

*VLN*

*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:

Violin

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

*barely audible*

**With energy**  $\text{♩} = 108$

2

5

A pizz. arco

9

pizz. arco

13

rit.

f

16

B slower Soprano

ev - i - dence burns to a beau - ti - ful white

accel. a tempo

f

rit. C slower

23

p f

p

## Violin

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

27

*accel.* - - - - *a tempo*

32 pizz. arco

f

36

*tr*

p f

p

40

f p f

43

p f

46

p f f

49

p f

random high gliss.  
(as if wiping off eyeglasses)

52

pizz. arco

p rit.

56

f

p rit.

F slower  
Soprano

fects them with a happy flu, and they

accel. - - - -

59

p f

laugh as if they were young again,

**a tempo**

**Violin**

62 pizz. arco **V** 3

66 **f** rit. - **G** slower harmonics gliss ad lib.

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

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

73 flares that sig - nal the **p** **f** **rit.** **H** **Triumphantly** **d=72** **rit.** **accel.**

78 start slowly **sfp** **6** **4** **3**

82 **f** **3** **3** **twice as quickly** **d=144** **rit.** **3** **3**

86 **I** **(f)** **p** **f**

89

92

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

# Interlude I — Tacet

## Things

Soprano

**Sprightly** ♩ = 144

What

con sord.

**mf**

5

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

**A**

pizz.

**p**

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

**p**

13      **mf**

clock      a      face,      the      chair      a      back,      the

**B**

**mf**

**p**

**mp**

**p**

**mf**

**p**

17

ta - ble,      four      stout      legs,      which will

**p**

**f**

**f**

**p**

21

nev - er      suf - fer      fa - tigue.      We

tap Violin

**arco**

**p**

**f**

pizz.

## Violin

5

26

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

**C**

pizz.

**p** **p**

**mf** **p** **p**

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**  $\text{♩} = 176$

**mf**

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

pizz. arco pizz.

**p**

42

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

arco **mf**

**E** pizz.

**p**

57

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

**mf** **p**

63

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

arco **rit.** **F** **Slower**  $\text{♩} = 138$  **gradual rit.** **pizz.**

**p** **mf**

Things **mf**

## Violin

6

69

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

$\text{= 120}$

arco

**p** ***mf***

73

storm an eye,  
the cave a mouth

**p** ***mf***

76

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

**p** ***mf***

***rit.***

***mf*** ***p***

79

coun - try a heart,  
the storm an eye,  
**G** as an echo  
sul pont.

$\text{= 120}$  (as before)

**p** ***non cresc.***

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**  $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 132$   
 (senza sord.)

4

7

11

15

**Slower**

Violin  
**Naming the Animals**

9

*L. = 72 as a rocking motion*

Piano

Violin Staff:

- Measure 1: Violin enters with eighth-note patterns. Dynamic: *p*. Measure 5: Dynamic: *mf*. Measure 11: Dynamic: *mf*. Measure 16: Dynamic: *p*. Measure 21: Boxed 'A'. Dynamic: *mf*. Measure 27: Dynamic: *mf*. Measure 33: Dynamic: *f*. Measure 40: Dynamic: *f*. Measure 45: Boxed 'B'. Dynamic: *f*. Measure 50: Dynamic: *f*. Measure 55: Dynamic: *f*. Measure 61: Boxed 'C'. Dynamic: *p*. Measure 65: Dynamic: *mf*.

Piano Staff:

- Measure 1: Sustained notes. Measure 5: Sustained notes. Measure 11: Sustained notes. Measure 16: Sustained notes. Measure 21: Sustained notes. Measure 27: Sustained notes. Measure 33: Sustained notes. Measure 40: Sustained notes. Measure 45: Sustained notes. Measure 50: Sustained notes. Measure 55: Sustained notes. Measure 61: Sustained notes.

Performance Instructions:

- Measure 1: *L. = 72 as a rocking motion*
- Measure 5: *p*
- Measure 11: *mf*
- Measure 16: *p*
- Measure 21: Boxed 'A'
- Measure 27: *p*
- Measure 33: *f*
- Measure 40: *accel.*
- Measure 45: Boxed 'B' | *f* | *pizz.* | *mf* | *arco* | *f* | *mf*
- Measure 50: *f*
- Measure 55: *f*
- Measure 61: Boxed 'C' | *p* | *f* | *rit.* | *con sord.* | *mf* | *Slower 2*

## Violin

10

**a tempo**  $\text{♩.} = 80$

67      *8va if possible* - - - - -      senza sord.      (loco)

74

*rit.* - - - - -      **Slower**

79      **D**      **a tempo**  $\text{♩.} = 72$

**Free Measure**

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

88      **E**       $\text{♩.} = 72$   
pizz.

93      con sord.      senza sord.      3      hold into next song

# There are Mornings

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

**(7)** **(8)** **A**

**pp** **mf**

**11**

**14**

**17**

**B**

**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** ( $\text{J} = 126$ )

**26** **mf**

**29** **D** pizz. **p**

The sheet music for Violin consists of ten staves of music. Staff 1 starts with six grace notes above the staff, followed by a measure of two eighth-note pairs. Staff 2 begins at measure 7 with a dynamic **pp**, featuring a sixteenth-note pattern. Measure 8 contains a sixteenth-note cluster labeled **A**. Staff 3 starts at measure 11 with a sixteenth-note pattern. Staff 4 starts at measure 14 with a sixteenth-note pattern. Staff 5 starts at measure 17 with a sixteenth-note pattern. Staff 6 starts at measure 21 with a sixteenth-note pattern and includes a vocal part for Soprano. Staff 7 starts at measure 26 with a sixteenth-note pattern. Staff 8 starts at measure 29 with a sixteenth-note pattern labeled **D** and **pizz.**

12

Violin

33      arco       $\#$   $\text{P}$

40       $\#$   $\text{P}$        $f$        $p$

E  
45 pizz.

$mf$

49 arco       $mf$        $f$

53 F  $p$

*poco rit.* - - - - -

57  $p$        $mf$

60 slightly slower, quasi recitative      2      rit. - - - - -

$p$

G Slowly      accel. - - - - - a tempo ( $\text{♩} = 126$ )

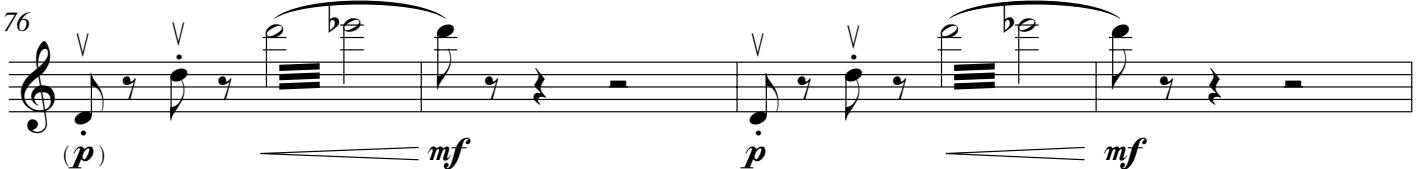
$ffp$        $f$        $sfp$

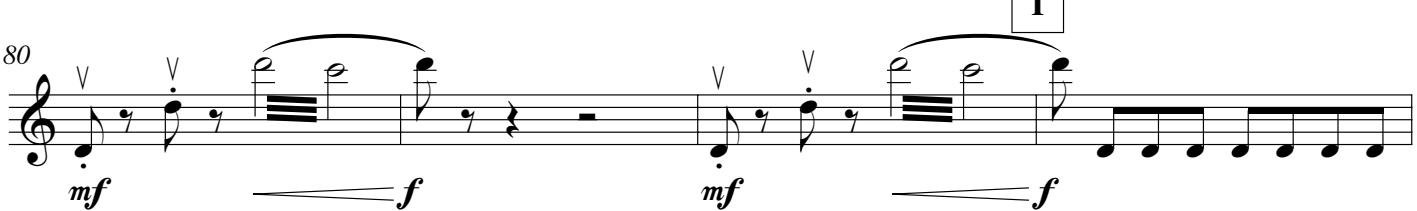
## Violin

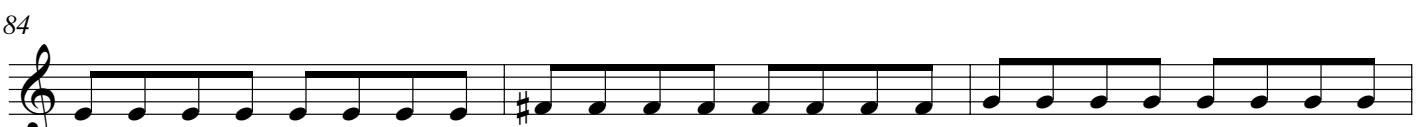
13

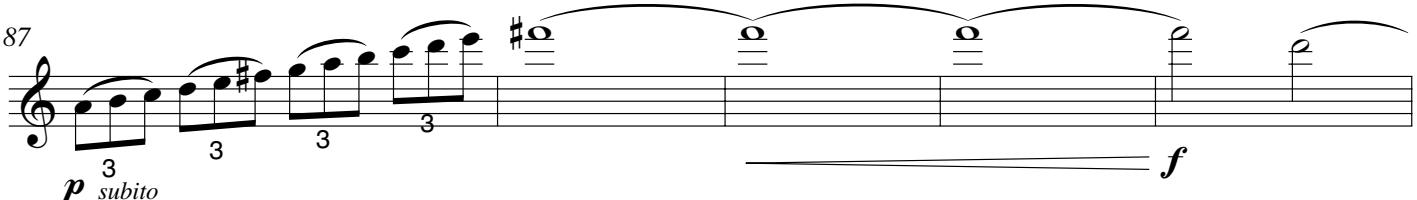
*accel.* - - - - - H Quickly ♩ = 144

71 

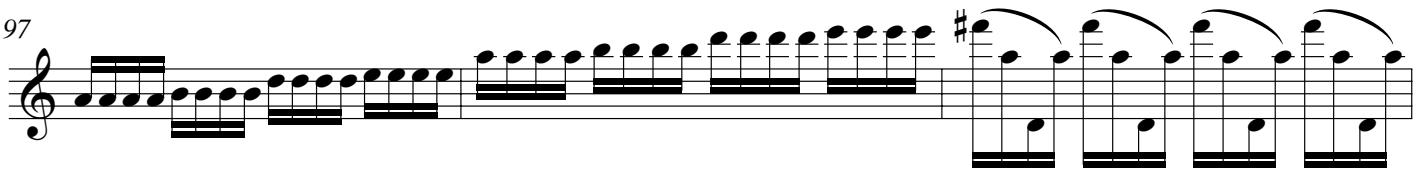
76 

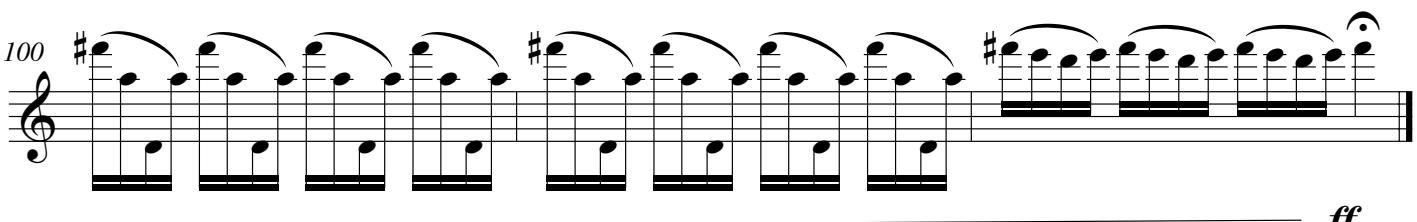
80 

84 

87 

92 

97 

100 

ff