

THUMBS UP!

SONGS FOR

BRIGHT KIDS

Four Choruses for Two-part Treble Voices and Piano

Poems of James Laughlin

Music by Bruce Trinkley

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NOTES

James Laughlin (1914-1997), editor, publisher and poet, was born in Pittsburgh and studied with the poet Ezra Pound in Italy. Legend has it that Pound told Laughlin to not write poetry but to do something useful with his life. The useful thing he did was to found one of the greatest publishing houses in America, New Directions, which became the first American publisher of Nabokov, and also published the works of Tennessee Williams, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Henry Miller, and Dylan Thomas.

Luckily Laughlin ignored Pound's advice about writing and produced a body of work noted for its humor and imagery and use of classical forms.

Performers must take great care to enunciate and project the text. The abrupt changes in the musical texture will make sense only if the words are clearly understood by the audience.

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1. Thumbs Up!

What if we were not enantio-
morphic if our thumbs were

both on the same side of our
hands (and the big toes the

same of course) would our e-
volution have been different

would we have made our home
underground instead of in

the trees (because matching
thumbs could dig better than

climb) in ten million years
there were endless possibil-

ities don't think about them
they might still come true.

2. For the Finders Within

I cannot name them nor
tell from whence they

come I cannot summon
them nor make them lin-

ger they come when they
wish (and when least ex-

pected) and in a moment
they are gone leaving

their burst of words
which become my song.

3. The Man in the Wall

I was waiting for the bus on Canal Street
near an old deserted brick warehouse sud-

denly I noticed a movement in the bricks
on the surface of the wall as I watched

the figure of a man appeared on the wall
at first just a faint gray shape that be-

came clearer until it was a whole man (but
the face not very clear) a gray man in a

rumpled gray suit he wasn't dead because
he moved his arm as if he wanted to get my

attention the passersby on the street
didn't seem to notice him he was no one

I had ever seen before did he want to
speak to me had he been sent by someone

who knew me with a message he lasted only
a few moments then faded back into the

bricks of the wall there was no longer
a person there what did he want to tell

me did he mean to warn me did he intend
to say you too have appeared and will van-

ish don't hope for more there is no more
the bus came to the curb and I climbed aboard.

4. The Hour Glass

I'm angry with time because
it moves so slowly the horses

of the sun race through the
sky but my chariot is pulled

by snails all clocks in my
house have been hidden in

closets they are loafing
they don't run fast enough

is time as slow for her
the hour glass shows time

as a thousand grains of
sand each one must fall

in the glass for time to
pass is it the same for

her is she impatient too?