

# MOTHER NATURE

Seven Songs for Young Voices and Piano

Music by  
**BRUCE TRINKLEY**

# **MOTHER NATURE**

## **Seven Songs for Young Voices and Piano**

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**MOTHER NATURE** is the third section of **MOUNTAIN LAURELS**, a Choral Symphony celebrating the Centennial of State College, Pennsylvania. The texts are drawn from the works of Central Pennsylvania poets. The symphony was commissioned by the Borough of State College with grants provided by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and gifts from corporate and individual sponsors in State College.

**MOUNTAIN LAURELS** was composed between 1992 and 1996, including a yearlong sabbatical from the Pennsylvania State University in 1993-1994. The composer expresses his appreciation to the College of Arts and Architecture and Philip Philip Mitchell Award recipient Suzanne Scurfield Hess for grants that enabled beginning the work. He would also like to thank the following foundations and artist colonies for residencies that facilitated completion of the work:

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**MOTHER NATURE** was written for Patti Begg, Tracy Bunnell, Kim Fodor, Jo Henry, and Molly McAninch, and the singers of the State College Elementary and Middle School Choruses. The cycle is dedicated with love and affection to Suzanne and James Hess for their many services to the music and poetry of our town.

### **1. The Bat**

by Theodore Roethke (1908-1963) from *Open House* (1941)

By day the bat is cousin to the mouse.  
He likes the attic of an aging house.

His fingers make a hat about his head.  
His pulse beat is so slow we think him dead.

He loops in crazy figures half the night  
Among the trees that face the corner light.

But when he brushes up against a screen,  
We are afraid of what our eyes have seen:

For something is amiss or out of place  
When mice with wings can wear a human face.

### **2. Mid-Country Blow**

by Theodore Roethke (1908-1963) from *Open House* (1941)

All night and all day the wind roared in the trees,  
Until I could think there were waves rolling high as my bedroom floor;  
When I stood at the window, an elm bough swept to my knees;  
The blue spruce lashed like a surf at the door.

The second dawn I would not have believed:  
The oak stood with each leaf stiff as a bell.  
When I looked at the altered scene, my eye was undeceived,  
But my ear still kept the sound of the sea like a shell.

### **3. Food Songs: The Egg**

by John Haag (1926-2008) from *Pivot* (1981)

Eggs, eggs, beautiful eggs  
– strange little creatures  
without any legs,  
exquisite ovals  
without any navels,  
no elbows or hair  
and nothing to wear,  
balder than whales  
in those elegant shells –  
Oh beautiful, beautiful, beautiful eggs!

#### 4. Winter Fire

by Jack McManis (1917-1989) from manuscript

Throat swelling ecstatic matins,  
does the cardinal worship the sun?  
Or has sun come up to worship him?  
Why else would sun bother to rise  
this Arctic dawn? In holy roller  
frenzy does the flame bird warble  
in tongues? No, only listen hard  
and you'll catch the words: *Joy! Joy!*  
To heck with protective coloring!  
*Let sun in, Let sun in, Let sun in*  
trills the blood bird. *Make it sing,*  
*Make it sing* he goes on as if never  
to stop. Red arsonist setting  
my winter soul on fire, high over  
a world of ice you carol messages  
to the sun and to the poet in all of us.

#### 5. April Snow

by E. H. Knapp (1922-2012) from manuscript

Those epicures in ermine were the last  
To leave. They slumped on summer furniture  
And lounged about the yard to see that blast –  
The end of revels – through, or to be sure  
The sun would rise. Pristinely reprobate,  
The drowsy rounders slouched and shifted, to roam  
No more but silent sit and contemplate  
The mounting disadvantages of home.  
They may have come to foil the green of grass  
Or give the hardy crocus tales to tell  
The daffodils of these pale rogues, alas,  
Who crashed a lovely garden party, fell,  
And spent the night – not to apologize  
Nor even to the flowers bid goodbyes.

## 6. dandelions

by Deborah Austin (1920-2013) from *The Paradise of the World* (1964)

under cover of night and rain  
the troops took over.  
waking to total war in beleaguered houses  
over breakfast we faced the batteries  
marshalled by wall and stone, deployed  
with a master strategy no one had suspected  
and now all  
firing

pow

all day, all yesterday  
and all today  
the barrage continued  
deafening sight.  
reeling now, eyes ringing from noise, from walking  
gingerly over the mined lawns  
exploded at every second  
rocked back by the starshellfire  
concussion of gold on green  
bringing battle-fatigue

pow by lionface firefur pow by  
goldburst shellshock pow by  
whoosh splat splinteryellow pow by  
pow by pow  
tomorrow smoke drifts up  
from the wrecked battalions,  
all the ammunition, firegold fury, gone.  
smoke  
drifts  
thistle-blown  
over the war-zone, only

here and there, in the shade by the  
peartree  
pow in the crack by the  
curbstone pow and back of the  
ashcan, lonely  
guerrilla snipers, hoarding  
their fire shrewdly  
never

pow

surrender

## 7. Song to a Coy Parent

by John Haag (1926-2009) from *The Mirrored Man* (1961)

Yes, tell me of the birds and bears  
And palpitating bees,  
Of ululating owls among  
The eucalyptus trees,

Of cats and bulls and animals  
Too numerous to mention,  
And how the wind is pandar to  
The randy palm's intention;

I'd like to know how porcupines  
Greet their inamoratas,  
And why the grunion runs aground  
In agitated stratas,

Or how the frugal cuckoos find  
Impromptu incubators,  
And happy hens are setting on  
The eggs of alligators.

O, tell me of countless foolish things –  
I'd welcome explanation.  
For, really, I'm intrigued by all  
This din of procreation.