PIANO REDUCTION

# JOAN SZYMKO

# IT IS HAPPINESS

a choral suite in three movements on poems by Mary Oliver for SSA(A) with instrumental chamber ensemble

The Summer Day
 Sunrise
 Wild Geese

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It Is Happiness, may be performed with FULL or REDUCED orchestration. This score (JS-118.1 / Piano Reduction-SSA Chorus) is to be used in rehearsal preparation for performance of either of the the available orchestrations.

## **FULL FORCES**

Flute

Oboe

• doubling English Horn

Clarinet in Bb

Bassoon

Violin I

Violin II

Violincello

Piano

## **REDUCED FORCES**

Flute

Violin

Violincello

Piano

**Movement No.1** The Summer Day is available as a stand alone movement in following formats:

SSA Chorus / Piano / Flute (JS-119) SAB Chorus / Piano / Flute (JS-120)

### JOAN SZYMKO (b. 1957)

Joan Szymko's music is regularly performed across North America and abroad including performances at national and international choral festivals and competitions. Notably, her music has been presented on stage or in session at every National Conference of the American Choral Directors Association since 2003. The ACDA recognized Szymko's lasting impact on the choral arts in North America by selecting her as the recipient of the prestigious Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission in 2010. As resident composer with Portland, OR based Do Jump! Movement Theater (1995-present), Szymko has created vocal underscoring for several major touring productions in the US, earning praise from the New York Times for her "ethereal vocal music."

Szymko makes her home in the Pacific Northwest where she has led choruses for over four decades. A dynamic conductor, she has workshopped her compositions with numerous choirs as a visiting artist in a variety of community and educational settings across the country, and abroad. Her catalog of over 150 choral works is published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Roger Dean Music Publishing, Oxford University Press, Walton Music. earthsongs, and independently published by Joan Szymko Music. For additional information, see www.joanszymko.com.

### NOTE from the COMPOSER

In 1995, I was invited to create a major work for Aurora Chorus, a then 140-voice women's ensemble I had recently begun to lead as Artistic Director. As with all my choral works, words come first. And so I went about the careful process of choosing the "perfect" text for my very first choral composition to be accompanied by small orchestra. I kept returning to to Mary Oliver's poems for their powerful beauty and grace; for Oliver's ability to move me to tears. Her words and images made me feel at home in the world. Even then, I felt disconnected from so much cultural hype and from an accelerating technological incursion that disembodied human communication. So it was with great solace that I turned to the volume: New and Selected Poems — to a woman who considers her one life to be "wild and precious" who "knows how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass... how to feel idle and blessed." —and who asks in "Sunnrise,"

What is the name of the deep breath I would take over and over for all of us?

It is happiness, she tells us—words that I selected as the title of the three-poem choral suite. Oliver later wrote to me: "I like the title it is happiness a lot." – which meant a lot to me.

I was thrilled when I heard from Mary Oliver again after she received the recording of the premiere performance. In a typewritten note she responded:

Dear Joan Szymko,

Just a note to tell you...that I have been listening to the tape of "It is Happiness" every morning for the past many mornings, in my car, early, on my way to the woods, and it has made me very happy. I like...its tenderness, its lushness, its entrenchment into the text. I like the instruments, what they do, and the surprise that they are there is a pleasant one, I thought it was chorus only. I like the certainty of the melodic line, and the play of it, its circling around. I like it...altogether.

Thank you, therefore. Cordially, Mary Oliver

#### MARY OLIVER (1935-2019)

"Mary Oliver was born and raised in Maple Hills Heights, a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. She would retreat from a difficult home to the nearby woods, where she would build huts of sticks and grass and write poems ... As a young poet, Oliver was deeply influenced by Edna St. Vincent Millay and briefly lived in Millay's home, helping Norma Millay organize her sister's papers. Oliver is notoriously reticent about her private life but it was during this period that she met her long-time partner, Molly Malone Cook. The couple moved to Provincetown, Massachusetts, and the surrounding Cape Cod landscape has had a marked influence on Oliver's work. Known for its clear and poignant observations and evocative use of the natural world, Oliver's poetry is firmly rooted in place and the Romantic nature tradition." "Mary Oliver." Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-oliver

Oliver's work received early critical attention and she became one of America's most significant and best-selling poets. Among her many honors are winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1984 for American Primitive, the 1992 National Book Award for New and Selected Poetry and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

"Beginning with her first book in 1963, Mary Oliver's poetry has been a touchstone for understanding our world and ourselves. She described her work as loving the world. Her poems capture the human spirit and nature's complexity with wonder and awe. Starting with an openness to the teachings contained in the smallest of moments, Mary Oliver is a determined explorer of the mysteries of our daily experience." Mary Oliver."

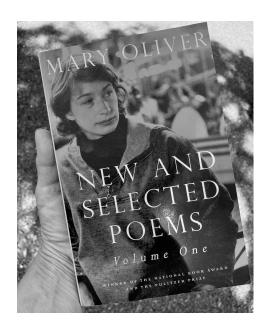
www.maryoliver.com/poetry/

Mary Oliver summed up her desire for amazement in her poem "When Death Comes" from *New and Selected Poems*:

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

Upon learning of Mary Oliver's passing on January 17, 2019 composer Joan Szymko posted on FaceBook:

Rest in peace Mary Oliver— poet, healer, advisor, spirit guide, Muse. I feel as though I have lost a dear intimate friend. Today the world is a poorer place without her in it. And yet my life will always be richer because of how she paid attention, how she breathed; how she loved this world. With deep gratitude for her life and poetry and for being allowed the rare privilege of setting her words to music.



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#### No1. The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes
New she lifts her pale forcemes and thoroughly washes ber face
New she snapsher wing, open, and to its away.

for

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass, how to kneel in the grass, how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

With your one wild and precious life?

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#### No 2. Sunrise

You can die for itan idea, or the world. People have done so, brilliantly, letting their small bodies be bound to the stake, creating an unforgettable fury of light. But this morning, climbing the familiar hills in the familiar fabric of dawn, I thought of China, and India

and Europe, and I thought

bazes

for everyone just so joyfully

as it rises

under the lashes

of my own eyes, and I thought

I am so many!

What is my name?

What is the name

of the deep breath I would take

over and over

for all of us? Call it

whatever you want, it is

happiness, it is another one

of the ways to enter

fire.

"Sunrise" by Mary Oliver

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#### No 3. Wild Geese

You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.

Who every or are, no marte show lot ely the world wiers itself to your imagination calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

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