

# **SEVEN SYNGE SONGS**

**for Tenor and Piano**

**Poems by  
JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE**

**Music by  
BRUCE TRINKLEY**

# SEVEN SYNGE SONGS

## 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.

# 1. Prelude

**Andante espressivo** ♩ = 69 *mp*

Voice

Piano

*mp* *cresc.*

*Still*

**3** *cresc. poco a poco*

south I went and west and south a - gain, \_\_\_\_\_ Through Wick-low from the morn-ing till the

*p* *cresc. poco a poco* *mf*

**6** *f* *dim. poco a poco*

night, And far from cit - ies, and the sights of men, \_\_\_\_\_ Lived

*dim. poco a poco*

9

*poco rit.* *pp* *a tempo*

with the sun-shine, and the moon's de - light. I knew the stars, the flow-ers, and the

*poco rit.* *a tempo* *pp*

12

*mp* *cresc.* *mf*

birds, \_\_\_\_\_ The grey and win - try sides of man - y glens, And

*poco cresc.* *p cresc.*

15

*mp* *allarg.*

did but half re-mem-ber hu-man words, \_\_\_\_\_ In con-verse with the moun-tains, moors, and fens.

*mp* *p* *molto dim.* *allarg.*

# 2. Epitaph

After reading Ronsard's lines from Rabelais

Humorously (not too fast)  $\text{♩} = 104$

Voice *mf* *f*

If ——— fruits are fed on an - y beast Let

Piano *f* *mf* *sempre marcato*

8va

4

vine-roots suck this par-ish priest, For while he lived, no sum-mer sun Went up but he'd a bot-tle done, And

7

in the star - light beer and stout Kept his waist - coat bulg - ing out. ——— Then ———

*mf* *sub. p*

10 *f* *sfz*

Death that chang - es hap - py things ——— Damned his soul to

*mf*

13 *ff*

wa - ter springs. ——— Then Death that chang - es hap - py things ———

*f*

16 *sfz*

Damned his soul to wa - ter springs. ———

*sub. mp* *ff*

8vb



# 3. Dread

Andante gregoriano ♩ = 72

*p espressivo*

Voice

Be-side a chap-el I'd a room looked down, Where all the

Piano

*p*

3

wom-en from the farms and town, On Ho-ly-days and Sun-days used to pass To mar-riag-es, and

6

*pochiss. rit.* *a tempo*

chris - ten - ings, and to Mass. Then I sat lone - ly watch - ing

9

score and score, Till I turned jeal - ous of the Lord next door.

12

**Sprightly** ♩ = 72*mf*

Now by this win-dow,— where there's none can see, The

16

*f*

Lord God's— jeal - ous of your-self and me.

20

*pochiss. rit.*

## 4. In May

**Allegro gioioso** ♩ = 96

Piano

*f*

5 *mf*

In a nook That o - pened south, You and I Lay mouth to mouth.

*mf* *simile*

9 *mf*

A

*p molto cresc.* *f* *mp*

13 *rit.*

snow - y gull And soot - y daw Came and looked With man - y a caw; *sva - - - - - ten.*

*con pedale*

**Languorously, espressively**  $\text{♩} = 54$

18 *p molto legato*

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

*p*

22 *cantando*

*mp*

# 5. Winter

*With little money in a great city*

**Pesante espressivo** ♩ = 56 *mp*

Voice

There's

Piano

*mp*

*dim.*

[5]

snow in ev - 'ry street Where I go up and down, \_\_\_\_\_ And

*p simile*

[9]

there's no wom - an, man, or dog That knows me in the town. \_\_\_\_\_

*dim.*

*mp*

*dim.*

13 *pp sotto voce*

I know each shop, and all These Jews, and

*pp una corda*

17 *non cresc.*

Russ - ian Poles, For I go walk - ing night and noon To

21

spare my sack of coals.

*rit.*

## 6. The Curse

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

**Acerbic** ♩ = 108

**Voice**

**Piano** *ff*

**3** *f*

Lord, con-found this sur - ly sis - ter, Blight her brow with blotch and blis - ter,

*mf* *ff*

**6**

Cramp her lar - ynx, lung, and liv - er, In her guts a gall - ing give her.

*mf*

9

*ff*

15

Let her live to earn her din - ners

*mp cresc.**f*

12

In Mount-joy with seed-y sin-ners: Lord, this judg-ment quick-ly bring, And

15

I'm Your serv - ant, J. M. Synge.

18

*8va -*



# 7. Epitaph

**Solemnly** ♩ = 88

**Voice**

*p*

A si - lent sin - ner, nights and days, No

**Piano**

*p*

*simile*

**5**

*mp simile*

hu - man heart to him drew nigh, A - lone he wound his wont - ed ways, A -

*mp*

**9**

*cresc.*

*f*

lone and lit - tle loved did die. And au - tumn Death for

*cresc.*

*mf*

13 *mp*

him did choose, A sea - son dank with mists and rain, And took him, while the

*p*

*sos.* *sos.* *simile*

17 *poco rit.* *a tempo*

eve - ning dews Were set - tling o'er the fields a - gain.

*poco rit.* *a tempo*

21 *mf* *p* *allarg.*

*allarg.*