

## Joan Szymko

Joan Szymko's music is sung by distinguished ensembles across North America and abroad, with performances at international competitions and festivals, at state and regional conferences, and at six consecutive National Conferences of the American Choral Directors Association. Especially significant is Szymko's contribution to the body of quality literature for women's voices. The ACDA has recognized Joan's lasting contribution to the choral arts by selecting her as the recipient of the 2010 Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission, "All Works of Love."

Composing for vocal ensembles is an extension of Joan Szymko's creativity as a choral director; her passion for the art of singing, an embodied approach to sound, her dedication to storytelling and an insistence on quality texts all relate to her predilections as a conductor and are reflected in her choral compositions. Joan lives and works in the Pacific Northwest. She serves on the faculty of the Music School at Portland State University as director of PSU's select women's chorus, Vox Femina. She leads Aurora Chorus as Artistic Director and conductor, a post she has held since 1993. She is also a resident composer with the award winning Do Jump! Movement Theater.

## Notes

A Burst of Song was commissioned by the New Jersey Gay Men's Chorus in 2010 for their 20th Anniversary Season. I sought texts that celebrated the healing aspects of song, especially since this community chorus had lived through the AIDS epidemic and so had experienced the pain and grief of overwhelming loss. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a native of Bengal was first and foremost a poet. The texts for A Burst of Song are primarily from his most famous volume: *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912). I hoped to illuminate the poet's heartfelt beliefs about the divine grace and power of song. While exploring Tagore and selecting texts, I found these words from his book, *Fruit Gathering*:

"To the birds you gave songs, the birds gave you songs in return. You gave me only voice, yet asked for more, and I sing."

Around the same time I happened to be reading about French composer, organist and ornithologist Olivier Messiaen, and his use of birdsong in his works. The opening notes sounded by the piano in A Shower of Mercy are a kind of "nod" to this happy coincidence, and served as inspiration for the entire work and the brief passing theme (descending minor 3rds) reoccurs as transitional material in the last movement.

## A Burst of Song

### No.1 A Shower of Mercy

*When the heart is hard and parched up,  
come upon me with a shower of mercy.  
When grace is lost from life,  
come with a burst of song.*  
— excerpt from "Beggarly Heart" (*Gitanjali*)

### No.2 A Kiss of Blessing

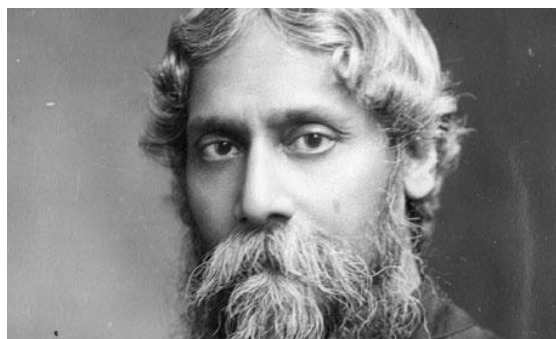
*This song of mine will wind its music around you,  
my child, like the fond arms of love.  
This song of mine will touch your forehead  
like a kiss of blessing.  
My song will be like a pair of wings to your dreams,  
it will transport your heart to the verge of the unknown.  
It will be like the faithful star overhead  
when dark night is over your road.  
My song will sit in the pupils of your eyes,  
and will carry your sight into the heart of things.  
And when my voice is silenced in death,  
my song will speak in your living heart.*  
— "This Song of Mine" (*The Crescent Moon* #38)

### No. 3 Thee and Me

*The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky.  
With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant,  
and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.*  
— excerpt from "Maya" (*Gitanjali*)

## Rabindranath Tagore

Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) worked in various literary genres, but was first and foremost a poet. He was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913). The texts for "A Burst of Song" are primarily from his most famous volume: *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912) which he himself translated into English.



photograph: Hulton Archive

# A Burst of Song

## 1. A Shower of Mercy

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)  
excerpt from "Beggarly Heart" (*Gitanjali*)

Joan Szymko

**Piano**

$\text{♩} = 72$

**f** **mf** **mp** **poco rit.**

**6** **A tempo** (opt. tenor solo) **p** **pp** **p**

**8** **A tempo** When the heart is hard and parched, come u-pon me

**sost.** **p** **mp** **p**

**12** **p** **dim.** **pp** end solo **Poco più mosso**

**8** with a show-er of mer-cy.

with a show-er of mer-cy. **Poco più mosso**

**dim.** **pp** **sub mf**

**Ped.**

*Tutti*

17 *f* *mf*

T come u - pon me with a show - er of mer - cy.

B come u - pon me with a show'r of mer - cy.

*f* *mf*

*Ped.*

20 *Tempo primo* *dim.* *mp* *accel.*

When grace is lost from life, come, come,

When grace is lost from life, come,

is lost from life, come, come,

When grace is lost, come

*dim.* *mp* *div.* *mp* *mf*

*Tempo primo* *legato* *8va* *dim.* *mp* *mf*

*Ped.*

# A Burst of Song

## 2.A Kiss of Blessing

Rabindranath Tagore  
 "This Song of Mine,"  
 #38 from *The Crescent Moon*

Joan Szymko

**Andante** ♩=64 *Espressivo*

TENOR 1 *p* This

TENOR 2 *p* This song of mine, will wind its mu-sic a-round you, my child, This

BARITONE *p* This song of mine, will wind its mu-sic a-round you, my child,

BASS *p* This

Piano *p*

4

rit. . . . . A tempo *mp*

*p* N.B.

song of mine will wind its mu - sic a - round you like the fond arms of

song of mine will wind a - round you the

wind its mu - sic,

song of mine will wind its mu -

rit. . . . . A tempo

8

poco rit. *dim.*

*dim.*

*mp* *dim.*

*mp* *dim.*

poco rit.

love, the fond arms of love.

fond arms of love, of love.

the fond arms of love.

sic, the fond arms of

11 **Poco meno mosso** ♩=60

*p* love.

**Poco meno mosso** ♩=60

*p* *pp* *p*

14 *mp* *dim.* *p*

This song of mine will touch your fore-head like a

# A Burst of Song

## 3. Thee and Me

Rabindranath Tagore  
from "Maya" (*Gitanjali*)

Joan Szymko

*con brio!* ♩=164

Piano *f*

The piano introduction consists of five measures in 3/8 time. The right hand plays a series of chords and dyads, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The tempo is marked as ♩=164.

6 Tutti Tenor *mf*

8 The great pa - geant of thee and me has

The vocal line (Tutti Tenor) begins at measure 6 and continues through measure 10. The lyrics are "The great pa - geant of thee and me has". The piano accompaniment is in 4/4 time, marked *mf*. The right hand (R.H.) plays a melody with slurs and ties, while the left hand (L.H.) plays a bass line with slurs and ties. The piano part includes fingerings: 2, 1, 2 in the left hand and 5, 4, 3, 1 in the right hand.





13

*mf* With the tune of thee and

*mf* With the tune of thee and

*mf* With the tune of thee and

*mf* With the tune of thee and

*mf* With the tune of thee and

6 6 6 6

*mf*

15

*f* me all the air is vi-brant, and

*f* me all the air is vi-brant, all the air is vi-bran[t]

*f* me all the air is vi-brant, and

*f* me, all the air, and

*cresc.* *f*

R.H. L.H.

Ped.