

Hail! Mother of us all and Beautiful!

Section I. Chorus
from
Hymn to the Earth [1929]

Edward Joseph Collins, music and words

Notes by Jon Becker, editor for the Collins project

Composed in Wisconsin's Door County, *Hymn to the Earth* was inspired by that peninsula's landscape and changing seasons. This the opening section of Collins's secular cantata *Hymn to the Earth* sets the composer's own words:

Hail! Mother of us all and beautiful!

Thou paradise of singing birds and perfumed flowers!
Thou generous provider!
All love and gratitude to thee!
Whence we came, and whither we return.

Who does not love thy white hooded mountains,
Thy rich green valleys, thy tumbling cataracts?
Who does not love thy broad, calm rivers
Sweeping down to meet the sea?
Or thy lesser streams that unite with shining water inland?
How beautiful thy limitless stretch of undulating sand and throbbing ocean!

Thou art fair to behold at dawn when the sun, thy lover, kisses thee,
But thou art fairer still by night when shadows creep across thy face,
And thou art bathed in pale, blue light.

In the cool shade of thy forests
Are springs of bubbling nectar.
While high among the leafy vaults are birds with gay plumage, with sweet voices.

Thou yieldest the precious metals
And the stored up sunlight
And nuturest the tiny seeds
That burst into golden showers of fruit and grain.

Hail, thou mother of us all and beautiful!
Thou paradise of singing birds and perfumed flowers!
Thou generous provider!

The other sections of *Hymn* celebrate the seasons. Toward the end the work, the composer takes a quite modern view of human existence, so small within the vastness of the cosmos. Collins also uses the phrase "Mother Earth," perhaps for the first time in Western classical music.

Collins (10 November 1886 – 1 December 1951) thus holds a very interesting place betwixt two legendary Wisconsin environmental thinkers and writers, John Muir (21 April 1838 – 24 December 1914) and Aldo Leopold (11 January 1887 – 21 April 1948), in a Wisconsin cultural and intellectual history that arcs from the pre-historic Native American Effigy Mound Culture (ca. 700-1100 CE) toward the founding of Earth Day by U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson (4 June 1916 – 3 July 2005).

Hail! Mother of us all and Beautiful! was extracted from Collins's piano-vocal score for *Hymn to the Earth*.