

What Tune Shall I Play, While in Calcutta, This Fine Day?
By Nancy Mann

It is such a myth, no, a hoot –
People think a cobra
Responds to the pungi, the native flute.

Sixteen species are in the cobra genus –
So herpetologists ever amaze us.

They possess the most glinty eyes,
Crawling silently from under leaves, narrowed and intent is their stare –
(Before any living thing is of the snake aware).
Conducive to frighten prey – such deadly looking eyes!
When coiled to attack us (we are prey, too, I surmise).

Cobras threaten populations –
In India; in the mountains – the gentle Hmong.
Some grow well over three meters long!

Cobras kill and eat each other –
Babies, newly egg-hatched, snake fathers, mothers!

Of nature's music? The cobra's deaf; he has no ears –
The coiled cobra hears no sound!
Temperature attracts him...
Rising quickly from his ubiquitous straw basket,
To kill instantly, his purpose and task is.
Temperature attracts him...
When warm humans gather 'round.

In front of a snake charmer, he surveys and sways;
Sways his distinctly marked, eyelet, evil hood...
A lithe girl, is there – ankle-braceletted,
Eyelids kohl-lined, innocent, wan, and frail and good...
So very frail...
“Don't stay there! Run!” the crowd,
Though thrilled, starts to wail.

This is music – music oriental
Rising to crescendo...
The reptile's aria; wish-song that he will Life undo.

I tell all;

Preaching from August until June

It matters not which music plays, or what is the musical tune.

(You may even stop any musical tune.)

Nothing will be happening.

You can silence the audience –

Silence their urging, silence their clapping –

Nothing will be happening!

Never obscure the hands of the snake charmer—

Or ... Lightning!

The cobra strikes –

Strikes, in tempo,

Certain to kill, and fatally harm her!