

*Gwyneth Walker*

***The Laughter of Women***  
*and other songs*

*based on the poetry of Lisel Mueller*

*for Soprano, Violin and Piano*

commissioned by

**Donne e Doni**

Susan Pickett – Violin    Sonja Gourley – Soprano    Debra Richter – Piano

duration: 16 minutes

Program Notes

The texts for **The Laughter of Women** are found in Alive Together, the 1997 Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of poems by Lisel Mueller. This poetry encompasses a broad spectrum of mood: reverent, irreverent (!), witty, poignant, independent, reflective and triumphant.

The musical interpretations aim to explore the imagery evoked by the poetry. For example, in the opening song, "The Laughter of Women," the jagged patterns introduced in the violin might be suggestive of laughter. And the glissandi which occur mid-way through the song are associated with the text of "wipes the spectacles of the old," to be heard, perhaps, as "wiping" motives. The image of fire in this song is suggested by swirling patterns in the piano, later adopted by the violin. And daylight shines through, perhaps, in the violin harmonics.

In general, the voice presents the lyrics, the piano offers the underpinning, and the violin is the primary image-translator, offering motives which endeavor to reflect the words. The piano occasionally joins in this activity as well, "scampering" up the keyboard when the words "they laugh as if they were young again" are sung. The listener might therefore enjoy detecting possible correlations between the poetry (as expressed by the singer) and the musical accompaniment.

The poems presented in this work were selected in chronological order from Alive Together. Certainly, "The Laughter of Women," with its energy and triumph, appeals as a strong opening selection. And, "There Are Mornings" closes with its own form of triumph – the transcendent beauty of when "the sky opens and pours itself into me."

Notes About the Composer

Dr. Gwyneth Walker is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. Degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, Walker resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. She now lives on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont.

Walker's catalog includes over 120 commissioned works for orchestra, band, chorus and chamber ensembles. The music of Gwyneth Walker is published by E.C. Schirmer of Boston (choral/vocal music) and MMB Music of St. Louis (orchestral/instrumental music).

# The Laughter of Women

*barely audible*  $\text{pp}$

Violin  $\text{pp}$

Soprano *spoken triumphantly:*  
The laughter of women sets fire  
to the Halls of Injustice  
and the false evidence burns  
to a beautiful white lightness

Piano *barely audible*  $\text{pp}$  *8va*

**With energy** ♩ = 108

*f* joyfully

**With energy** ♩ = 108

*f* joyfully

*8va* --- 1

*f* joyfully

*arco* ad lib.

4

**A** *pizz.* *arco*

*f* joyfully

The laugh - ter of wom - en sets

**A**

fire to the Halls of In - - - jus - tice. The

laugh - ter of wo - - - - men sets fire, fire, fire, fire,

fire to the Halls of In - - - jus - tice, and the false

16 **B** slower

*p* ev - i - dence burns to a beau - ti - ful white light - - - - - ness.

**B** slower

*p*

19 *accel.* ..... *a tempo*

*f* *f* *pizz.*

The laugh - ter of wom - en sets

*accel.* ..... *a tempo*

*f*

22 *arco*

*p* *f*

fire, fire, fire, fire, fire to the Halls of In - - - jus - tice.

*5* *5* *5* *5*

*Leg.*

25 *rit.* ..... **C** *slower*

*p* It rat - tles the Cham - bers of Con - gress and for - ces the win - dows wide

*rit.* ..... **C** *slower*

*p*

28

*p* o - - - - pen, wide o - - - - - pen, *spoken, mockingly* So the fatuous speeches can fly out...

31 *accel.* ..... *a tempo*

*p* *f* *pizz.* The laugh - ter of wom - en sets

*accel.* ..... *a tempo*

*p* *f*

35

arco

fire, fire, fire, fire, fire to the Halls of In - - - jus - tice.

*p* *f*

*5* *5* *5* *5*

Ped.

38

**D**

fire!

*p* *f* *p*

*p* *f*

**D**

*p* *f* *p*

42

fire!

random clusters scampering up keyboard

fire!

*p* *f* *p* *f*

*p* *f*

*p* *f*

*p* *f*

Ped. Ped.

45 *f* *p* *f* *f* *f* **E**

The laugh - ter of wom - en

*f* *p* *f* *f* *f*

**E**

48 *p* *f*

(as if wiping off eyeglasses)  
random high gliss.

wipes the mist from the spec - ta - cles of the old.

*p* *f*

51 *pizz.* *arco*

The laugh - ter of wom - - - en wipes the

*pizz.* *arco*



54

*p* *v* *p*

mist, mist, mist from the spec - ta - cles of the

*ped.*

56

*f* *rit.* **F** slower

old; it in - fects them with a hap - py flu, and they

*f* *rit.* **F** slower

59

*p* *p echo* *f* *f* *accel.*

laugh as if they were young a - gain, young a - gain.

*accel.* random clusters scampering up keyboard

62 *a tempo*

*pizz.* *arco* *p*

The laugh - - ter of wom - en wipes the mist, mist, mist\_\_

*a tempo*

*f*

65 *p*

*f*

from the spec - ta - cles of the old.

*5* *Leo.*

67 *rit.* *slower*

*pp* *G*

Pris - on - ers held in un - der - ground cells im -

*rit.* *slower*

*p* *G*

69

Sul IV

harmonics gliss ad lib.

*p* *mp* *sim.*

ag - ine that they see day - light when they re - mem - ber the laugh - ter of wom - en.

71

It runs a - cross wa - ter that di - vides, and rec - on - ciles two un - friend - ly shores like

*p* *mf*

73

flares that sig - - - nal the news to each oth - - - er.

*p* *rit.*

75 **H** **Triumphantly** ♩ = 72

*f* *f* *rit.* . . . . ,

What a lan-guage it is, the laugh-ter of wom-en, high - - -

**H** **Triumphantly** ♩ = 72

77

**start slowly**

*spoken softly, mischievously* *sfz* *p*

fly - ing, high - fly - ing, high - fly - ing and subversive Long be - fore law and scrip - ture

**start slowly**

79

*p*

we heard the laugh - ter, we heard the laugh - ter, we

81 *accel.* .....  $\text{♩} = 72$

un - der - stood free - - - - - dom.

*accel.* .....  $\text{♩} = 72$

84 *rit.* ..... *rit.* .....

What a lan - guage it is, the laugh - ter of wom - - - en

*rit.* ..... *rit.* .....

86 *twice as quickly*  $\text{♩} = 144$

free - - - - - dom,

*twice as quickly*  $\text{♩} = 144$

89

free - - - - - dom, - - - - - free - - - - -

92

dom. - - - - -

94

*f* a triumphant laugh *f* Ha!

Red.

Duration: 4' 15"

# Interlude I

Freely ♩ = c. 132 *rit.* -----

*p* throughout, dreamlike

a tempo *rit.* -----

Piano

a tempo *rit.* -----

a tempo *rit.* -----

Pedal stays into next song

Duration: 30"

# Things

con sord. Sprightly ♩ = 144

*mf*

Vln.

S

*mf*

What

Sprightly ♩ = 144

Pno.

Pedal stays from previous Interlude until A

5 **A**

Vln. *p* pizz.

S **A**

hap-pened is we grew lone - - - ly, liv-ing a - mong the

9 arco

Vln. *mf*

S *p*

things, lone - - - - ly, so we gave the

13 **B**

Vln. *p* *mp* *p* *mf* *p*

S **B** *mf* *f*

clock a face, the chair a back, the

17

Vln. *f* *p*

S *p*

ta - ble, four stout legs, which will

21 tap Violin

Vln. *p* arco *p* *f*

S *f*

nev - er suf - fer fa - tigue.



25 C *f* *pizz.* *p*

Vln.

S *p* C

S We fit - ted our shoes with tongues as smooth as our

29 *mf* *arco* *mf* *p* *p*

Vln.

S *mf* *p*

S own and hung tongues in - side bells so we could lis - ten to

34 *poco accel.* *poco accel.*

Vln.

S *poco accel.*

S their e - mo - tion - al lan - - - - guage.

39 D gracefully, slightly faster ♩ = 176 *mf* *pizz.*

Vln.

D gracefully, slightly faster ♩ = 176 *mf*

S and be - - - cause we loved

45 *arco* *mf* *pizz.* *p*

Vln.

S *mf*

S grace - - - - - ful pro - - - - - files

Things

51 *arco* *mf* *p* **E** *pizz.*

Vln. *mf* *p*

S **E**

the pit - cher re - ceived a

57 *mf* *p*

Vln. *mf* *p*

S

lip, the bot - tle a long slen - - - der

63 *arco* *mf* *rit.* **F** *p* **Slower** ♩ = 138

Vln. *mf* *p*

S *rit.* **F** **Slower** ♩ = 138

neck. E - ven what was be - yond us

68 *pizz.* *mf* *gradual rit.* ♩ = 120 *arco* *p*

Vln. *mf* *p*

S *gradual rit.* ♩ = 120

was re - cast in our im - age; we gave the coun - try a heart,

72 *mf* *p* *mf*

Vln. *mf* *p* *mf*

S

the storm an eye, the cave a mouth

76 *rit.*

Vln. *p* *mf* *mf* *p*

S *rit.* *p*

† so we could pass in - to safe - ty, the

79 **G** ♩ = 120 (as before) *as an echo sul pont.*

Vln. *p non cresc.*

**G** ♩ = 120 (as before)

S coun-try a heart, the storm an eye, the

83 *rit.* *a tempo*

Vln. *p gradual cresc. to end*

*rit.* *a tempo*

S cave a mouth so we could pass in - to safe - ty.

87 *pizz.* *(non rit.)* *senza sord.*

Vln. *(non rit.)*

S

Duration: 2'20"

# Interlude II

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 132$

Pno.

*p*

5

*mf*

*rit.* -----

*a tempo*

*p*

*rit.* -----

*mf*

Ped. ----- Ped. -----

10

*a tempo*

*mf*

*rit.* -----

*p*

Ped. ----- Ped. ----- Ped. ----- Ped. -----

Pedal stays into next reading

*[Piano pedal stays until midway through reading]*

## **TEARS**

*(read by Soprano)*

*The first woman who ever wept  
was appalled at what stung  
her eyes and ran down her cheeks.  
Saltwater. Seawater.  
How was it possible?  
Hadn't she and the man  
spent many days moving  
upland to where the grass  
flourished, where the stream  
quenched their thirst with sweet water?  
How could she have carried these sea drops  
as if they were precious seeds;  
where could she have stowed them?  
She looked at the watchful gazelles  
and the heavy-lidded frogs;  
she looked at the glass-eyed birds  
and nervous, black-eyed mice.  
None of them wept, not even the fish  
that dripped in her hands when she caught them.  
Not even the man. Only she  
carried the sea inside her body.*

**FUGITIVE**

*(Optional reading by Pianist or Violinist)*

*My life is running away with me;  
the two of us are in cahoots.  
I hold still while it paints  
dark circles under my eyes,  
streaks my hair gray, stuffs pillows  
under my dress. In each new room  
the mirror reassures me  
I'll not be recognized.  
I'm learning to travel light,  
like the juice in the power line.  
My baggage, swallowed by memory,  
weighs almost nothing. No one suspects  
its value. When they knock on my door,  
badges flashing, I open up:  
I don't match their description.  
"Wrong room," they say, and apologize.  
My life in the corner winks  
and wipes off my fingerprints.*

**SOMETIMES, WHEN THE LIGHT**  
(Optional reading by Pianist or Violinist)

*Sometimes, when the light strikes at odd angles  
and pulls you back into childhood*

*and you are passing a crumbling mansion  
completely hidden behind old willows*

*or an empty convent guarded by hemlocks  
and giant firs standing hip to hip,*

*you know again that behind that wall,  
under the uncut hair of the willows*

*something secret is going on,  
so marvelous and dangerous*

*that if you crawled through and saw,  
you would die, or be happy forever.*

# Interlude III

**Sprightly** ♩ = c. 132  
(senza sord.)

Violin *p* *mf*

Piano *p* *mf*

6 *rit.* *gliss. on harmonics* *p*

*rit.* *p* *mf*

11 *a tempo* *p* *rit.*

*a tempo* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

15 *Slower* *mf* *p* *rit.*

*Slower* *rit.*



# Naming the Animals

Lisel Mueller

Gwyneth Walker

*♩. = 72 as a rocking motion*

Violin *p* *mf*

Soprano *mf* Un -

Piano *mf*

5 *p* *mf*

til he named the horse "horse",

9 *p* *mf*

hoofs left no print on the earth,

black-note clusters

13

manes had not been inven - - - ted,

black-note clusters

*p* *mf*

17

swift-ness and grace were not mar - - - ried.

*p* *mf*

21 A

Un - til he named the

*p* *mf*

A *(mf)*

26

cow "cow", no one slept stand - ing

31

up, no one saw through o - - paque eyes,

36

food was on - - ly chewed once.

*accel.* .....

40

*f* *p* *mf* *f* *mf*

*gva* "horse" *accel.* "cow"

45 **B** ♩. = 80

*f* *pizz.* *arco*

**B** ♩. = 80

*f* joyously

Leo. sim.

50

*p* *f*

55

*p* *f* *mf*

On-ly

*p*

61 **C** (♩ = 80) *rit.* *con sord.* *mf*

*p* *mf*

af - ter he named the fish "fish", did the

**C** (♩ = 80) *rit.*

65 **Slower** *8va if possible* *p* *colla voce*

*cantabile* *p*

light put on skins of yel - - low and sil - - ver

**Slower**

69 **a tempo** (♩ = 80) *senza sord.* *(loco)* *p* *delicately*

*p* *delicately* *(loco)* *p* *delicately*

oil, re - veal-ing it-self as a dan - cer

**a tempo** (♩ = 80) *p* *delicately*

74

and high - jump cham-pion of the world,

79

*rit.* ..... **Slower**

just as la - - - ter he had to

*rit.* ..... **Slower**

83

, a tempo ♩ = 72

name the wom - an "love" be -

, a tempo ♩ = 72

(Ped.)

87 Free Measure

E  $\text{♩} = 72$   
 pizz.  
*p*

fore he could put on the knowledge of who she was, with her small hands.

Free Measure

E  $\text{♩} = 72$

(Ped.)

90

arco  
*p non cresc.* *mp* *p*  
*(p)* *mp* *mf*  
 "horse" "cow" "fish"  
*p* *mp* *mf*  
 (Ped.)

95

con sord. *mf* *rit.* senza sord. *p* hold into next song  
*p* "love"  
*rit.* *p*  
 Pedal stays into next song

(Ped.)

Pedal stays into next song

# There are Mornings

Lisel Mueller

Gwyneth Walker

Violin *pp*  $\text{♩} = 126$

Piano *p* *delicately*  $\text{♩} = 126$

(Pedal stays from previous song) *ped.*

5 *ped.* *sim.*

9 *mf* *mf* *ped.* *sim.*

13 *V V V V V V V*



17

*p*

*p*

una corda

**B**

21

continue two-measure pattern

*spoken gently, with a sense of wonderment*

Some mornings in summer I step outside and the sky opens and pours itself into me as if I were a saint about to die.

**B**

continue one-measure pattern

**C** (♩ = 126)

22

*mf*

**C** (♩ = 126)

*mf*

tre corde

26

V V V V V V V

29

**D** pizz. *p*

*mf* 3

E - ven now, when the plot calls for me to turn to

**D** *p*

33

arco *mf*

stone, \_\_\_\_\_ the sun \_\_\_\_\_ in - ter -

*mf*

37

venes, \_\_\_\_\_ the sun, \_\_\_\_\_ sun, \_\_\_\_\_ sun, \_\_\_\_\_ in - ter -

41

venes. \_\_\_\_\_ Some

45 E pizz.

E morn-ings in sum - mer \_\_\_\_\_ I step out - - - side \_\_\_\_\_ and the sky \_\_\_\_\_

49

o - - - - - pens and pours

arco  
mf  
f

53

it - self in-to me as if I were a saint a - bout to die.

F  
p

57

But the

p  
mf  
poco rit.

60 *slightly slower, quasi recitative*

*p*

plot calls for me to live, be ord - i - nar - y, — say noth - ing to an - y - one.

*p*

*slightly slower, quasi recitative*

*p*

64 *rit.* ..... **G** *Slowly*

*p*

*(p)*

In - side the house the mir - rors

*rit.* ..... **G** *Slowly*

*p*

*rit.* ..... **G** *Slowly*

67 *accel.* ..... *a tempo* (♩ = 126)

*ffp*

*f*

burn — when I pass.

*accel.* ..... *a tempo* (♩ = 126)

*ffp*

*f*

*rapidly, blurred*

*ffp*

accel.

70

*sfz* *f* *sfz* *mf*

*mf* *p*

accel.

74

**H** Quickly ♩ = 144

*p* (*p*)

*p*

There are morn - - - ings, some

**H** Quickly ♩ = 144

(*p*)

77

*mf* *p* *mf*

*mf*

morn - - - ings, there are morn - - - ings,

*p* *mf*

80

*mf* *f* *mf* *f*

— some morn - - ings, — there are

83

*f* *f*

morn-ings, morn - ings, some morn-ings, some morn - ings, the sky

87

*p subito* *p* *p subito* *cresc.*

J

91

*f* *mf* *p* *p*

pens, o

J

96

*f* *f*

o pens

J

100

*ff* *ff* *ff*

J