

## 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 every National Conference of the American Choral Directors Association since 2003. Especially significant is Szymko's contribution to the body of quality literature for women's voices. The ACDA has recognized Szymko'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. A resident composer with the award winning Do Jump! Movement Theater, Joan has performed her music on tour with the company from Broadway to LA.

## 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 Oliver 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 this 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)

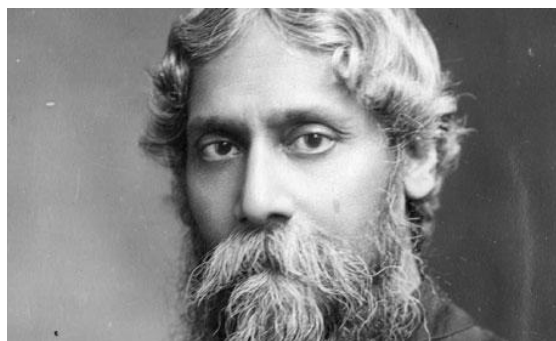
### No. 3 Thee and Me

*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

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

# A Kiss of Blessing

No.2 from "A Burst of Song"

Joan Szymko

Andante ♩=64

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

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

Piano *Andante* ♩=64 *Espressivo* *p*

for perusal only

4 *mp* **A** *po* *mp*  
 T song of mine will wind its mu - sic a - round you like the fond arms of

T song of mine will wind a - round you the

B *cresc.*  
 wind its mu - sic,

B *cresc.*  
 song of mine will wind its mu -

*rit.* **A tempo**

8

*poco rit. dim.*

love, the fond arms of love.

*dim.*

fond arms of love, of love.

*mp dim.*

the fond arms of love.

*mp dim.*

— sic, the fond arms of

*poco rit.*

for perusal only

*Poco meno mosso* ♩=60

11

*p*

love.

*Poco meno mosso* ♩=60

*p pp p*

14 *mp* *dim.* *p*

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

17 *Più mosso* ♩=72 *mp* *p* *mp* *mp*

**for perusal only**

kiss, kiss of bless-ing  
kiss, like a kiss, a kiss of bless-ing  
like a kiss, like a kiss a kiss.  
like a kiss a kiss of

*Più mosso* ♩=72

21 *poco rit.* *A tempo* *mf*

like a kiss, like a kiss.

like a kiss, like a kiss.

like a kiss, like a kiss, like a

bless - ing, like a kiss,

*poco rit.* *A tempo*

**for perusal only**

26 *Più mosso* ♩=84

kiss.

like a kiss.

*Più mosso* ♩=84

*mp* *cresc. poco a poco*

28

*mf*

My song will be \_\_\_\_\_ like a pair of wings to your

*mf*

My song will be \_\_\_\_\_ like a pair of wings to your

*mf*

My song will be \_\_\_\_\_ like a pair of wings to your

*mf*

My song will be \_\_\_\_\_ like a pair of wings to your

*mf*

escopo a poc

**for perusal only**

30

dreams \_\_\_\_\_ your

dreams \_\_\_\_\_ like wings

dreams \_\_\_\_\_ like wings

dreams \_\_\_\_\_ like wings to your

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of the un-known

of the un-known

will trans - port your heart It will be like the

verge of the un - known.

*f*

*f*

*f*

with all star

when

**for perusal only**

dark night is o-ver your road, o-ver your road.

o-ver your road.

o-ver your road.

*dim.*

*molto rit.* ♩=72 *mp*

*mf* *mp*

*molto rit.* ♩=72 *mf* *dim.*



**Poco meno mosso**  
*dolce mp*

45

T  
8 My song will sit in the pu-pils of your eyes, and will

B  
8 My song will sit in the pu-pils of your eyes,

**Poco meno mosso**  
*dolce e sostenuto*  
*mp*

48

**Più mosso** *f*

car - ry your sight in - to the heart of things

car - ry your sight in - to the heart of things.

car - ry your sight in - to the heart of things.

*mp* *mf*

*mp* *mf*

**Più mosso** *mf*

52

*mp* *p*

And when my voice is

56

*molto rit.* . . . . *Tempo primo* *pp* *p*

si - lenced . . . . si-lenced in death, . . . . my

*molto rit.* . . . . *Tempo primo*

**for perusal only**

*Red.*

61

*mp* *mp* *mp* *mp* *p*

song will speak . . . . in your liv - ing

song will speak . . . . in your liv - ing

song will speak . . . . in your liv - ing

song will speak . . . . in your liv - ing

*Red.*

64

heart, in your liv - ing heart.

heart.

heart, in your liv - ing heart.

heart, in your liv - ing heart.

Ped.

for perusal only

67

*dim.* *rit.*

*dim.*

*dim.*

*dim.*

*rit.*