# CONCEPTION TO BIRTH 

for: soprano 1, soprano 2,atio, tenor, baritone, bass and harp
by JENNIFER FOWLER

Text by the composer.

Duration: 11' 30"

# FROM CONCEPTION TO BIRTH 

by Jennifer Fowler

From Conception To Birth is part of a collection of songs with the overall title of "Eat and Be Eaten". The collection revolves around the subject of food in all its significance. The subject matter allows for a range of moods, from deadly serious (literally) to humorous. It is not forgotten that while one creature is indulging in the enjoyable bit - the eating - often it is another creature which is being eaten.

This song is the longest, central item of the cycle, and explores the balancing act set up between a pregnant woman and a growing foetus. The nourishment and survival of both follows a different agenda but is interdependent. In this case the nurture of the foetus plays a risky strategy against the depletion of the mother's rescurces. A further ironical strand is added by the (male) voices of brash redics.

The song is scored for 6 vecal parts: Sop 1, Sop 2, Alto, Tenor, Baritone \& Bass, and harp. Thei ist soprano is given a solo part.

The cycle of songs whe commissioned by The Song Company of Sydney.

## CONCEPTION TO BIRTH

TEXT (by Jennifer Fowler):
It has begun. No stopping now.
Conception is reckoned as Week Two.
Cells fuse, then divide and divide again.
Segments bunch like a blackberry.
Still but a spot, life moves
In a glistening membrane,
And burrowing home, couches in soft tissue.
A strange restlessness invades me.
Uneasy, I drift on surging tides of nausea
And queasy hunger that craves only raw carrot.
Waiting with the waiting women,
All tense, quiet,
Silence magnifies the crunching,
Teeth grinding carrot.
Now at Week Six, (no stoppitg),
The burgeoning life is a halt-inch jelly, A floating comma of heaa and tail, Sprouting buds with packering hollows, And strange swellingerotrusions.

Awash with navsed, my body rejects
All food.
The heave of unstable fluid mounts in sickening waves
To violent seizure.
Weak, unnourished, legs drag, Flesh wastes.

At Week Twelve, (holding on), The head is large, the tail has gone. Eyelids form, remaining closed, Heart beats strongly, tireless, steadfast.

Waiting, more dreary waiting rooms, The brash medic advises:
An expectant mother needs proper nutrition, She should eat every day,
Eggs, milk, liver, whole grains, green veggies and fruit. Vomit surprises his shiny black shoes.

Twenty four weeks, (still surviving), Foetus looks human,
Skin less red and covered in down,
Sex now determined, it moves
With purposeful vigour.
Craving one food at a time,
Burnt toast... sardines... fish paste,
Morning still greeted with spewing and heaving,
Uncomfortable squeezing of stomach and foetus,
This to continue even during Birth.
Thirty six weeks, (nearly ready!),
Lungs are developed and waiting for air,
Less room to move, gathering strength,
Poised, waiting....
Ah......

It has begun. A second beginning.
Birth is counted as Day One.
This life is unique, and, separate now
Comes forth crying,
And by crying, meets Life's first challenge.
Comfort returns, though Cautious as yet.
Aware now, in the voic, a huge hollow.
The fast is over!
Nine months of staivation is finished.
A whole roast ox brould be welcome.
What time is the evening meal?
This hospital serves meals in very strict order,
Your ward has been dealt with,
Plates collected and taken away.
You must wait till tomorrow.
Hunger!
Aching, growling, wolfish, Greedy, unruly,
Voracious, rapacious, rampaging,
Salivating, tormenting, overwhelming,
Devouring, raging, Hunger!
So mother and baby wait, Then slake their desperate need, And join in the lifelong rhythm, Hunger, comfort, hunger, comfort.....

## NOTES:

Voices: For the sections of "Mnn......uh", the "M" produces the accent, and the note/s are sung on the prolonged " n ". The final syllable is unaccented and produced by simple release, but is nevertheless distinct. Vowel
sound as in "but".

In sections such as Bar 107 onwards, the accents on the long held notes indicate a voices throbbing sound. (As also in Par 188 onwards, which involves the upper

Harp: Please emphasize the rhythmicsroupings of the notes, as they are written, in 2's, 3's, or 4's.

A separate harp part is avaid àole.

Jennifer Fowler










Bar.


$$
(q=76)(e+e=q)
$$


B.


[^0]



## $(q=60)(q=e+e$.



$(q=76)$










[^1]



Bar.

B.

$\ddagger$ Sections in square brackets [...] indicate panting, with a lot of the " h " sound carried through the vowel as well. Vowel as in "cot".


* ng - on the last note, release the tongue abruptly so that it becomes almost a separate syllable.

S1.


A.

T.


Bar.

B.








$238 \quad$ A tempo $(q=76)$

T.


Bar.

B. $\frac{6): 17}{16}$

$$
\text { A tempo }(q=76)
$$






T.


Bar.

B.





S2.

T.

B.


Bar.
Mnn
uh.


A


T.



[^0]:    * Click tongue in imitation of a deep-toned clock.

[^1]:    * o (vowel as in "cot"), oe (vowel half way between "cot" and "toe")
    $\dagger$ "ah" includes some expelled breath after the short vowel

