La Volière Magique* by Marcel Tournier was a big inspiration for this composition and led to asking myself, how would I write music about a magical aviary? What are the feelings from the birds captured inside - magical and beautiful? There is something about this duplicity that you find everywhere in this world: the captured and the free, the natural and artificial, life and death. The inner battle of one's duplicity is what I have wanted to explore in this composition. When I perform this piece, I have my own personal story behind the music. I hope each harpist will present their own personal story through their interpretation of *Life is flashing before my eyes and I realize that it all started with a blackbird*.

~Uno Alexander Vesje

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**This work has been funded by grants from *Komponistenes vederlagsfond* and *TONO*.**

**Program Notes from the Composer:**

This piece should be played freely! It should sound organic and sometimes improvised. Even when the rhythm is explicit, I give you the freedom to make this piece your own. When there are no bar lines, you can be absolutely free in the rhythm and dynamics. The important thing is that you tell your own story through your interpretation of the piece.

The recorded audio-file should be played on a small speaker from the back of the harpist. You can download the file to your Phone, computer, MP3 device, etc. and press play yourself. If you have a sound technician and a PA at the venue, the technician can start the audio-file and balance the harp sound and audio-file on the PA. You should be able to play this piece in any settings as long as you have a harp and a speaker big enough to balance the sound of the harp.

~ ~ ~

**Recorded harp** – Sound of a recorded harp part that is played backwards. The notation is more or less how it should sound. The recording is tuned to 442 Hz, so the live harp should also be tuned to 442 Hz.

**Birds** - Recordings of blackbird song. The notation is not accurate and only indicates approximately when the birds are singing. The bird song will appear in the end of the piece, but because of freedom in tempo and the fermata this will appear different places in the music every time.

**Live harp** - The harp part to be performed by the harpist.

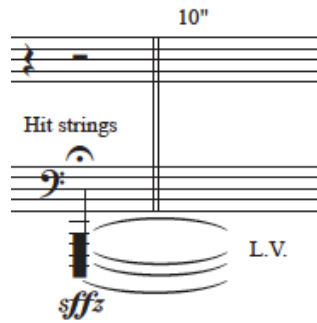
**Time** - In the score there are two different time notations. When there is a number with a quotation mark (e.g. 10”), it indicates approximately how long a fermata, a bar or a sound should be in seconds. Time written with four numbers (like 12:34) and the text *soundtrack time* is for rehearsal with the soundtrack.

**\*All extended techniques** are available with video at the *Harp Notation Manual* website made by Gunnhildur Einarsdóttir as a part of her DocMus degree from the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland.

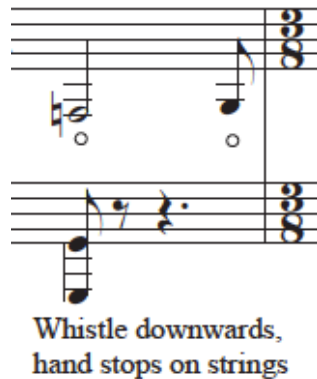
**<http://sites.siba.fi/web/harpnotation/manual>**

## Extended techniques

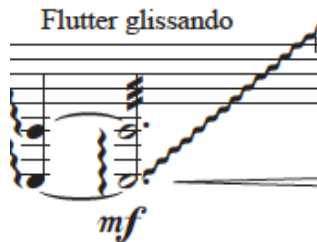
**Hit Strings** - Hit the lower wires with the palm of the hand, held horizontally. Do not muffle the sound.



**Whistle downwards** - Whistling sounds are produced by placing the palm of the hand horizontally over the wires, then sliding it quickly downwards. The hand should stay on the strings so as to muffle the sound.



**Flutter glissando** - A fast and light glissando produced with the fingertips on the left hand, quickly moving back and forth on the wires. The fingers are held vertically.



**Thunder glissando** - This is a fast and loud glissando played by the left hand on the lowest strings of the harp. The strings are played forcefully so that they rattle against one another creating a metallic thunder-like sound.



# LIFE IS FLASHING BEFORE MY EYES AND I REALIZE THAT IT ALL STARTED WITH A BLACKBIRD

Uno Alexander Vesje  
2017/2018

Recorded harp

Live Harp

15" (seconds)

*ppp* *mp*

Played backwards (noted the way it sounds)

Largo ♩ = 47

R. Harp

L. Hp.

10" Largo ♩ = 47

Hit strings

L.V.

*rit.* *ffz*

R. Harp

L. Hp.

00:47 - soundtrack time

*p*