

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

There's something wonderful about happening upon a musician playing for his or her own pleasure, completely absorbed in the music. Jeff Daniel Marion is a fine poet from east Tennessee. And here's a woman playing the bagpipes.

Playing to the River

She stands by the riverbank,
notes from her bagpipes lapping
across to us as we wait

for the traffic light to change.
She does not know we hear—
she is playing to the river,

a song for the water, the flow
of an unknown melody to the rocky
bluffs beyond, for the mist

that was this morning, shroud
of past lives: fishermen
and riverboat gamblers, tugboat captains

and log raftsmen, pioneer and native
slipping through the eddies of time.
She plays for them all, both dirge

and surging hymn, for what has passed
and is passing as we slip
into the currents of traffic,
the changed light bearing us away.

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