

# Blues-Birds

A band of bird-projects by Steven Speciale and the  
Loyola High School Music Appreciation Students

April 9 - June 4, 2022



**Blues-Birds 2022**, cyanotype fabric and paper, Audubon birds, plastic transparencies, sampled sounds.

Inspired by Kerry James Marshall's *Black Birds* series, Blues-Birds primarily celebrates Music's Black-innovators. The blue color celebrates the African-American musical art form of the blues as it is foundational to most popular music today. It simultaneously suggests a tone of lament as historically, Black artists have suffered cultural appropriation of their work and consequent erasure.

The sampling of John Audubon bird images serves as a metaphor for the modus operandi of structural racism. Audubon was a slave-owner and is rumored to be of mixed heritage. Regardless of the truth surrounding his ethnicity, the broader celebration of his painting masks his abhorrent past. The plushies address this issue more directly by celebrating a Black innovator on one side while acknowledging their appropriator on the other.



**Animation to accompany a realization of BIRDCAGE by John Cage** 2017, Flip-a-clip phone software.

Students animated birds on their phones to accompany their installed-realization of John Cage's BIRDCAGE, an 8-speaker musique-concrete work that modified musical parameters with the I Ching.

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**The Curlew Blues 2020**, quilted-cyanotype fabric.

Students created this large quilted cyanotype of an extinct Audubon bird by collaging the image with "extinct" audio technologies like records and tape. The work examines how easily we discard perfectly good technologies and the environmental consequences of such behavior.



**Birdsong Project 2020**, mobile phones, iMovie, and xeno-canto.org

Inspired by "Dawn Chorus" by Marcus Coates, the Birdsong Project was created during the first pandemic lockdown in 2020. Birdsong is a proxy for violence. Students considered what in their own lives was threatened by COVID. The learners downloaded birdsongs from xeno-canto, an online repository of birdsongs recorded around the world, and slowed them down until they lay within the human vocal range. They then filmed themselves with their phones singing a kind of bird karaoke. The resulting film was then sped up to match the original birdsong pitch. For this installation, we have tinted the video to evoke the blues.