

Gwyneth Walker

The Laughter of Women
and other songs

based on the poetry of Lisel Mueller

for Soprano, Violin and Piano

commissioned by

Donne e Doni

Susan Pickett – Violin Sonja Gourley – Soprano Debra Richter – Piano

duration: 16 minutes

Program Notes

The texts for **The Laughter of Women** are found in Alive Together, the 1997 Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of poems by Lisel Mueller. This poetry encompasses a broad spectrum of mood: reverent, irreverent (!), witty, poignant, independent, reflective and triumphant.

The musical interpretations aim to explore the imagery evoked by the poetry. For example, in the opening song, "The Laughter of Women," the jagged patterns introduced in the violin might be suggestive of laughter. And the glissandi which occur mid-way through the song are associated with the text of "wipes the spectacles of the old," to be heard, perhaps, as "wiping" motives. The image of fire in this song is suggested by swirling patterns in the piano, later adopted by the violin. And daylight shines through, perhaps, in the violin harmonics.

In general, the voice presents the lyrics, the piano offers the underpinning, and the violin is the primary image-translator, offering motives which endeavor to reflect the words. The piano occasionally joins in this activity as well, "scampering" up the keyboard when the words "they laugh as if they were young again" are sung. The listener might therefore enjoy detecting possible correlations between the poetry (as expressed by the singer) and the musical accompaniment.

The poems presented in this work were selected in chronological order from Alive Together. Certainly, "The Laughter of Women," with its energy and triumph, appeals as a strong opening selection. And, "There Are Mornings" closes with its own form of triumph – the transcendent beauty of when "the sky opens and pours itself into me."

Notes About the Composer

Dr. Gwyneth Walker is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. Degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, Walker resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. She now lives on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont.

Walker's catalog includes over 120 commissioned works for orchestra, band, chorus and chamber ensembles. The music of Gwyneth Walker is published by E.C. Schirmer of Boston (choral/vocal music) and MMB Music of St. Louis (orchestral/instrumental music).

The Laughter of Women

Lisel Mueller

Gwyneth Walker

Soprano speaks:
The laughter of women sets fire
to the Halls of Injustice
and the false evidence burns
to a beautiful white lightness

barely audible

pp

With energy ♩ = 108

f joyfully

2

5 **A** pizz. arco

9 pizz. arco

13 *rit.* *p* *f*

16 **B** slower Soprano 3 3 *accel.* *a tempo* *p*

19 *f* pizz. arco

23 *rit.* **C** slower *p*

Violin

2

Soprano speaks:
So the fatuous speeches can fly out...

27

27
accel. - - - - - *p* < > - - - - - *a tempo*
p

32

32
f *pizz.* *arco*

36

36
p *f* **D**

40

40
f *p* *f*

43

43
p *f*

46

46
p *f* *f* **E**

49

49
 random high gliss. (as if wiping off eyeglasses)
p *f*

52

52
pizz. *arco* *p* *f* *p*

56

56
f *rit.* - - - - - **F** *slower* Soprano
accel. - - - - -

59

59
p *f*

laugh as if they were young a - gain,
The Laughter of Women

a tempo

Violin

62 *pizz.* *arco* *p* *tr*

66 *f* *rit.* *slower* *pp* **G**

69 *Sul IV* *p* *mp* *sim.*

71 *Soprano* *3* *It runs a - cross wa - ter that di - vides, and rec - on - ciles two un - friend - ly shores like*

73 *rit.* *p* *f* *f* **H** *Triumphantly* *♩ = 72*

78 *start slowly* *accel.*

82 *sfp* *f* *rit.* *♩ = 72*

86 *twice as quickly* *f* *p* *f* **I** *♩ = 144*

89

92

94 *f* *6* *6* *6* *6* *6* *6*

Interlude I – Tacet

Things

Soprano *mf* What

Sprightly ♩ = 144

con sord. *mf*

5

A hap - pened is we grew lone - - - ly, liv - ing a - mong the

pizz.

p

things, lone - - - ly, so we gave the

arco *p*

13 *mf* clock a face, the chair a back, the

B

mf *f*

p mp p mf p

17 ta - ble, four stout legs, which will

f *p*

21 nev - er suf - fer fa - tigue. We

tap Violin *p* arco *f*

Violin

26

fit - ted our shoes with tongues as smooth as our own and hung tongues in - side

C

mf

pizz.

p

mf

31

bells so we could lis - ten to their e - mo - tion - al lan - - - guage.

arco

mf

p

p

37

poco accel. ----- **D** gracefully, slightly faster ♩ = 176

mf

42

and be - - - cause we loved grace - - - - - ful

arco

mf

pizz.

p

49

pro - - - - - files the pit - cher re - ceived a

arco

mf

pizz.

p

E

57

lip, the bot - tle a long slen - - - - - der

mf

p

63

neck. E - ven what was be - yond us was re -

arco

mf

rit. ----- **F** Slower ♩ = 138 *gradual rit.* -----

p

pizz.

mf

Violin

6

69

cast in our im - age; we gave the coun - try a heart, the

p *mf*

$\text{♩} = 120$

73

storm an eye, the cave a mouth

p *mf*

76

so we could pass in - to safe - - ty, the

rit. *p* *mf* *mf* *p*

79

coun - try a heart, the storm an eye, the

G $\text{♩} = 120$ (as before) *p non cresc.* *as an echo sul pont.*

83

cave a mouth so we could pass in - to safe - ty

rit. *a tempo* *p gradual cresc. to end*

87

pizz. *(non rit.)* *senza sord.*

Interlude II — Tacet

FUGITIVE (Optional reading by Pianist or Violinist)

My life is running away with me;
 the two of us are in cahoots.
 I hold still while it paints
 dark circles under my eyes,
 streaks my hair gray, stuffs pillows
 under my dress. In each new room
 the mirror reassures me
 I'll not be recognized.
 I'm learning to travel light,
 like the juice in the power line.
 My baggage, swallowed by memory,
 weighs almost nothing. No one suspects
 its value. When they knock on my door,
 badges flashing, I open up:
 I don't match their description.
 "Wrong room," they say, and apologize.
 My life in the corner winks
 and wipes off my fingerprints.

SOMETIMES, WHEN THE LIGHT (Optional reading by Pianist or Violinist)

Sometimes, when the light strikes at odd angles
 and pulls you back into childhood

 and you are passing a crumbling mansion
 completely hidden behind old willows

 or an empty convent guarded by hemlocks
 and giant firs standing hip to hip,

 you know again that behind that wall,
 under the uncut hair of the willows

 something secret is going on,
 so marvelous and dangerous

 that if you crawled through and saw,
 you would die, or be happy forever.

Interlude III

Sprightly ♩ = c. 132
(senza sord.)

p

4

mf

7

rit. -----

gliss. on harmonics

p

11

a tempo

p

rit. -----

2

15

Slower

mf

rit. -----

p

Violin Naming the Animals

$\text{♩} = 72$ as a rocking motion

Piano

p *mf*

5 *p* *mf*

11 *p* *mf* *p*

16 *mf* *p* *mf*

21 **A** *p* *mf*

27 *f* *mf* *p* *mf*

33 *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

40 *f* *mf* *mf* *f* *mf* *accel.*

45 **B** $\text{♩} = 80$ *pizz.* *arco* *p* *mf* *f* *mf*

50 *f* *p* *f*

55 *p* *f* *rit.*

61 **C** $\text{♩} = 80$ *con sord.* *p* *mf* *Slower* $\frac{3}{4}$ *2*

The image shows a violin score for a piece titled "Naming the Animals". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 72, described as "as a rocking motion". The piece is marked "Piano". The score is divided into three sections: Section A (measures 21-33), Section B (measures 45-55), and Section C (measures 61-66). Section A features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with dynamic markings of piano (p) and mezzo-forte (mf). Section B starts with a tempo change to quarter note = 80 and includes markings for pizzicato (pizz.) and arco. It features a variety of dynamics including piano (p), mezzo-forte (mf), and forte (f), along with an acceleration (accel.) marking. Section C also has a tempo change to quarter note = 80 and includes a "con sord." (con sordina) marking. It concludes with a "Slower" marking and a 3/4 time signature. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins.

67 *8va if possible* ----- **a tempo** ♩ = 80 *senza sord.* (loco)

p colla voce *p delicately*

74

p

79 *rit.* ----- **Slower** **D** **a tempo** ♩ = 72

f

Free Measure

87 *Soprano:* Before he could put on the knowledge of who she was, with her small hands

88 **E** ♩ = 72 *pizz.* *arco*

p *p non cresc.*

93 *rit.* ----- *senza sord.* **3** *hold into next song*

mp > p *mf* *p*

There are Mornings

$\text{♩} = 126$

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

7

pp

A

mf

11

14

17

B

p

21 continue two-measure pattern

Soprano: Some mornings in summer I step outside and the sky opens and pours itself into me as if I were a saint about to die.

C ($\text{♩} = 126$)

22

mf

26

29 **D** pizz.

p

Violin

12

33 arco *mf*

40 *f* *p*

E

45 pizz. *mf*

49 arco *mf* *f*

53 *p* **F**

57 *p* *mf* *poco rit.*

60 slightly slower, quasi recitative *p* *rit.*

66 **G** Slowly *ffp* *f* *sfp* *accel.* *a tempo* (♩ = 126)

accel. ----- H Quickly ♩ = 144

71 *f* *sfp* *mf* *p*

76 (*p*) *mf* *p* *mf*

80 *mf* *f* *mf* *f* I

84

87 *p subito* *f* J

92 *mf* *p*

97

100 *ff*

Detailed description: This is a violin score for the piece 'There Are Mornings'. The music is in 2/4 time and begins with an acceleration (accel.) leading to a tempo of 144 beats per minute, marked 'Quickly'. The score is divided into systems of staves. The first system (measures 71-75) starts with a forte (f) dynamic, followed by sforzando (sfp), mezzo-forte (mf), and piano (p). The second system (measures 76-79) features piano (p) and mezzo-forte (mf) dynamics. The third system (measures 80-83) includes mezzo-forte (mf) and forte (f) dynamics, with a first ending bracket (I) over measures 82-83. The fourth system (measures 84-86) consists of a continuous eighth-note pattern. The fifth system (measures 87-91) begins with piano (p) subito, followed by forte (f) dynamics, and includes a second ending bracket (J) over measures 90-91. The sixth system (measures 92-96) shows mezzo-forte (mf) and piano (p) dynamics. The seventh system (measures 97-99) features a rapid sixteenth-note passage. The eighth system (measures 100-104) concludes with fortissimo (ff) dynamics.