

Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition: **The Snake and Other Creatures** – soprano and piano

The Snake – The Frog – The Bee – The Oriole – The Spider – The Rat

Date: 2001

Duration: 15:20

Recording: by Susan Narucki, soprano; Christopher Oldfather, piano

Program Note:

There were many years when I tried to set a poem by Emily Dickinson, all in vain. Since I was such a strong admirer of Dickinson's poetry I was not happy about that. BUT, after a few years it suddenly came. I was finally able to do it! In fact, I had eventually to restrain myself from overdoing it. I set over ten of her texts in the following years. *The Snake* is a song set that gathers texts about animals, of which there is quite a rich supply. My accompaniments for the songs have quite a lot to say about the character of the animals in the text; the slithery snake, the threading spider, and waddling rat, etc.

Texts:

The Snake

A narrow fellow in the grass
Occasionally rides;
You may have met him, - did you not?
His notice sudden is.
The grass divides as with a comb,
A spotted shaft is seen;
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on.
He likes a boggy acre,
Yet when a child, and barefoot,
I more than once, at morn,
Have passed. I thought, a whip-lash
Unbraiding in the sun,-
When, stopping to secure it,
It wrinkled, and was gone.
Several of nature's people
I know, and they know me,
I fell for them a transport
Of cordiality;
But never met this fellow,
attended or alone,
Without a tighter breathing,
And zero at the bone.

The Frog

His mansion in the pool
The frog forsakes.
He rises on a log
And statements makes.
His auditors two worlds
Deducting me.
The orator of April
Is hoarse today.
His mittens at his feet
No hand hath he,
His eloquence a bubble
As fame should be.
Applaud him, to discover
To your chagrin
Demosthenes has vanished
In forums green.

The Bee

His feet are shod with gauze,
His helmet is of gold:
His breast, a single onyx
With chrysoprase inlaid
His labor is a chant,
His idleness a tune;
Oh, for a bee's experience
Of clovers and of noon!

The Oriole

To hear an oriole sing
May be a common thing,
Or only a divine.
It is not of the bird
Who sings the same, unheard,
As unto crowd.
The fashion of the ear
Attireth that it hear
In dun or fair.
So whether it be rune,
Or whether it be none,
Is of within;
The "tune is in the tree,"
The sceptic showeth me;
"No, sir! In thee!"

The Spider

The spider as an artist
Has never been employed
Thought his surpassing merit
Is freely certified
By every broom and Bridget
Throughout a Christian land.
Neglected son of genius
I take thee by the hand.

The Rat

The rat is the concisest tenant.
He pays no rent,
Repudiates the obligation
On schemes intent
Balking our wit
To sound or circumvent,
Hate cannot harm
A foe so reticent-
Neither decree prohibit him-
Lawful as equilibrium.