BEHIND THE LINES

THE MUSIC AND COMPOSERS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

RESOURCE PACK: GURNEY

musicbehindthelines.org
IVOR GURNEY
(1890–1937)

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About Behind the Lines

**Behind the Lines** is a year-long programme of free participatory events and resources for all ages to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. The programme is being delivered in partnership by Westminster Music Library and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

**Public Workshops**

Beginning in autumn 2013, educational leaders and world-class musicians from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra are leading a series of 18 interactive workshops for adults and families (early years and primary age focus). Sessions will explore the music and composers of the First World War through these engaging creative composition workshops, targeted at the age group specified, and using the music and resources housed in Westminster Music Library, where all sessions take place.

Any level of musical experience and ability will be welcome, as accessible instruments will be provided for workshops. Participants who sing, or own an instrument, are encouraged to bring and use their instrument/voice.

There will be six workshops for each participant group (Adults, Early Years, Primary Age) between October 2013 – July 2014. Booking information can be found below.

**Schools Projects**

In addition to the public workshop series, Behind the Lines will also work with six schools in Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; two secondaries and four primaries. These six schools will participate in 2 day creative composition projects which draw upon the themes of the programme and link in with the schools own learning programmes – in particular the History, Music and English curriculum.

Additional schools projects can be incorporated in to the Behind the Lines programme between 2014 – 2018, although fundraising will be required. For further information or to discuss fundraising ideas with the project partners please contact rwalters@westminster.gov.uk

**Summer School**

The programme will culminate with a four day creative summer school for young musicians (Years 6-11) across Westminster and RBKC, to commemorate the outbreak of the First World War and celebrate its music and composers. Participants will explore numerous key compositions and composers, drawing upon the resources and works held in the collections at Westminster Music Library, and devise their own new musical compositions in response to these works, supported by the musical expertise of 5 professional musicians and leaders from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Dates are to be confirmed but please register interest using the link provided on the next page.

**Featured Composers**

The programme will feature key composers, and sign post numerous others, who all lived during The Great War and composed music that was directly inspired by their experiences, including the socio-political climate at the time. Key composers include Elgar, Ravel, Holst and Vaughan Williams, who will each be the subject matter for a set of public workshops and a resource pack. However, in addition, the programme will explore other key and lesser known composers through thematic explorations such as the integration of poetry in to WW1-inspired composition with Gurney and Bliss, or the works of composers who died during active service such as Butterworth and Farrar.
Resource Packs

Just like this pack, for other featured composers and themes throughout the year there will be further Behind the Lines Resource Packs created, which will be available from Westminster Music Library, online at www.musicbehindthelines.org or by request to education@rpo.co.uk

Contribute

Behind the Lines welcomes public contributions to the subject matter, and since its initiation in summer 2013 has drawn in support from academic specialists with composer/compositional specific knowledge, and is building a network of partner organisations who are commemorating the outbreak of the First World War through activities, art and events. If you would like to contribute to the programme or be involved contact education@rpo.co.uk

Booking Information

Booking is now open for the sixth round in the series.

- Early Years Workshop 6   Sat 7th June, 14.15-15.15
- Primary Age Workshop 6   Sat 7th June, 15.30-17.00
- Adult Workshop 6         Mon 9th June 15.15-18.00


Further booking information:

- Participation in Behind the Lines activities is free of charge.
- Priority will be given to participants who live and work in the London boroughs: City of Westminster or Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.
- However, interested participants from other areas may register their interest below to be put on a waiting list, and will be notified of any available spaces one week prior to events.
- Participants do not need to have prior musical experience, just an interest in either the subject matter or participatory music workshops with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.
- Any level of musical ability is welcome, accessible instruments/resources will be provided.
- Participants who own and play instruments are encouraged to bring them along.
- Sessions will be hosted at Westminster Music Library.
- Sessions will be facilitated by a professional RPO workshop leader and team of three musicians from the Orchestra.

Register Your Interest

To register your interest in participating / resource packs / receiving further information about the programme please complete this form: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/musicbehindthelines

Concerts

There will also be the opportunity to hear some of this fascinating music being played by the Orchestra throughout the year – see the section below for a list of related concerts and events.

The Behind the Lines Summer School will culminate with a grand finale performance which will be open to the public and feature young musicians who have participated in the programme alongside musicians and leaders from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Details will be announced on the website www.musicbehindthelines.org later in the year, but for those interested in being kept up to date, register your interest above.
Biography

Ivor Gurney (1890–1937)

Ivor Gurney was born in Gloucester on 28 August 1890 and was one of four children. His father owned a small tailoring business. In his early years he was influenced a great deal by the Revd Alfred Cheesman, a local clergyman. Cheesman, the curate at the Gurney's local church, had been the only person present at Gurney's baptism, apart from his parents and the vicar, and so became his Godfather. He took his role of Godfather seriously by taking the young Ivor under his wing and encouraging his musical, literary, and intellectual interests, which were not nourished at home or in his formal education. He had large a personal library to which he allowed Gurney free access. Gurney had a troubled relationship with his family, especially with his mother and his brother; his creative mind was difficult for them to understand. Their home was small, as it contained his father's workshop, and work had to take precedence over culture. Even at a young age there were signs that Ivor Gurney was a dreamer, with a somewhat disorganised mind, making him inconsistent and not easy to deal with. Later in life this would manifest itself in numerous incomplete manuscripts.

Initially Gurney attended the National School in Gloucester, but Cheesman, recognising the boy's talents, encouraged him to become a chorister at the cathedral which would also mean attending the King's School. He moved there in 1900, and in 1906, received tuition from the cathedral organist, Herbert Brewer. His first attempts at composition date from 1904. The composer Herbert Howells and poet Will Harvey were his early friends in Gloucester who encouraged his artistic tendency.

He won a composition scholarship in 1911 to study at the Royal College of Music (RCM) with Stanford. Of the many composers that Stanford taught, which included Vaughan Williams, Holst and Bliss, he believed Gurney to be potentially the best, yet unteachable (Parry once commented that Gurney's manner and appearance reminded him of Schubert). It was at the RCM that Gurney met Marion Scott, who was to become a great champion of his life and work. At this time, Gurney had great enthusiasm and ideas for music in a range of genres, including a series of operas. He experimented with instrumental and chamber music but struggled with their abstract nature; song became his forte, with words providing an anchor for his musical expression. Whilst at college, Gurney lived in poverty in Fulham, and had to take a job as an organist in High Wycombe to make ends meet. In High Wycombe, he met the Chapman family with whom he was to become friends and correspond with over a long period. The children loved his lively personality and enthusiasm. Gurney proposed marriage to the seventeen year old Kitty, but she turned him down.

Gurney may have had a natural exuberance, but his mood would often swing to one of depression, and in 1913 he was close to a nervous breakdown which required him to take a break in Gloucestershire. 1913 was also the year that Gurney found his musical voice with the composition of Five Elizabethan Songs, with texts by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, which were eventually published in 1920.

For a detailed account of Gurney's life and work in the war click here
After the war, Gurney returned to Gloucester with his life in disarray. His family were able to provide little support or understanding, although he did have friends who rallied round. However, he slowly recovered now he was in his familiar environment. His creative spirit returned, possibly encouraged by the publishing of his poetry, and by the autumn of 1919 he was fit enough to resume his studies at the RCM, this time being taught by Vaughan Williams. Unlike in 1911, when he first attended the RCM, he was now well known, which provided him with further encouragement. Vaughan Williams was instrumental in raising funds from friends to help him. Gurney resumed his organ post in High Wycombe, and received vital care and support from the Chapman family.

Life was now relatively stable, and musically he was at his most prolific, writing dozens of songs with great intensity. He found some physical work on a Gloucestershire farm which helped settle his nerves, but this also seemed to bring him further inspiration. Exercise seemed to both calm him and stimulate him. He needed both the discipline of study at the RCM, and the inspiration of the countryside. In the end though, he was unable to cope with London, and after irregular attendance at the RCM, he finally left in March 1922. The years 1919 to 1921 marked a period when most of his songs were written, during a period of intense creativity.

Back in Gloucester, he had little going for him. He worked briefly as a tax clerk but was unable to sustain this due to his increasingly irregular eating and sleeping patterns. His behaviour, which was always quite eccentric, grew ever more erratic due to the extreme pressure under which he was working. This was hard for his family, from whom he was now virtually estranged. Gurney seemed to harbour resentment against his family, his friends and his country, believing that he was not valued as a war poet. He felt betrayed by the country he loved and had served, both as a soldier and as an artist.

His family eventually sought medical help in September 1922, at which point he was certified as insane and admitted to Barnwood House Asylum in Gloucester, largely for his own safety. This was traumatic for a man who loved the outdoors and being free. He wrote letters to the police, universities, friends and colleagues seeking help in getting released, but to no avail. He did manage to escape once but was recaptured, so it was decided that he should be moved away from the familiarity of Gloucestershire. With the help of Marion Scott, Vaughan Williams and others, he was transferred to the City of London Mental Hospital near Dartford in Kent on 21 December 1922. It was now clear he could not be cured, although he was never a threat to other people, only himself.

He may have been physically imprisoned by the asylum system, but his mind was still free, and he could live through the past. There were periods of sanity between the illness. He still had support from friends and received visits, and was occasionally allowed out for the day with friends, providing a nurse was present. He continued to write songs (he wrote about fifty in 1925), but then he wrote nothing after 1926. His poetry remained strong though, with the past very much alive in his mind, including memories and visions of the war. Many were tinged with the sense of the betrayal that he felt. In total, he possibly wrote about 900 poems, of which two thirds remain unpublished.

From his writings within the asylum, we can sense Gurney's bitterness that his suffering did not bring him the reward of fame. However, throughout the 1920s, his poems and songs were continually being published. Admittedly, though, as his condition worsened, the quality of his
poetry did deteriorate. His anger does not seem to be directed against the army or his war experiences; he seems to have stoically accepted his lot and remained largely detached from its horrors. Part of Gurney’s bitterness and feelings of failure may have stemmed from the fact that he had high expectations of himself as an artist, encouraged by such people as Alfred Cheesman early in his life, and Marion Scott.

As his condition deteriorated, Gurney claimed he was the author of Shakespeare’s plays and the composer of music by Beethoven and Haydn. He complained he was being persecuted by ‘electrical impulses’ and being attacked by wireless radio waves. He could not have been referring to electro-convulsive therapy as this had yet to be invented; he may have been latching onto fears of new technology in general. By 1928, it was clear that he would not recover and would have to remain in an asylum.

During the late 1930s, a group of Gurney’s friends and supporters put together a collection of articles on the composer which were to be published in *Music and Letters* in 1938. Drafts of the symposium were taken to Gurney for him to see, but he was too ill to understand them or recognise their significance.

Ivor Gurney died from tuberculosis on 26 December 1937, and was buried on 31 December in St Matthew’s churchyard at Twigworth near Gloucester. The burial service was taken by his godfather, now Canon Alfred Cheesman, who had been present at his baptism 47 years earlier.

Composer Gerald Finzi attended the funeral, who had come across Gurney’s music, and who, along with Marion Scott, would be responsible for gathering together his songs and poems to prepare them for publication. This was a task made difficult by the unevenness of much of his writing, and its increasing incoherence as his mental state deteriorated. Only about a hundred out of his estimated 300 songs have been (or would be able to be) published. Of Gurney’s instrumental and chamber music, little has been published. In this genre are sonatas for violin and piano, string quartets and one orchestral piece called *A Gloucestershire Rhapsody*, but it is as a song writer that he is remembered.

Gurney loved English literature and set poems from different periods, but was especially attracted to contemporary poets. His song settings are sensitive with strong emotional intensity, and often have long flexible vocal lines which aim to express the poem’s overall meaning. He tended to write quickly and from instinct, rarely revising his work, which sometimes means the piano accompaniment can be clumsy. Unlike several of his contemporaries, he showed little interest in the folk song revival which was growing in popularity at the time. His own poetry often celebrates his beloved Gloucestershire countryside, as well as life in the trenches, and one can detect in his poems his gradual descent into insanity. In both poetry and song writing, he was a remarkable talent; distinctive and original.

Much has been written about the origins of Gurney’s mental illness. Initially there was a tendency to blame it entirely on the war, and his horrific wartime experiences were no doubt part of the story, but he was already showing signs instability before he went to fight. It is now generally accepted that he had a genetic form of paranoid schizophrenia. In fact, his time in the trenches was one of the happiest in his life, when he was most at peace with himself; the comradeship of fellow soldiers, the shared suffering, and the structure of army life were to bring him some stability. He was always prone to depression, which often followed periods of intense creativity;
as his creative opportunities were naturally limited in the trenches, he did not experience this to the same extent. Once he was discharged and alone again, he no longer had a feeling of ‘safety’ which came with being in the army. He was forced to attempt to cope on his own, but ultimately, and tragically, he was unable to do so. It is possible that he was misdiagnosed and received the wrong treatment as the causes of mental illness in the 1920s were very often, understandably, put down to the effects of war. However, it is questionable, even with the availability of modern treatment, as to how much he would have been able to live outside an institution, and it is unlikely that his creativity could have been restored.

Life and Work During the War

Music would have been Gurney’s career had the war not intervened. With the war in only its fourth day, he tried to enlist with his old school friend and poet Will Harvey, but was rejected due to defective eyesight. He tried again in February 1915, when the requirements had been relaxed, and this time was accepted by the 2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment as a Private, number 3895. He was sent to Chelmsford in Essex for basic training, followed by a stint on Salisbury Plain, where facilities and conditions were very primitive. Gurney hoped that the physical exertion, the camaraderie, and the discipline of army life might help his increasingly fragile mental state. There is little evidence that he was overly patriotic.

On 25 May 1916, Gurney and his regiment sailed from Southampton to France where he served as a signaller. He saw his first action in July, at Fauquissart near Laventie, where his regiment relieved the London Welsh. During the changeover, Gurney was able to enjoy hearing and singing Welsh folk songs. His role as a signaller required him to crawl, sometimes in great danger, in no man’s land to fix telephone cables. On 27 October, his regiment moved south to the Somme for the final stages of the battle there, but he saw no action. At the end of the year, he moved away from the front to Gapennes for further training during the very cold winter.

In February 1917, the Gloucesters moved south to Ablaincourt to provide support for the French. Gurney received a bullet wound in the arm on Good Friday which was relatively minor, but he was hospitalised in Rouen for six weeks, and thus was spared most of the fighting. He was not senior enough to be sent home, which he regretted.

Gurney’s letters from the front are extensive; on the whole he seems to have taken the dangers and discomfort of trench life in his stride, and remained quite cheerful. He enjoyed the comradeship of his fellow soldiers and experienced a sense of belonging. He might have been a little eccentric before the war, but now he was no longer the odd one out. The army catered for his needs, and his destiny was in the hands of others, which freed him from the stresses he was starting to feel in civilian life before the war. However, as time passed, his enthusiasm waned and his correspondence shows a greater weariness and a hope for a ‘Blighty’ (an injury sufficiently serious to be sent home). Boredom was more of a problem for Gurney; he was frustrated at not being able to compose and longed to return to England so he could be creative once again. He seemed to have no obvious fear of battle or death.

Writing music while serving in France was obviously not very practical, although he is known to have written five songs while in the trenches. Instead of writing music, however, he turned more to poetry, with many of his poems evoking homesickness and a longing to return to his native
Gloucestershire. Some poems recalled life in the trenches, with an acceptance of the possibility of death; others expressed his hatred of war. His first set of poems, *Severn and Somme*, was written in 1917, while the second, *War's Embers*, appeared in 1919. As a lover of poetry, Gurney carried copies of poems with him, including poems by Keats and Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad*. He always had a note book to jot down poems and ideas. After the war, he wrote songs and poetry in equal numbers, although he always regarded himself as a composer first and foremost, and believed that music was his true form of expression.

*For details of songs written while serving in France and Flanders* [click here](#)

Once he had recovered from his injury, Gurney trained as a gunner with the Gloucesters, and was transferred to a machine gun battery at Passchendaele where the infamous Third Battle of Ypres was already under way. The Gloucesters went into battle on 22 August 1917 and suffered huge losses. As a gunner though, Gurney was no longer in the infantry, so avoided the worst of the fighting, and was thus spared the level of danger and carnage experienced by his comrades. In the battle, Gurney lost friends that he had made in the regiment during the last year and a half, and this was very difficult for him to deal with. As a gunner, he had quite a good shot, but killing people caused him great distress. The initial benefits he gained from army life had now well and truly worn off.

At Passchendaele around 10 September, Gurney inhaled poison gas, however, the seriousness of his injuries is unclear. It is also possible that he experienced some kind of ‘shell shock’ or trauma, as a decision was made to send him back home, where he was admitted to Bangour War Hospital in Edinburgh.

Friends noted his poor physical and mental condition, but Bangour War Hospital was a progressive establishment which treated the body and mind, and encouraged culture and music. In such an environment, Gurney’s condition improved. He was nursed at the hospital by a volunteer worker, Annie Nelson Drummond, to whom he was attracted, but it is unclear as to what extent his feelings were reciprocated. By November, he was discharged and went for more signalling training over the winter in Northumberland, but with this lonely existence, and the possibility that he might be sent back to Flanders, he fell into depression once again. Showing increasing signs of mental instability, he returned to hospital in February 1918, and then was moved from one hospital to another, including one in Warrington for the war wounded suffering from nervous conditions. Correspondence from Annie Nelson Drummond ceased during this time, which plunged him further into despair.

On 19 June 1918, he was found wandering by the canal in Warrington, having written suicide notes. On 4 July, with the help of Hubert Parry, he was admitted to hospital once again where he stayed until he was discharged from the army in October 1918, shortly before the armistice. With the war now over, the army took no further responsibility for his welfare; he was given a small pension, and sent out into the world to fend for himself, despite his mental condition.
Chronology of key dates and World War One connections

1890  Born in Gloucester on 28 August – Revd Alfred Cheesman is his Godfather

1890s  Attends National School in Gloucester

1900s  Alfred Cheesman allows Gurney access to his personal library and encourages his musical, literary, and intellectual interests

1900  Wins a place in the Cathedral Choir and attends King’s School

Starts learning the organ

Meets F. W. Harvey

1904  First attempt at composition

1906  Is taught the organ by Herbert Brewer

1907  Meets Herbert Howells

1911  Wins composition scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music and meets Marion Scott

Takes job as organist in High Wycombe to make ends meet – meets the Chapman family who become his friends

Struggles with the abstract nature of instrumental and chamber music but excels in song writing

1913  Completes the *Five Elizabethan Songs*

First evidence of mental instability and comes close to a nervous breakdown

1914  Tries to enlist in the army four days after war breaks out in August but is turned down due to poor eyesight

1915  Tries enlisting again in February and is accepted – joins the 2/5th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment as a Private, number 3895

Trains in Chelmsford and on Salisbury Plain

1916  25 May – leaves Southampton for France

July – sees first action as a signaller in July at Fauquissart near Laventie

August – composes *By a Bierside* in a disused trench mortar emplacement

Composing music is difficult so starts writing poetry

27 October – moves south to the Somme but sees no fighting and then moves away from the front to Gapennes for further training
January – sets Will Harvey’s poem *In Flanders* to music at Crucifix Corner, Thiepval.

February – regiment moves south to Ablaincourt to provide support for the French.

March – composes music to his poem *Severn Meadows* at Caulincourt.

Good Friday – receives a bullet wound in the arm and is hospitalised in Rouen for six weeks.

June – writes music for Sir Walter Raleigh’s *Even such is time* while at Arras.

Trains as a gunner.

August – Gloucesters move to Passchendaele and go into action on 22nd suffering many losses but as a machine gunner Gurney escapes the worst.

Around 10 September – inhales poison gas and shortly afterwards is invalided home.

Recuperates in Bangour War Hospital in Edinburgh.

Falls in love with nurse Annie Nelson Drummond.

November – is discharged and goes for more signalling training in Northumberland.

November – first collection of poetry *Severn and Somme* is published.

1918

Falls into depression again and shows increasing signs of mental instability.

Correspondence with Annie Nelson Drummond ceases.

February – returns to hospital, and then moves from one hospital to another, finishing up in a hospital in Warrington for war wounded suffering from nervous conditions.

19 June – is found wandering near a canal in Warrington having written suicide notes.

4 July – is admitted to hospital again.

October – is discharged from the army with a small pension.

1919

Returns to Gloucester and in his familiar environment slowly recovers – his creative spirit returns.

Returns to Royal College of Music and is taught by Vaughan Williams.

Second set of poetry *War's Embers* is published.
Resumes his organ post in High Wycombe and is looked after by the Chapman family

1919–22
Writes both songs and poems in large numbers but intense creativity takes its toll on his mental health

Tries physical work hoping it will settle his nerves

Finds living in London difficult and spends more time in Gloucestershire

1922
Leaves the RCM in March after irregular attendance

Has irregular eating and sleeping patterns and is unable to hold down a job

Becomes estranged from his family

His family seek medical help in September – he is certified as insane and admitted to Barnwood House Asylum in Gloucester

Moves to the City of London Mental Hospital near Dartford in Kent on 21 December

1923–37
Continues to write songs and poetry, writing his last song *The Trumpet* to words by Edward Thomas in 1925 – eventually his poetry also dries up

His songs and poems continue to be published

Increasingly complains of being persecuted by ‘electrical impulses’ and wireless radio waves as his mental health deteriorates further

1937
Dies of tuberculosis on 26 December at the age of 47 and is buried in St Matthew’s churchyard at Twigworth near Gloucester
Writing music was difficult in the trenches, so Gurney concentrated more on writing poetry, but he is known to have written five songs while in France and Flanders, four of which are regarded as masterpieces. The texts of these songs are by other poets, except for one which is by Gurney himself. They explore themes of longing and homesickness, of grief and exile from the peace and security of the familiar world and landscape left behind, and they often contemplate the nature of death.

Gurney often memorised a poem and then set it quickly as a complete song, so there are often inaccuracies in the text. He tended to see a poem as a complete entity and composed the music accordingly, often with long flowing lines, rather than responding musically to the detail of words and phrases.

Following the war, Gurney went through a very prolific period from 1919 to 1921 where songs flowed from him one after another. Later, he wrote a cycle of songs called Lights Out, which takes its title from the fourth song in the set. The final song in the set is The Trumpet which was composed in 1925, after he had been admitted to an asylum. This is believed to be the last song he wrote, after which he remained silent. The six songs which make up Lights Out are settings of poems by Edward Thomas who was killed in action at the Battle of Arras in 1917. Thomas’s widow was one of the few visitors Ivor Gurney received after he had been confined to an asylum.

It is tempting to dwell on thoughts of what Gurney might have produced as a composer had his life not been affected and shortened by mental illness. However, perhaps it might be more appropriate to admire what he was actually able to achieve in his creative life given the circumstances. The four songs below, written in such chaotic and adverse conditions, are a fine example of Ivor Gurney’s song writing.
By a Bierside

Background to the composition

*By a Bierside* is an intensely dramatic setting of a poem by John Masefield, and is the first of the songs he wrote while on active service. The poem is a setting of the words of the *Chief Centurions* from Masefield’s *The Tragedy of Pompey the Great*. In a letter to Marion Scott dated 16 August 1916, Gurney explains that he wrote it in a disused trench mortar emplacement, and did so in two sittings, almost without effort. He set the poem from memory so it contains textual errors.

The opening of the song contemplates beauty, which is contrasted with the pity and waste of death, but then continues with the uplifting thought that death might open new doors, before finishing triumphantly with the statement that ‘it is most grand to die’. Gurney will surely have had his own possible fate in mind here.

He seems to have been thinking of an orchestral accompaniment for this song. Indeed, his friend Herbert Howells, with whom he corresponded regularly, did orchestrate it, and it was performed at the RCM on 23 March 1917, while Gurney was still in France. The version for piano and voice was published in 1980.

**Musical breakdown**

- Key: C Major
- Tempo: Adagio quasi andante, crotchet = 60.

**How the piece relates to WWI**

1. The opening contrasts described above are emphasized in bars 8-15 where the text declares how death is blind to beauty. The vocal line at ‘Beauty was in that heart and in that eager hand’ is underpinned by a gentle piano accompaniment outlining D minor and A minor but this contrasts sharply with the dramatic C sharp minor music underpinning ‘Death is so blind and dumb’.
Bars 8-15

mf

Beauty was in that heart and in that eager hand.

mf

Death is so blind and dumb, tranquillo

p

Death does not understand
2. The quiet, mysterious music accompanying the text ‘Death opens unknown doors’ in bars 28-30 hints at a possible afterlife and the forceful fortissimo statement at bars 34-39 ‘It is most grand to die’, accompanied by strident repeated chordal figures in the piano part, gives a feel of valor and pride in death. By setting this text Gurney was tackling the issue of death on the front lines head on and perhaps offering solace for those left bereaved or those, possibly including himself, afraid of death.

Bars 28-30

Bars 34-39
In Flanders
Background to the composition

In Flanders is a poem written by Gurney’s school friend and Gloucestershire man F. W. (Will) Harvey, who also served in the First World War. Both poet and composer shared the same love of their native county, and here celebrate their homeland. The poem compares the Flanders landscape, in which the poet is imprisoned, with the beauty of the Gloucestershire hills and rivers, along with the sky, clouds, sun and rain. Gurney saw the poem, written in 1915, in the Glosters Gazette, a trench magazine from the war. Writing to Marion Scott, Gurney said ‘That says everything for me. It is the perfect expression of homesickness...that will be in anthologies hundreds of years from now surely.’ Gurney's setting is dated ‘Crucifix Corner, Thiepval, finished 11 January 1917.’ Earlier, in August 1916, Harvey had gone missing and was believed to have been killed, which came as a terrible blow to Gurney. However, by October, it became known that Harvey had been captured and was to spend the remainder of the conflict as a prisoner of war.

Musical breakdown
- Key: E Flat Major
- Tempo: Andante espressivo

How the piece relates to WWI

1. The opening has a nostalgic feeling with the lyrical C minor piano accompaniment complimenting the text ‘I’m homesick for my hills again’. Homesickness would, no doubt, have been a serious issue for Gurney and other soldiers given the extended period away from Britain and as the song develops this sense of yearning increases in intensity.

Bars 5-10
2. The Flanders countryside is described by the text ‘Where the land is low Like a huge imprisoning O’ in bars 36-40.

Bars 36-40

3. The song reaches its climax during bars 54-57 where the poet reaffirms his desire to see the hills of Britain again ‘Cotswold or Malvern, sun or rain’. At this point the piano part falls silent for more than a bar before interjecting with a fortissimo chord during the word ‘sun’. This sparse texture gives the vocal line a declamatory character before the piano fully reenters to close the piece.
Severn Meadows
Background to the composition

Gurney rarely set his own poems to music and *Severn Meadows* is the only one to have been published. In March 1917, in the middle of the war torn landscape at Caulincourt, he sketched this song – a short two stanza poem, which is a mere 26 bars in length and lasts less than two minutes. Like Harvey’s *In Flanders*, there is the same nostalgic yearning for Gloucestershire, but this time in Gurney’s own words. The understatement of the verse combined with the music and its overall brevity increases the poignancy of the sense of exile.

**Musical breakdown**
- Key: D Major/B Minor
- Tempo: Lento

**How the piece relates to WWI**

1. A long held E minor 7 chord creates a feeling of calm remorse at the opening of the song before Gurney’s text enters ‘Only the wanderer knows England’s graces’ against a meandering lyrical piano accompaniment in thirds and sixths (perhaps suggesting movement/wandering). The music once again has a nostalgic feel and ties in with the text, which perhaps suggests that the soldiers on the front line developed a greater understanding of the country they left behind when contrasted against the situation they faced in mainland Europe.

*Bars 1-5*
2. The piano part continues in a similar vein throughout the short piece and the texture thickens briefly during the final line ‘Do not forget me quite O Severn meadows’ in bars 20-26

Bars 20-26
Even such is time

Background to the composition

*Even such is time* is a poem by Sir Walter Raleigh. The verse was found inside his Bible in the Abbey Gatehouse at Westminster, and was written on the night before his execution. It may be Raleigh’s farewell to life, but it also powerfully expresses the thoughts about death and the feelings of Gurney and those serving in the trenches. The song was composed at Arras and dates from early June 1917.

Musical breakdown

- Key: E Minor/E Major
- Tempo: Andante con moto

How the piece relates to WWI

1. The opening stanza of Raleigh’s poem ‘Even such is Time, which (sic. that) takes in trust Our youth, our joys, and all we have, And pays us but with age (sic. earth) and dust’ ostensibly deals the role time plays from youth to death but Gurney’s sparse piano accompaniment and doleful melody perhaps highlight his fears of an early death on the frontline and his personal sadness at the deaths of others.
Andante con moto

Bars 1-16

Even such is Time, which takes in trust Our youth. our

joys, and all we have, And

pays us but with age and dust;
2. The poem concludes with Raleigh’s belief that he will rise to heaven from his grave ‘But from his (sic. this) earth, this grave, this dust, My God shall raise me up, I trust.’ Gurney supports this positive statement with a gradually rising and intensifying vocal line accompanied by a piano part which also increases in intensity until loud chords mark out the end of the phrase.
## Gurney: Further Reference

### Gurney Related Books, Scores & Audio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney</td>
<td>Michael Hurd</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maker and lover of beauty : Ivor Gurney, poet and songwriter</td>
<td>Charles W Moore</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War Letters</td>
<td>Ivor Gurney</td>
<td>Music Store</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stars in a dark night: the letters of Ivor Gurney to the Chapman family</td>
<td>Ed. Anthony Boden</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song Composers</td>
<td>Trevor Hold</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Poetry of Shell Shock</td>
<td>Daniel Hipp</td>
<td>Victoria Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores/Sheet</td>
<td>By a Bierside (A Fifth Volume of Ten Songs)</td>
<td>Sheet Music – Vocal Solo</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>In Flanders</td>
<td>Sheet Music – Vocal Solo</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Severn Meadows (A Fifth Volume of Ten Songs)</td>
<td>Sheet Music – Vocal Solo</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Severn Meadows (20 Favourite Songs)</td>
<td>Sheet Music – Vocal Solo</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even such is time (20 Favourite Songs)</td>
<td>Sheet Music – Vocal Solo</td>
<td>Music Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In Flanders</td>
<td>Ivor Gurney</td>
<td>Shops/Rentals. On YouTube. On Spotify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even Such is Time</td>
<td>Ivor Gurney</td>
<td>Shops/Rentals. On Spotify.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Gurney Related Periodicals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Periodical/Journal</th>
<th>Volume and Page</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music and Letters</td>
<td>Vol. 19, no. 1 p. 1</td>
<td>Jan 1938</td>
<td>Ivor Gurney Symposium by various authors</td>
<td>Periodicals Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Music</td>
<td>Vol. 15, p. 34</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Long Shadows Fall: a study of Ivor Gurney’s songs to his own poems by Richard Carder</td>
<td>Music Store</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Gurney Related Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>URL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Ivor Gurney Society</td>
<td>Biographical information, sections on Gurney’s music and poetry, writings on and by Gurney, bibliography, etc.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ivorgurney.org.uk/">www.ivorgurney.org.uk/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivor Gurney</td>
<td>A web journal of Philip Lancaster’s work on the Gloucester Composer-Poet</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ivorgurney.blogspot.co.uk">www.ivorgurney.blogspot.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grove Music Online</td>
<td>Leading online resource for music research (free access for members of Westminster Libraries)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.westminster.gov.uk/services/libraries/247/exclusives/#music">www.westminster.gov.uk/services/libraries/247/exclusives/#music</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</td>
<td>Concise, up-to-date biographies of men and women who have shaped British history and culture (free access for members of Westminster Libraries)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.westminster.gov.uk/services/libraries/247/exclusives/#biography">www.westminster.gov.uk/services/libraries/247/exclusives/#biography</a></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra: WW1 related concerts

ELEGANT ELGAR
Sunday 11 May 2014 7.30pm
CLIFFS PAVILION, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA
Conductor – Nicholas Collon, Cello – Julian Lloyd Webber

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS The Wasps Overture **
ELGAR Cello Concerto *
TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No.6

Julian Lloyd Webber will perform his signature work - Elgar's Cello Concerto, written towards the end of the First World War.

For more information, follow this link: www.rpo.co.uk/event.php?pid=1492
* Behind the Lines featured composition (see Elgar resource pack).
** Behind the Lines featured composer (see Vaughan Williams resource pack).

ELGAR AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Thursday 22 May 2014 7.30pm
CORN EXCHANGE, CAMBRIDGE
Conductor – Nicholas Collon, Cello – Julian Lloyd Webber, Soprano – Sally Harrison

BRITTEN Four Sea Interludes
ELGAR Cello Concerto *
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Symphony No.3 **

Julian Lloyd Webber brings Elgar's sublime Cello Concerto vividly and passionately to life. The evening ends with Vaughan Williams' elegiac Symphony No.3, with celebrated soprano Sally Harrison ending the series on a beautiful, ethereal note.

For more information, follow this link: www.rpo.co.uk/event.php?pid=1423
* Behind the Lines featured composition (see Elgar resource pack).
** Behind the Lines featured composition (see Vaughan Williams resource pack).
CHARLES DUTOIT CONDUCTS RAVEL
Wednesday 14 May 2014 7.30pm
ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON
Conductor – Charles Dutoit, Mezzo-Soprano – Susan Graham, Organ – Stephen Disley

RAVEL Valses nobles et sentimentales *
BERLIOZ Les nuits d'été
SAINT-SAËNS Symphony No.3, 'Organ'

Praised by The New York Times for her ‘creamy singing’, mezzo-soprano Susan Graham performs Les nuits d'été by Berlioz: exquisite orchestral songs which make perfect listening for a summer evening. The programme opens with Ravel's witty Valses nobles et sentimentales, which began life as a piano suite before being transformed by Ravel's unique palette of orchestral colours. Saint-Saëns' ‘Organ’ Symphony is perhaps his most majestic achievement, with an expansive structure, virtuosic display and the grand sound of the organ adding richness to the timbre.

For more information, follow this link: www.rpo.co.uk/event.php?pid=1434
*

Behind the Lines featured composition (see Ravel resource pack).

SOUNDS OF WAR – INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE
May 2014
Brighton – various venues to be announced

A month long series celebrating, commemorating and exploring the music and composers of two world wars. Music by Elgar, Gurney and Bliss to Messiaen, Boulez and Reich with Ligeti Quartet, OperaCoast, The Riot Ensemble and the Post-War Orchestra. Three new commissions, free of charge educational workshops including British Music Reloaded and an all-comers sing-a-long event.

Web link
### WW1 Centenary: Websites & Links

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Websites</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>URL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behind the Lines</td>
<td>The website of this Behind the Lines programme, containing useful information about the resources available, workshops taking place, as well as information and media documenting the year-long project run in partnership by Westminster Music Library and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.musicbehindthelines.org">www.musicbehindthelines.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centenary News</td>
<td>News and information about the 2014-2018 First World War Centenary. The website contains news items, videos, details of events, educational resources, and links to articles and blogs. The site also includes a summary of organisations who are involved with the study of the First World War, or who are planning Centenary events.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.centenarynews.com">www.centenarynews.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914.org</td>
<td>1914.org is a website which highlights centenary events and resources from across the globe, and includes the First World War Centenary Partnership: a network of over 1,000 local, regional, national and international cultural and educational organisations led by IWM (Imperial War Museums).</td>
<td><a href="http://www.1914.org">www.1914.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War Memorials Trust</td>
<td>War Memorials Trust is the national charity dedicated to the protection and conservation of war memorials in the UK. The website has lots of useful resources and information about war memorials, in particular some excellent teacher packs and lesson plans to help build a greater understanding of our war memorial heritage.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org">www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Memoriam 2014</td>
<td>In Memoriam 2014 is a national War Memorials Trust (see entry above) project which will, with the assistance of local communities and groups, locate, log, maintain then protect the nation’s war memorials in time for Remembrance Day 2014.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.inmemoriam2014.org">www.inmemoriam2014.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial War Museum</td>
<td>The Imperial War Museum’s website. The information on this website tells you about the permanent displays, the archives, special exhibitions, forthcoming events, education programmes,</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iwm.org.uk">www.iwm.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commonwealth War Graves Commission</td>
<td>This organisation commemorates the 1,700,000 men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the two world wars and maintains cemeteries, burial sites and memorials of all sizes. The website has useful learning resources and search facilities (memorial sites, Registers of war dead).</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cwgc.org/">www.cwgc.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department for Culture, Media and Sport</td>
<td>The government is working alongside partners, on a series of national remembrance events, an extensive cultural programme and educational schemes. Information can be found on this website.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/topics/first-world-war-centenary">www.gov.uk/government/topics/first-world-war-centenary</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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