

June Boyce-Tilman  
**A Rainbow to Heaven**  
**Hymns, Songs and Chants**  
ISBN 9780 8524 9890 3  
*Stainer and Bell, 2006, £13.50*

The Composer, Sir John Tavener, compares June Boyce-Tilman's album to "a beautiful woman, with the white hair of Wisdom, and the face of a young girl". For those searching for 'alternative church' musical materials, or simply a way to celebrate life, this book provides a wonderful resource of hymns, songs, and chants - a cappella, with accompaniment, or sung as rounds.

The writing of this refreshing and heart warming album threads together the many colours of our human experience. Sometimes with humour; sometimes with suffering, and always with insight, JBT reflects the varying shades of our relationship to God, to creation and to one another. Her work is shot through with that delightful, tender, earthed freedom of one in love with the life that God would have us enjoy in abundance.

In her introduction, JBT weaves autobiographical glimpses into her explanation of the creative and theological impetus that inspires her words and music. From her immersion in the Wisdom/Sophia Tradition and in feminist theology, JBT redresses the balance by "finding the other half of one of the binary divides that characterize the Christian tradition...the unknowing that balances the aggressive pursuit of knowledge, feminine images to balance male images ...and the intuitive God who cannot be held by the reasoning mind alone". Included are sections on the history of women in church music, the spirituality of music and its construction and value.

The hymns of JBT are inspired by the reassertion of subjugated value systems. In a diagram of the relative polarities, she illustrates the values that dominate Western culture: Unity, Product, Rational, Challenge - and contrasts them with those often reasserted by feminist theologians: Diversity, Process, Intuitive, Nurture. It is the latter qualities that the composer has attempted to reflect in her work.

Her texts carry us outside the box of liturgical seasons and into a wide and colourful landscape of homely images and intimate, tender subjects: we have a hymn for Father's Day and another for Grief. There is one for Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Baby. A hymn of Prayer for Wisdom and one for The Flame of Love and an Ocean Hymn:

God within such beauty  
Pull us with your loving  
Into joyful deeps.  
Such majestic closeness  
Changing, yet unchanging  
Draws us to your heart.  
Gently sheltering harbour calm,  
Storms that wreck life's fragile fabric,

All take place within you.

Much of the music is composed by JBT. The melodic lines capture that hymnodist's genius: an accessible and engaging simplicity with a rhythmic energy that stays in the ear and heart. The style is often reminiscent of the English folk song.

Like many women before her, JBT has tried to reflect in song the visionary, improvisatory, integrative, authoritative nature of God, some of the ways of knowing that have been marginalized in Western society. She hopes that her work will encourage other women to sing, play and compose for music is power. She believes hymns, far more than sermons, transmit the theology of the Church. Music and words combined leave deep impressions on the mind. Such an impression was left upon this reviewer who discovered words and music that reached deep into the soul.

*Catherine Joy CSF*