

SEVEN SYNGE SONGS

for Tenor and Piano

**Poems by
JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE**

**Music by
BRUCE TRINKLEY**

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Seven Songs for Tenor and Piano

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COMPOSER'S NOTE

SEVEN SYNGE SONGS was composed during a residency at the Patrick Allan-Fraser of Hospitalfield Trust in Arbroath, Angus, Scotland in September 2005. The settings were inspired by the brilliant production of the complete plays of John Millington Synge by DruidSynge, directed by Garry Hynes, at the Edinburgh International Festival in August 2005.

The poems are intensely autobiographical, alluding to Synge's stay in Paris as an impoverished writer, his love affair with a young woman in the west of Ireland, and his reaction to criticism of his major work, "The Playboy of the Western World". These lyrics also present the themes that illuminate all of Synge's work: his distrust of priesthood and organized religion, his passion for the beauty of women, and his contempt for the fashionable critics of his day. And always there is the trenchant humor that heckles even as it is haunted by death.

The cycle is dedicated to Richard Kennedy with gratitude and affection.

1. PRELUDE

Still south I went and west and south again,
Through Wicklow from the morning till the night,
And far from cities, and the sights of men,
Lived with the sunshine, and the moon's delight.

I knew the stars, the flowers, and the birds,
The grey and wintry sides of many glens,
And did but half remember human words,
In converse with the mountains, moors, and fens.

2. EPITAPH

After reading Ronsard's lines from Rabelais

If fruits are fed on any beast
Let vine-roots suck this parish priest,
For while he lived, no summer sun
Went up but he'd a bottle done,
And in the starlight beer and stout
Kept his waistcoat bulging out.

Then Death that changes happy things
Damned his soul to water springs.

3. DREAD

Beside a chapel I'd a room looked down,
Where all the women from the farms and town,
On Holy-days and Sundays used to pass
To marriages, and christenings, and to Mass.

Then I sat lonely watching score and score,
Till I turned jealous of the Lord next door . . .
Now by this window, where there's none can see,
The Lord God's jealous of yourself and me.

4. IN MAY

In a nook
That opened south,
You and I
Lay mouth to mouth

A snowy gull
And sooty daw
Came and looked
With many a caw;

'Such,' I said,
'Are I and you,
When you've kissed me
Black and blue!'

5. WINTER

With little money in a great city

There's snow in every street
Where I go up and down,
And there's no woman, man, or dog
That knows me in the town.

I know each shop, and all
These Jews, and Russian Poles,
For I go walking nith and noon
To spare my sack of coals.

6. THE CURSE

*To a sister of an enemy of the author's who disapproved of
'The Playboy'*

Lord, confound this surly sister,
Blight her brow with blotch and blister,
Cramp her larynx, lung, and liver,
In her guts a galling give her.

Let her live to earn her dinners
In Mountjoy with seedy sinners:
Lord, this judgment quickly bring,
And I'm Your servant, J. M. Synge.

7. EPITAPH

A silent sinner, nights and days,
No human heart to him drew nigh,
Alone he wound his wonted ways,
Alone and little loved did die.

And autumn Death for him did choose,
A season dank with mists and rain,
And took him, while the evening dews
Were settling o'er the fields again.