

Teaching the Songs of Ivor Gurney:  
An Applied Studio Guide to the Utilization of Fourteen Songs

DMA Document

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## **Abstract**

Brilliant and tortured composer Ivor Gurney produced some three hundred songs, only one third of which have been published. Resistant to criticism from others and suffering from erratic behavior and a slow decline of his mental faculties, Gurney's songs range from masterpieces of the genre to indecipherable muddle. Recently, well-deserved attention has been paid to the hidden gems that exist in Gurney's output. Writings and recordings have brought about critical analysis and thoughtful performances of these songs; however, little has been written about how these songs can be utilized where they will have the largest impact on future generations of singers and audience members: the applied studio. This document will give a brief background on the life and compositional output of Gurney, with special attention paid to the composition and publication of his art songs. It will discuss many high-quality writings that delve into analyzing and advising performance of these songs. Lastly, this document will summarize observations from these works with additional observations from this author, and there will be a discussion regarding the use of this repertoire to address specific pedagogical issues in the voice studio with fourteen of Gurney's published songs.

## **Dedication**

To my incredibly loving and supportive parents, who sacrificed much to ensure I had the opportunity to go wherever my passions led me: Without your help, so much of what I have accomplished would have been impossible. I am forever grateful.

## **Acknowledgments**

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My sincere thanks to my DMA document committee, especially my advisor, Dr. Robin Rice, for patience, support, and encouragement.

Thanks must be given to Allison Voth, who first introduced me to Ivor Gurney's songs at Chautauqua Opera.

To countless friends, family, and students, my thanks for your patience and flexibility as I devoted more and more time and energy to this work at the frequent expense of everything from office hours to verbal coherence.

Lastly, to Ivor Gurney: May the torture you endured in this life be eased in the life that follows, and may you gain some comfort from the continued enjoyment, study, and performance of your beautiful words and music.

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## **Ivor Gurney: A Biographical Sketch**

The following biographical sketch is intended to provide historical background in a condensed and concise format to aid potential performers and teachers of Ivor Gurney's art songs with historical context regarding the life of this troubled composer. Gurney's principle biographers are Michael Hurd and Pamela Blevins, and their works *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney* and *Ivor Gurney and Marion Scott: Song of Pain and Beauty* are outstanding pieces of scholarship that provide in-depth discussions of Gurney's life. These works, in combination with Gurney's complete letters edited by R.K.R. Thornton, provide as complete a picture of Gurney's life as possible for any Gurney researcher. Where not otherwise cited, these comprehensive biographies serve as the principle resources for the compiled biographical sketch that follows.

### **Early Life**

On August 28, 1890, Florence Gurney gave birth in England to her third surviving child, a boy, and named him Ivor Bertie Gurney. Her husband, Ivor's father David, was a tailor of middling success, and Florence helped him run the small shop that provided for the family. David was a kind, patient, and gentle man,

reticent to participate in conflict and accommodating of his very different wife. Florence was prone to outbursts of temper and to serious bouts of anxiety.

Shortly after Ivor's birth, the family relocated to a house that also contained the shop, and the modesty of the living quarters in combination with increased business contributed to stable and comfortable finances. Accompanying the ascension of the family into the middle class was the purchase of a piano and the provision of music lessons for the Gurney children, a decision that would influence the life of young Ivor and the musical landscape of Britain in the decades that followed.

The Gurney family worshipped at All Saints' Church in Gloucester, where Ivor was baptized in 1890. Without godparents accompanying the child, the Reverend Alfred Cheesman stood in, a role he took very seriously during Ivor's adolescence. Cheesman was an intellectual who was well-read and had a deep love of poetry and philosophy. The reverend was also known throughout the community of Gloucester to enjoy the company of adolescent boys but by all accounts provided only innocent mentorship and teaching to his many young companions. Gurney was one of Cheesman's most doted upon mentees, visiting the latter's home some 2,000 times by Cheesman's own accounts.

Under Cheesman's advice and help, Gurney successfully auditioned for the Cathedral Choir. And, as a result, Gurney attended the King's School, where he studied theory, organ, piano, and singing as part of his normal education. Gurney was also a relatively successful athlete during his schooling but was noted to keep

mostly to himself. As he entered into his teenage years, Gurney took to the Gloucester countryside and the literature provided to him by Cheesman for companionship rather than his school peers. Gurney took these escapes more and more regularly as his intellectual and musical prowess began to surpass the understanding of his strict and humble family.

Not only was the country surrounding the city of Gloucester instrumental in the young poet and composer's development, but so too was the rich musical tradition of the city. The Three Choirs Festival was, at the time, world famous, and attendance at related performances helped to solidify young Ivor's determination to become a professional musician by the time he left the Cathedral Choir in 1906. He studied organ, piano, and composition under Dr. Herbert Bewer, the organist of the cathedral, and began serving in a variety of small organist positions. Gurney's outspoken nature, however, often led to his prompt dismissal from these posts.

Perhaps the most important thing Ivor took from his early years in Gloucester, aside from the love of music and literature he gained from Reverend Cheesman, were a few lifelong friendships. These included Will Harvey, Margaret and Emily Hunt, and Herbert Howells. Will Harvey was Gurney's closest lifelong friend, and the two were inseparable for much of Gurney's youth. The Harvey family practically adopted young Ivor, and he would spend days at a time at their home. The Hunt sisters were muses, supporters, and patrons of the mercurial young Gurney's poetry and music for the rest of their lives. Herbert Howells studied music

along with Gurney at the Royal College of Music and advocated for his friend's art throughout Gurney's life and after his premature death.

## **London and the Royal College of Music**

Ivor Gurney and Herbert Howells arrived in London in 1911 to study at the Royal College of Music (RCM). Gurney, with support and help from Reverend Cheesman, had received a substantial scholarship to facilitate his attendance at the school. Gurney's submitted songs in support of his scholarship prompted comparisons to a young Franz Schubert, and indeed, upon his arrival at the school, many remarked upon the physical resemblance as well. Principle among the acquaintances Gurney made in his time at the RCM was Marion Scott. She was a composer, music critic, poet, and musician. Scott would eventually become Gurney's closest friend and confidant and most outspoken champion.

Brimming with potential and excitement, Gurney met a foil in his composition teacher, Sir Charles Stanford. Stanford was seen by many as the unrivalled, principal teacher in all of England, and he vehemently insisted upon adherence to rules and regimented discipline. The regulation and order demanded by Stanford were at odds with Gurney's temperamental behavior, rumpled appearance, and manic energy. These conflicting personalities exacerbated a new phenomenon for Gurney: musical criticism. Gurney grew increasingly frustrated and felt stifled. The frustration was mutual. Stanford told Howells later that of all his pupils (an impressive list consisting of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst,

John Ireland, and many others), Gurney was potentially the most talented yet also the “least teachable.”<sup>1</sup>

Whether in spite of the teaching of Stanford or as a result of it, Gurney’s compositions began to show remarkable maturity at this time. Three of the songs selected for this document originate during this early period at the RCM. “The Two Corbies” and “The Night of Trafalgar” are examples of dramatic experimental writing and certainly are worthwhile songs. The chief achievement from this time, however, is Gurney’s set of *Five Elizabethan Songs*, from which “Sleep” is taken. Many subsequent songs lack the prowess of these five, indicating that they are perhaps an intuitive leap forward—composed more as a visceral response to the beautifully expressive Elizabethan poetry than as a nuanced expression of a heightened intellectual understanding of his own compositional talent.

The musical development Gurney experienced during his early years at the RCM was derailed by the first of many nervous breakdowns that occurred in the spring of 1913. Upon consultation with doctors in London, Gurney decided to return home to Gloucester to recuperate. Rather than staying with his family, Gurney lived with his friends, the Harris family, whom he had known since 1907. Gurney admired the work ethic and gregariousness of the Harris family and threw himself into hard physical labor to stave off the lethargic and depressive state under which he suffered.

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<sup>1</sup> Vaughan Williams and Howells, “Ivor Gurney: The Musician,” 13.

It is most likely that this nervous breakdown in 1913 served as the first onset of bipolar disorder that would torment Gurney for the rest of his life. The self-medicative tactic of releasing endorphins through physical labor was employed again and again through more frequent and more serious bouts with depression throughout the rest of Gurney's life. This attempt to find balance would continue to elude him for the rest of his days. In 1913, after a period of a few months, Gurney entered into a manic phase and returned to London with seemingly unquenchable energy, bravado, and impulsiveness.



## World War I: Training and Battle

In 1914, upon hearing that war had been declared, Gurney volunteered for military service but was turned away due to his poor eyesight. A mix of patriotism, restlessness, and pride motivated Gurney to volunteer once again, and with restrictions becoming less stringent as the need for soldiers increased, Gurney was accepted into military service in February of 1915. Gurney referred to his military service as an “experiment,” hoping to give himself purpose and to recreate his tried and true medicative periods of physically arduous activity in an effort to stave off his depression and writer’s block. Writing to Marion Scott, he seems to consider the experiment a success in his early days of military training in England, stating: “My health is still slowly improving; and as my mind clears, and as the need for self-expression grows less weak, the thought of leaving all I have to say unsaid, makes me cold.”<sup>2</sup>

Gurney found comfort among the men with whom he trained and experienced the hard work of training as difficult but satisfying. After a brief stint in a military band playing baritone and occasionally conducting, Gurney’s unit was shipped off to France. Continuing his training and standing in support of the front

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<sup>2</sup> Thornton, *Ivor Gurney: Collected Letters*, 21.

lines, Gurney had much time in the trenches, during which he wrote poetry and sketched ideas for songs. His unit saw battle in the summer of 1916, and it was near the end of this summer that Gurney received his first wound of war. The wound was not physical, however, but rather an emotional blow of devastating severity.

Gurney's childhood friend, Will Harvey, had been reported missing and was presumed dead. During these emotionally draining times, Gurney composed his trench songs, notably "In Flanders," which was a setting of Harvey's own poetry. By October, Ivor learned that Will was, in fact, alive and well and being held in a German prisoner of war camp. The two were eventually able to correspond, and the connection with his good friend did much to bolster Gurney's spirits and equip him to survive the emotional and physical hardships of war.

Gurney, while inundated with battle and the hardships of trench life, seemed unexpectedly calm and detached from his situation. This is especially evident in his letters to his close friends back in England. To Marion Scott, he wrote:

The night before we came up here there was a heavy bombardment of these trenches, so our debut narrowly escaped being extremely trivilling, but the telling of all this and much more must be postponed till the happy day when I shall hold the listener with my glittering eye and bore them to shriefts and titters of apprehensive imbecility. *Apres la guerre.*<sup>3</sup>

In addition to these correspondences with Scott, Howells, and Harvey, Gurney busied himself with creative writing of his own. Remarkably, he was able to compose at least five songs while in the trenches of battle, but he was even more

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 87.

prolific poetically. This outpouring of war poetry would come to be the primary source of Gurney's notoriety, with music serving a secondary purpose. Indeed, while Gurney was facing hunger, battle, and boredom on the front lines, Scott was editing and arranging for the publication of Gurney's poetry, and Howells was orchestrating some of his early war songs for public performance in London.

Gurney's good humor about his circumstances began to fade during the harsh winter of 1916-1917. On April 7, 1917, the day after the United States declared war on Germany, Gurney was shot in the right arm. Initially worried the injury would be severe enough to prevent his composition and performance of music, Gurney soon began to come to a disappointing conclusion on the opposite end of the spectrum: The wound was not even serious enough for him to be sent home. He said to Scott he was injured "but not badly; perhaps not badly enough..."<sup>4</sup> Gurney began his time in the hospital understandably grateful for the respite from battle but quickly grew bored and restless.

Returning to the front, Gurney wrestled with difficulties both external and internal. He longed for his poetry to be published and confided in his friends his envy of Howells, who had been disqualified from service for health issues, and his success and progress at the RCM. Gurney had begun to excel as a marksman, though, and his superiors unfortunately noticed his talent. He was transferred to be a machine gunner, which was an exceptionally dangerous assignment. Constantly under shelling and sniper threat, Gurney was on edge and grew anxious. Eventually,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 242.

in September of 1917, Gurney got his ticket back to England not through a bullet or shrapnel but from the ill effects of exposure to gas.

## **World War I: Hospitalization, Heartbreak, and Discharge**

Gurney, for reasons he did not share in his letters, did not want frequent visits from his friends and family during his recovery from gas exposure. As a result, he selected Edinburgh War Hospital in Scotland as the location of his recuperation. Inadvertently, he chose one of the best military hospitals in all of the United Kingdom. On the forefront of medical treatment, the hospital also provided exceptional food and recreational activities for patients.

Perhaps the most appealing feature of the Edinburgh War Hospital was a volunteer nurse by the name of Annie Nelson Drummond. Gurney described her in a letter to Howells as “perfectly enchanting.”<sup>5</sup> Relationships between patients and staff were discouraged, and Gurney’s infatuation with Drummond only seemed to be stoked by the necessary secrecy surrounding their connection. He often referred to her by nicknames when corresponding with his friends about her. It was during these early weeks of his hospital stay and infatuation with Nurse Drummond that Gurney composed “The Folly of Being Comforted.”

Gurney was eventually released from Edinburgh and, after a brief visit to London, went back to military post training as a signaler. He was constantly

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 395.

troubled by health issues associated with the gas exposure, going in and out of hospitals, all the while corresponding with Drummond, with whom he professed to be deeply in love. Letters from Gurney to friends and family hinted at an engagement; however, in March of 1918, their relationship suddenly ended. The precise reasons for the split do not survive in extant letters, but it's likely that as a trained health professional, Drummond began to see signs of the mental deterioration and emotional instability in Gurney that would be compounded exponentially by the end of their relationship. After the split, Gurney was hurled into a renewed crippling depression.

This depression gave way to an even more troubling sign of deterioration in Gurney's mental state. The new phenomenon was revealed to Scott in a letter Gurney wrote her in which he contended he had been able to converse directly with the spirits of Beethoven, Schumann, and Bach. He described the event to her as follows:

Yesterday I felt and talked to (I am serious) the spirit of Beethoven.

No, there is no exclamation mark behind that, because such a statement is past ordinary ways of expressing surprise. But you know sceptical [sic] I was of any such thing before.

It means I have reached higher than ever before – in spite of the dirt and coarseness and selfishness of so much of me. Something happened the day before which considerably lessened and lightened my gloom. What it was I shall not tell you, but it was the strangest and most terrible adventure. The next day while I was playing the slow movement of the D major sonata I felt the presence of a wise and friendly spirit; it was old Ludwig van all right. When I had finished he said 'Yes, but there's a better thing than that' and turned me to

the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of the latest E flat Sonata – a beauty (I did not know it before). There was a lot more; Bach was there but does not care for me. Schumann also, but my love for him is not so great. Beethoven said among other things that he was fond of me and that in nature I was like himself as a young man...<sup>6</sup>

Gurney seemed to acknowledge the incredulity of his claim, later saying in the same letter: “There! What would the doctors say to *that*? A Ticket certainly, for insanity. No, it is the beginning of a new life, a new vision.”<sup>7</sup> It seems that Gurney’s assessment of the doctors’ reactions was correct, as shortly after he was sent to Lord Derby’s War Hospital, an asylum before the war that had now been oriented toward the mental treatment of war-weary soldiers.

Several weeks later, in early June, Gurney sat down to write notes to several close friends and mailed them out. These notes detail Gurney’s intention to commit suicide that day in chilling brevity. More than one includes the statement, “You would rather know me dead than mad.”<sup>8</sup> Intending to drown himself, Gurney was found by a canal by hospital staff, having “lost his courage.”<sup>9</sup> Gurney’s friends responded to the suicide attempt by successfully trying to have him moved from the wholly inadequate treatment he was receiving at Lord Derby’s War Hospital. The army did them one better: just a couple of months later, discharging him from service shortly before the fighting ceased.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 431.

### **Trouble with Reentry: Gloucester and London**

Upon his release from the army, Gurney returned to his beloved Gloucester to the concerned company of his friends and family. He went about his typical self-medication, throwing himself into hard manual labor and long walks through the countryside. He also avoided prolonged contact with his family, electing instead to stay with friends, often dropping in on them unannounced and staying for long periods of time. Gurney's erratic behavior, prolific writing, and irregular work indicate that the fall of 1918 was a time of transitioning into a manic state. By December, Gurney seemed to have acclimated to the return to civilian life, and his behavior stabilized somewhat.

In January, Gurney made arrangements to return to London, intending to resume his studies at the RCM. This time, Gurney would study composition with Ralph Vaughan Williams. Needing funds, Gurney began working as an organist nearby, and a reverend there, Arthur Chapman, opened his home to Gurney and provided a sanctuary away from the chaos of the RCM and the oppressive atmosphere of London during this time. Gurney's wanderings, and his compositions, grew increasingly manic.



The initial stage of his return to college went very well. Vaughan Williams was kinder and more accommodating than Gurney's first teacher. Gurney had also gained a bit of notoriety, primarily as a war poet (the first edition of his collection of poems, *Severn and Somme*, had sold out) but also as a composer. Public performances of his songs, edited and orchestrated by Howells, had been given, and his set of Elizabethan songs had been published along with a handful of other works. The years 1919 and 1920, in fact, were the most prolific years of composition of Gurney's life. These years produced numerous excellent songs, including "Cathleen ni Houlihan," as well as the inception of Gurney's two major song cycles. In spite of his father's death in 1919, Gurney appeared to be in good spirits during this manic phase and rubbed shoulders with some of the most influential British poets and musicians of the time.

Beneath the energetic and productive surface, however, Gurney's old struggles were beginning to seethe. He grew increasingly impatient with the publications of new poems and songs and with himself, feeling unable to harness the mounting storm of energy inside him. His restlessness increased his wandering and travel, and his attendance in classes and lessons became less and less regular. In April of 1920, Gurney departed the RCM early for the summer. He returned only briefly the next fall but was unable to pass his exams. Out of scholarship funds and unable to support himself financially, Gurney departed the RCM for good. Unable to hold down a job due to his erratic comportment, Gurney relied upon help from

friends and family, constantly traveling between London and Gloucester and virtually anywhere he could lay his head.

In 1922, after working odd jobs including farm work (another attempt at self-medication through manual labor), Gurney secured a position in the Gloucester Income Tax office as a clerk. Following months of living off the financial support of friends and in the homes of friends who were growing weary of his outbursts, odd hours, and erratic behavior, a stable job seemed just the boon Ivor needed to stabilize his now spiraling life and mental state. Being confined indoors and finding himself unable to acquiesce to his frequent impulses, however, sped up his decline. He began complaining about being tortured by electricity and radio waves, claiming the latter were inundating him with voices intent on controlling his mind.

Ivor moved in (uninvited) with his brother Ronald in the summer of 1922, and by that September, his behavior had become erratic to the point of violence. He frequently made reference to suicide. After consultation with a doctor, Ronald made preparations to have Ivor declared insane and to have him committed.

## **Asylum**

On September 28, 1922, Ivor Gurney was committed to Barnwood House, an asylum in Gloucester. Gurney took his early commitment very hard, refusing to eat and twice escaping in the first couple of months after he arrived. He wrote his friend Marion Scott frequently, often mentioning suicide. It was decided that Gurney's proximity to his beloved Gloucester in addition to his anxiety over being recognized there were exacerbating his mental decline and that he should be transferred to the City of London Mental Hospital at Dartford. On December 21, 1922, two hospital attendants drove Ivor Gurney to London; he was never to see his beloved Gloucester again.

Stone House, as the Mental Hospital in London was known, was recognized as being on the forefront of the treatment of the mentally ill at the time. The staff all underwent special training, and music was determined to be an integral diversion for patients. This, in conjunction with the proximity of Marion Scott, who had become Gurney's primary advocate and benefactor, made Stone House an ideal choice. Gurney made one last escape in January of 1923, travelling to the home of Ralph Vaughan Williams, where he was apprehended and returned to Stone House.

Gurney began to busy himself by prolifically writing poetry and letters. He read ravenously and would also occasionally play piano to accompany the movies played for the patients at Stone House. The torment Gurney complained to have suffered through electricity and radio waves increased, and he began to seek the release of death.

Marion Scott visited Gurney religiously and began to gather his writings, both those produced before his commitment and the ones he wrote in the asylum. Musically, Gurney produced very little except for a period of mania in 1925 and 1926 that yielded some fifty songs. Most of these new songs, in addition to several earlier songs that he attempted to revise, were barely decipherable at best and utterly incoherent at worst. After 1926, music ceased to flow from Gurney's pen.

Gurney spent eleven more years in the asylum. His moments of clarity became less and less frequent, his claims more and more outrageous. He claimed there were machines of torture hidden under the floor. He claimed he wrote the plays of Shakespeare. On the twenty-sixth of December 1937, with only two nurses present, Ivor Gurney succumbed to tuberculosis and passed away.

## Posthumous Song Publication

At the time of Gurney's death in 1937, fewer than forty of his songs had been published. These published songs were found in sources such as *Music and Letters* and in sets such as his *Five Elizabethan Songs* and his two song cycles. During the later years of Gurney's life, Marion Scott worked with composers Gerald Finzi and Howard Ferguson (who were great admirers of Gurney's despite barely knowing him personally and certainly not before his mental state had deteriorated) to catalog and sort the hundreds of unpublished song manuscripts in an effort to garner attention for the composer's work.

The manuscripts were in poor shape, often sloppily written and unclear. Scott attempted to provide dates and text sources, while Finzi inspected each available song for quality. In early 1937, Finzi and Ferguson had narrowed the list down of over two hundred and fifty unpublished songs to twenty-five they felt were most viable for immediate publication. Vaughan Williams then selected twenty from among these, and the Oxford University Press (OUP) agreed to publish the twenty songs in two volumes. Unfortunately, at this time, Gurney was too weak to inspect the proofs of these songs and did not live long enough to see their publication in 1938. The group, interrupted by World War II, prepared ten more

songs that were published by OUP in 1953. Following the deaths of Finzi and Scott, Ferguson alone prepared the fourth volume, which was published by OUP in 1959.

Oxford University Press published a fifth volume of Gurney's songs in 1979. This volume was prepared and edited by composer Michael Hurd, then lead trustee of the Ivor Gurney Trust. Hurd's approach to the further publication of Gurney manuscripts was conservative, as he was apt to minimize editorial decisions that might impact Gurney's original intent. Hurd felt all of the manuscripts that were publishable had been published already, stating: "If, as has so far obtained, you restrict it to the absolute minimum (i.e. the addition of phrase marks and dynamics), then the remaining manuscripts should be left unpublished."<sup>10</sup>

The attitude of the Ivor Gurney Trust has shifted since Hurd was succeeded by Ian Venables, who argues that performance editions of many of these manuscripts can be prepared "without sacrificing either the standards of previous editions or by making obtrusive changes to the music itself."<sup>11</sup> This work has already begun within the Trust and also through the work of independent scholars. Eric Neuville, in his dissertation from 2014, appraised the quality of the unpublished songs in the possession of the Ivor Gurney Trust that were written between the composer's commencement of study at the RCM and his commitment. Neuville prepared performance editions and recorded five songs from those ninety

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<sup>10</sup> Hurd, "Gurney's Unpublishable(?) Songs," 7.

<sup>11</sup> Venables, "The 'Unpublished Songs' of Ivor Gurney: A Composer's Reappraisal," 114.

qualifying manuscripts and contends more viable songs remain unpublished in the archives.

## **The Need for a Pedagogical Discussion**

Academic interest in Ivor Gurney has been present in the nearly eighty years since his death. A soldier, poet, victim of mental illness, and composer, Gurney's life provides fodder for much discussion on a variety of topics. Michael Hurd's biography, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney*, serves as the authoritative depiction of the troubled young composer's life, making frequent use of letters written by Gurney and his loved ones. Recently, Pamela Blevins published an excellent dual biography of Gurney and Marion Scott, focusing primarily on the profound impact each had on one another's lives.

Most academic writing has centered on Gurney's mental illness and the interplay of this with his poetry, specifically that which was written in the trenches and immediate aftermath of World War I. Musicians interested in the study of Gurney's songs are not without excellent resources, however. Charles Moore, in his 1967 dissertation, provides a first-rate compilation of data describing all of the published songs available to him at the time. (The fifth Oxford University Press volume had yet to be released.) Not only does Moore provide comments on every single published song, but he also endeavors to analyze the structure of these songs to discuss the most common themes and constructions throughout them, eventually



describing what a “typical” Ivor Gurney song constitutes. Another similar effort is made in Michael Pilkington’s book *Gurney, Ireland, Quilter, and Warlock*. In this work, Pilkington compiles brief comments about the makeup of all known songs by these composers. Ratings regarding the difficulty of the vocal and piano parts are assigned, but details aren’t provided on these aspects.

These works are informative of another excellent dissertation, this one written by Kim Lawrence Renas. Renas narrows the focus to the fifty songs present in the five OUP volumes but goes further in depth discussing the vocal line and piano parts, also listing key elements of each song and often remarking on the circumstances surrounding the time of composition. Ratings regarding the overall quality of the songs are assigned, and pertinent references in Gurney’s letters and other writings are included. While the structures of the songs are discussed, little is said about the interpretations of the songs and virtually nothing about the vocal requirements or benefits.

More detailed analyses and discussions on performance aspects can be found when utilizing even narrower song selections. Dissertations by David Kenneth Smith, Lawrence G. Johnson, David Herendeen, and Robert Clayton Smith each dissect a handful of Gurney songs and provide analyses regarding the harmonic makeup, melodic lines, and relation to poetry. These are top-notch pieces of research that successfully provide insight into these songs and how they relate to the troubled life of Gurney. Some limited mention is made about the vocal requirements for these songs. Nora Sirbaugh discusses this a bit in her dissertation

describing Gurney's use of song to communicate his love for Gloucestershire, and her excellent article written for the *Ivor Gurney Society Journal* ("Reflections on Singing Ivor Gurney") provides a general commentary (with some discussion of vocal technique) about what a singer needs to bring to Gurney's art songs in order to perform them successfully. Sirbaugh illuminates this commentary with specific examples from some of Gurney's finest songs.

Finally, no full preparation can be given to the performance of Ivor Gurney songs without consultation with Stephan Banfield's *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*. This book details the stylistic evolution of the twentieth century English art song idiom and provides a thoughtful discourse on the composition and performance of many Gurney songs.

Yet, in spite of mounting academic interest in Ivor Gurney and in the treasury of over one hundred published songs (and around 200 as yet unpublished songs, the viability of which Eric Neuville discusses with pragmatic optimism in his dissertation, "The Unpublished Songs of Ivor Gurney"), these songs remain almost entirely out of the common repertoire. Many of the published songs cannot be found on any commercial recordings. As art song recitals fade from cultural relevance, it is the contention of this writer that the only way to bring in the work of this underutilized composer from the periphery and into the mainstream is to cement its place in the training of singers in the academy.

Young singers are now required to be more versatile than at any other time in history. In addition to the study of music in English, German, Italian, and French

from periods ranging from the Baroque to the Romantic, students must explore the repertoire of the modern era and are asked more than ever before to be proficient in musical theater and contemporary commercial music. Russian and the Slavic languages are increasingly in demand, as are Spanish and Eastern music. In America, when English language music from the first half of the twentieth century is assigned, teachers often eschew British composers in favor of their American counterparts, or if they do assign the British repertoire, they prefer the more familiar and accessible songs of composers such as Roger Quilter or Gerald Finzi.

In such circumstances, there seems little room for the introduction of Gurney's repertoire. However, the songs of Ivor Gurney provide a uniquely British voice that spans the gap between the late Romantic style and the modern style in a way few others do while keeping in the forefront the experience of a troubled mind in a world torn apart by conflict as never before. There seems to be little motivation for teachers to employ these songs in lessons, as teachers themselves are not familiar with them nor with their intrinsic pedagogical value. The goal of this document, therefore, is to ameliorate that concern.

For each of the fourteen songs to follow, general information such as range, tessitura, text source, etc., will be provided. The default pitches provided for range and tessitura will be those for a male singer; female singers would perform an octave higher. Notable recordings including each song will be presented in addition to images of the opening measures and information about where the sheet music for each song can be found in current published anthologies. Finally, page numbers will

be provided so teachers and students can utilize the aforementioned books and dissertations to further study these songs. The body of each entry will include especially helpful excerpts from these writings as well as this author's observations and a discussion about the potential pedagogical pitfalls and benefits of each song.

## BLACK STITCHEL

**Range:** D-flat 3-E4

**Tessitura:** F3-C4

**Best for:** Baritone, Tenor, Mezzo-Soprano, Soprano

**Text Source:** *Neighbors* by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

**Location:** Oxford: Volume I, Number 3

**References:** Banfield: 196; Moore: 140-1; Pilkington: 7-8; Renas: 86-8

**Helps with:** Chromatic and rhythmic complexity, passaggio (especially tenor)

**Challenges:** Vowel-pitch alignment (low-voiced male), breath support/phrasing

**Notable Recordings:** *Severn and Somme: Songs and Poems by Ivor Gurney*: David Johnston (tenor), Christopher Keyte (baritone), Daphne Ibbott (piano), Geoffrey Pratley (piano) [Pearl 1997]; *A Shropshire Lad & The Land of Lost Content*: Anthony Rolfe Johnson (tenor), David Willison (piano) [Polydor Select 1875]; *Songs of Travel*: Anthony Wolfe Johnson (tenor), David Willison (piano) [IMP Classics 1993]; *Wars Embers*: Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe (baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]

# BLACK STITCHEL

WILFRID GIBSON

IVOR GURNEY

Allegro

Voice

Piano

*mp*

As I was ly-ing on

*cresc.*

Black Stichel The wind was blow - ing from the South;

*cresc.*

## Overview

This modified strophic setting of a romantic poem focuses on the winds that come from the four cardinal directions while sitting on a well-known hill in Northumberland. Each stanza is treated slightly different musically to allow for the emotional context that accompanies each wind. Pilkington summarizes these winds as: "South wind for happiness, West wind for love, the North for wrath, and the East for pity."<sup>12</sup>

The charming melody begins in the first stanza and is repeated with little variation aside from rhythmic adjustments for text in the second until this section ends on a sustained high note. In the third stanza, Gurney foregoes any connection melodically or tonally to the first two, allowing chromatic harmony to support the

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<sup>12</sup> Pilkington, *Gurney, Ireland, Quilter and Warlock*, 7.

louder and higher melodic depiction of the wrathful north wind. The final stanza resembles the first, but it is slower and easier, with new musical ideas at the conclusion of the song. Through each of these four verses, the accompaniment seems almost obsessively fixated on constant eighth-note motion. This is greatly effective in the lovelorn second and frightening third stanzas but decidedly detracts from the mood of the more calm and contemplative first and fourth stanzas.

The setting is largely syllabic; however, melismas are employed to text-paint throughout the song on the word “blowing” in each stanza. Renas points out that the melisma “... for each directional wind receives a musically different treatment; the melismas become longer or more chromatic, as dictated by Gibson’s poetry.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Studio Use**

The tessitura and range of this particular song allow for it to be sung by any voice type, with the exception of a young true bass or contralto. Advanced lower voices will find it an excellent teaching tool for prolonged singing in the upper-middle voice and avoiding an overly heavy sound on open vowels at the passaggio. This is especially troublesome on the prolonged E-natural on an open vowel for a low-voiced male. This same tessitura and vowel-pitch alignment, though, would make this a fantastic piece for young tenors, as Renas notes, because the E-natural is pre-passaggio for this voice type.

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<sup>13</sup> Renas, “The Songs of Ivor Gurney as Published by Oxford University Press: A Repertoire Guide,” 88.

While fairly chromatic tonally, the melody is largely stepwise with relatively easy leaps. This could help introduce a musically insecure singer to a less comfortably diatonic repertoire. In addition, while the constant eighth-note piano motion may take away from the overall musical quality of the song, the inherent subdivision will help the same less secure singer take steps toward the rhythmic complexity present in the vocal line. In short, this song sets a beginning student up for success as he or she ventures into slightly more complicated musical study.

While Gurney dictates his choices for vocal phrasing, as per usual, the growing intensity in dynamic level and tempo throughout the song, longer than average phrases, and frequent sustained notes at the end of phrases make support and phrasing a challenge for students in this piece.

### **Summary**

The pitch-vowel alignment will prove difficult for low-voiced males, but it is a great teaching tool for the other voice types. As it is tonally and rhythmically complex, beginning students and some intermediate students may struggle musically; however, a simpler melodic line and constant eighth-note motion in the accompaniment may ease the transition from a more basic repertoire. A solid foundation of breath support will be required. An interesting and dramatically satisfying song, “Black Stichel” provides an opportunity for students to broaden their musical horizons while exploring registration and support issues.



## BY A BIERSIDE

**Range:** A2-F4 **Tessitura:** E3-D4

**Best for:** Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** *The Tragedy of Pompey the Great* by James Masfield

**Location:** Oxford: Volume V, Number 1

**References:** Banfield: 189-90, 199-200; Herendeen: 46-56; Pilkington: 22-3;  
Renas: 212-20

**Helps with:** Robust voices, registration (mezzo), dramatic interpretation

**Challenges:** Breath/phrasing, registration (baritone)

**Notable Recordings:** *The Dark Pastoral: Music and Poetry from World War One:*

Andrew Kennedy (tenor), Julius Drake (piano), Simon Russell Beale (reader) [Altara 2008]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney:* Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]; *Wars Embers:* Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe (baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs:* Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]

## BY A BIERSIDE

JOHN MASEFIELD

IVOR GURNEY

Adagio quasi andante  $\text{♩} = 60$ . *As a recitative, with simplicity*

VOICE

PIANO

*pp*

This is a sa-cred ci - ty, built of mar-vel-lous earth.

*mf*

Life was lived no - bly there here to give such Beau - ty birth.

*p*

### Overview

In mid-August of 1916, in a trench in France, Ivor Gurney composed the first of his war songs. Written in the trenches without the benefit of a piano, “By a Bierside” lacks the tonal cohesion and memorable melodic lines of his more successful songs. This fact did not escape the composer. When he finally heard his song for the first time after gaining access to a piano in France, he stated that the song “contained even more strangeness than I had thought.”<sup>14</sup> By this time, however, the song was already being circulated in England.

The noticeable differences are not to be blamed entirely on the lack of piano in the composition process. Indeed, Gurney was facing the subject of his song daily and had much time to contemplate the idea of aggrandized death during battle. The

<sup>14</sup> Thornton, *Ivor Gurney: Collected Letters*, 194.

poetry must have spoken to Gurney not in a symbolic or metaphorical way but rather in a very real sense. The poem opens with a discussion of the beauty of a fallen soldier who is rooted in the city of origin. While ancient Troy serves as home to this particular soldier, Gurney himself viewed Gloucester with awe and reverence. The vocal line in the opening is long and wonderfully set, though the range is quite large, ranging from low A to high D.

It is after this lovely opening that the song becomes disjunct. Gurney assigns each depiction of death new and contrasting musical material, with little done in the accompaniment to aid the transitions. Finally, the declamatory statement of “It is most grand to die” is set leading up to over four measures of sustained high E naturals. Earlier versions of the song contained eight full measures of sustained high E, but Gurney was eventually convinced to pare it down to four through correspondence with Howells and Scott.<sup>15</sup> This is the vocal climax of the piece; however, the musical peak occurs in the piano response to this statement at a *fff* repetition of a continuing eighth-note motive reminiscent of church bells.

### **Studio Use**

“By a Bierside” is a powerful and emotionally set song composed without the benefit of the piano and conceived orchestrally. As such, it lacks much of the refinement and attention to singers’ needs that many of Gurney’s songs possess. The dynamic diversity and large range required relegate the assignment of this song

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<sup>15</sup> Pilkington, *Gurney, Ireland, Quilter and Warlock*, 23.

mostly to advanced singers. The beginning of the song offers long, quiet, and exposed phrases in the middle voice. After a middle section that lingers in the upper-middle voice, there is a climax that requires a loud, sustained pitch right at the passaggio for low voices. The open vowels at and above the passaggio will aid the mezzo-sopranos who undertake the song, but adjustments will need to be made for developing baritones.

This song can serve as an excellent teaching tool for robust low voices seeking to develop intimate colors and cultivate good intonation in quiet dynamics. The opening phrases of the song provide tremendous opportunities to sing in a piano dynamic while focusing on consistent phonation and intonation, and after the heavier singing required in the second and third sections, there is no need to return to the quieter vocalism.

Lastly, Gurney's obvious visceral connection with the poetry and subject matter of this song infuse the piece with drama and emotion. While this often helps students invest in a more informed dramatic interpretation, the vocal demands of this song, in addition to the disjunct nature of the middle section, may invite vocal problems if a singer gets "carried away" in the performance, especially leading up to the final note of the song. Singers who are able to communicate emotionally without letting that emotion manifest itself in the singing will find this piece satisfying, while others may find it treacherous.

## **Summary**

Big, emotional, and orchestrally conceived, “By a Bierside” requires a robust voice able to negotiate dramatic musical shifts and emotional writing. Such a voice will find “By a Bierside” a great opportunity to explore quieter and more intimate colors without needing to shift back and forth between a heavier production.

Excellent breath control and comfort in and above the passaggio are needed. A powerful, if flawed, song, “By a Bierside” provides an interesting contrast to most of Gurney’s successful songs, is an intriguing study of the composer’s struggle in the battlefield, and thus deserves consideration for programming.

## CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

**Range:** C-flat 3-F4 **Tessitura:** E3-D4

**Best for:** Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** *Cathleen ni Hoolihan*, play by William Butler Yeats

**Location:** Oxford: Volume I, Number 10

**References:** Moore: 100-1; Pilkington: 10-11; Renas: 108-11

**Helps with:** Dramatic interpretation, robust passaggio singing, legato

**Challenges:** Musicianship, registration, voice/piano ensemble

**Notable Recordings:** *Ivor Gurney: Songs*: Susan Bickley (mezzo), Iain Burnside (piano) [Naxos 2010]; *Wars Embers*: Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe (baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]

# CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

W. B. YEATS

IVOR GURNEY

Allegro con moto

Voice

Piano

*p*

*f*

The old brown thorn - trees

break in two high o-ver Cummen Strand,

## Overview

The setting of a dramatic Irish ballad by Yeats was thought by Gurney to be among his best when he wrote it, telling Marion Scott: “My best song? Well, perhaps...” in a letter from 1919.<sup>16</sup> The modified strophic form serves the ballad poetry well, with the second line of each stanza receiving new musical material and each stanza ending with an unaccompanied refrain of “of Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan” and several beats of silence before the off-beat accompaniment returns. The third stanza modulates down a half step from A minor to A-flat minor to emphasize the eeriness of the text.

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<sup>16</sup> Thornton, *Ivor Gurney: Collected Letters*, 476.

The interplay of the vocal line and the accompaniment depict a growing storm, and this is painted from the very onset with the syncopated accompaniment figure driving forward. The storm grows in intensity as the accompaniment thickens and becomes increasingly chromatic with each stanza. The howling wind is illustrated through long melismas in the vocal line, and the sudden calm of unaccompanied singing and silence punctuate the dread.

The text comes from a play by Yeats in which Cathleen represents Ireland. Some Irish terms used are defined as follows. Cummen Strand is an area northwest of Sligo. The left hand from which the wind blows symbolizes bad luck. Knocknarea is the mountain of kings, and Clooth-na-bar is a lake, both also near Sligo. A “rood” is a crucifix.

The last iteration of the unaccompanied refrain is followed by a very brief but effective postlude, which echoes the final vocal motive.

### **Studio Use**

The vocal line is difficult, with disjunct and angular motion occurring frequently. This, however, can serve as an excellent teaching tool to unify disjunct melodies through legato singing. There are several instances of four against three with triplets in the vocal line against the duplets in the piano, and the piano matches the triplets in voice only in the stormy second stanza. The tessitura of the second stanza travels through the *passaggio* for extended periods of time, and the middle of the final stanza requires an *ff* high E natural on an open [ɛ] vowel.



The vocal line requires full and robust singing in and around the passaggio, alternating with quiet vocal lines unaccompanied in the middle voice. While the vowels and assertive style assist in these high notes, this transition back and forth between a heavy and intimate production can prove treacherous, and as a result, this song should likely be reserved for advanced singers with robust voices who have mastered this type of adjustment.

A powerful and dramatic ballad, Pilkington remarks that “Cathleen ni Houlihan” is “excellent for the singer who thinks English song is only for the drawing-room!”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this song provides an exciting outlet for singers to tell a story, and the music perfectly suits the rises and falls in the drama of the text. So long as the impassioned portions are not oversung and excess vocal weight is not brought up into the upper voice, singers of this song can use the excitement of the text to assist in great vocalism.

Rhythmic challenges, hemiola, and high levels of chromaticism make this a difficult assignment for a musically insecure student. In addition, the accompaniment alternates between extremely supportive, with subdivision occurring throughout, to sudden instances of block chords, where a singer must be solely responsible for the propulsion of the vocal line, to utterly absent at the end of each stanza. In addition to a singer needing to be secure in switching between robust and quiet production, any student tackling this song should be very secure both rhythmically and tonally.

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<sup>17</sup> Pilkington, *Gurney, Ireland, Quilter and Warlock*, 10.

## **Summary**

An ambitious and successful song, “Cathleen ni Houlihan” requires an advanced singer and musician. Vowel placement and forte dynamics aid in the prolonged sections of passaggio singing, but the necessity for transitioning back and forth between that style and the quiet and exposed middle voice may prove difficult. The drama in the text is served exquisitely by the music, and for this reason, an advanced singer should consider it as a recital piece that showcases a commanding performer.

## THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN

**Range:** E-flat 3-G4

**Tessitura:** G3-E-flat 4

**Best for:** Tenor, Soprano

**Text Source:** *The Wind Among the Reeds* by William Butler Yeats

**Location:** Oxford: Volume V, Number 6

**References:** Banfield: 195; Pilkington: 24-5; Renas: 235-7; R. C. Smith: 57-62

**Helps with:** Registration, breath, phrasing, vibrant onset

**Challenges:** Quiet high notes, intonation

**Notable Recordings:** *English Songs*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Peters International 1980]; *English Songs: Ivor Gurney, Frederick Delius*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Etcetera KTC 1989]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney*: Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]

# THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN

W. B. YEATS

IVOR GURNEY

Andante

VOICE

Had I the Hea-ven's em-broi-dered cloths, En-

PIANO

[con Ped.]

- wrought with gold-en and sil-ver light, The blue and the dim and the

*pp* *p* *cresc.*

## Overview

Surprisingly, this beautiful setting of William Butler Yeats' poem, composed in 1919, was left unpublished until 1979. The rocking 6/8 meter is indicative of a lullaby. The accompaniment begins with a light texture and a simple eighth-note configuration and eventually is filled in with sixteenth notes and thickens texturally. It is meant to set a general mood of tenderness rather than to directly comment on the vocal line. The addition of faster rhythmic values and voices in the texture evokes the image of a tapestry, with threads and colors being added gradually throughout the song.

This evolving accompaniment supports the unique setting of Yeats' simple but lovely text. The first stanza of poetry is set in a straightforward manner, almost

entirely syllabically. The gradual enrichment of the accompaniment and the beginning of a similar melodic idea in the voice part leading into the second verse indicate that this setting will be, as is common in Gurney's songs, a modified strophic form. The second stanza, however, possesses four individual melodic statements, short and separated by rests in the accompaniment. This method not only provides interest and contrast for listeners but also wonderfully communicates the vulnerability associated with presenting one's fragile dreams as the only gift one can provide to his or her love.

The tonality is that of E-flat major, with numerous instances of modal mixture with the inclusion of the minor C-flat and D-flat chords, most notably on the emotional climax of the song with the text: "Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams." Pilkington suggests that "Cloths of Heaven" "...could be effective, but it seems a rather elaborate setting for such a simple poem."<sup>18</sup> It is the opinion of this writer that the song is successful precisely because of this nuanced approach to the text, speaking to the profound vulnerability of the poem as well as to the aforementioned imagery of an increasingly ornate tapestry.

### **Studio Use**

The key signature of this song presents an interesting opportunity for young high voices. Most of the melody lies within the middle voice, yet there are prolonged Fs and Gs interpolated, all of which are marked with a *pp* dynamic. As a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 25.

result, this song would serve as a superb teaching tool to utilize quiet dynamic levels above the passaggio in high voices, though young singers still unsure of negotiation of the registration change by leap will likely find these spots treacherous. Young tenors, however, who are just learning to negotiate the passaggio may find this song a helpful early performance piece dealing with these shifts, as these high notes could easily be sung in falsetto should trouble arise mid-performance.

The regular phrases in the opening stanza and the shorter vocal statements in the second stanza, combined with the composer's indications for vocal phrases and the rubato needed for optimal performance, allow for frequent breaths and manageable phrases for young singers. Repeated pick-up notes in the 6/8 meter provide opportunities to emphasize a vibrant and supported start to every single phrase by ensuring each of these are well sung rather than falling into the trap of producing these pick-up notes off the voice. Unaccompanied vocal moments after tonal shifts approaching the passaggio may prove difficult for students who struggle with intonation.

## **Summary**

A beautiful setting of a poem lovely in its simplicity, "Cloths of Heaven" boasts a pretty and memorable melody that sits mostly in the middle voice. Interpolated *pp* high notes and short unaccompanied sections may prove challenging for beginning students. This song, which sat unpublished for sixty years, is a wonderful example of the intricacy Gurney brought to even the simplest

text and is worthy of performance and study for some beginning and all intermediate and advanced students.

## DESIRE IN SPRING

**Range:** B2-E4; D3-G4 **Tessitura:** E3-D4; G3-F4

**Best for:** Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Soprano

**Text Source:** *Songs of the Fields* by Francis Ledwidge

**Location:** Oxford: Volume V, Number 2

**References:** Banfield: 216-7; Pilkington: 23; Renas: 221-5

**Helps with:** Musicianship, breathing/phrasing, vocal onset, open high notes

**Challenges:** Long phrases

**Notable Recordings:** *English Songs*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Peters International 1980]; *English Songs: Ivor Gurney, Frederick Delius*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Etcetera KTC 1989]; *Severn and Somme: Songs and Poems by Ivor Gurney*: David Johnston (tenor), Christopher Keyte (baritone), Daphne Ibbott (piano), Geoffrey Pratley (piano) [Pearl 1997]; *A Shropshire Lad & The Land of Lost Content*: Anthony Rolfe Johnson (tenor), David Willison (piano) [Polydor Select 1975]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney*: Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]; *Songs of Travel*: Anthony Wolfe Johnson (tenor), David Willison (piano) [IMP Classics 1993]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]



**DESIRE IN SPRING**

FRANCIS LEDWIDGE

IVOR GURNEY

Andante

VOICE

PIANO

*pp*

*p*

*mp*

*p*

I love the cra - dle... songs the mo - thers -

## Overview

The opening line to this modified strophic setting speaks of “the cradle songs the mothers sing.” Perhaps it was this sentiment that drew Gurney to this Ledwidge poem. Gurney, who had a complicated and strained relationship with his mother, often set poems that invoked nostalgia for his beloved Gloucester. The imagery of this spring scene, in combination with the reference to a loving and doting mother, must have been irresistible to the composer.

The longing for spring (i.e., for a mother’s love, for Gloucester, etc.) is embodied by the four-sixteenth-note figuration in the right hand that continues virtually uninterrupted throughout the song. This figure is established in a beautiful four-measure opening in the accompaniment and continues until the final two

measures, where two dotted half notes give the indication of long-sought-after satisfaction.

The vocal line is mostly conjunct and almost entirely syllabic (except for when the vocal line takes over the sixteenth-note figure, in which each syllable gets two). The vocal phrases are clearly marked and vary in length, leading to surprise and contrast for listeners to wonderful effect. The vocal line also features the flat seventh-scale degree prominently, further communicating a sense of longing and love.

Banfield is critical of the lack of text-painting, citing the specific examples below. This writer, however, finds these examples more than adequate when paired with the sense of nostalgia and yearning that the piano and vocal lines create.

His scene-painting is severely limited and not very effective: a twittering e" inverted pedal for the 'roadside birds', a chromatic slow descent at 'midday wind' and another, richly harmonized over a static melody note, for 'silent changes', and a broadening to 4/4 for 'long whisper' are about all he manages...<sup>19</sup>

## Studio Use

This vocal line is a helpful one for younger singers exploring ideal phonation. Nearly every onset is on a vowel or voiced consonant, allowing for free and open initiation of phonation. The phrases are mostly short and manageable, with the longer ones possessing the potential for needed catch breaths amongst consonant clusters. In addition, this is one of the only Gurney songs published in multiple keys.

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<sup>19</sup> Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*, 216.

Each key provides an ideal vowel-pitch alignment for its respective voice type on the highest note—E natural for low voices and G natural for high—on the word “silent.”

The flat seventh-scale degree is a great opportunity for young singers to understand borrowed tones, and as these are not applied arbitrarily in the song but rather to express longing or love, an emotional connection to the non-diatonic pitch will help young musicians internalize it. In addition, the near constant sixteenth-note motion in the accompaniment will help young singers who may be slightly less musically secure tackle the rhythmic challenges in the song.

### **Summary**

While not an easy song, “Desire in Spring” is an excellent teaching tool for vocal onset, open vowel passaggio negotiation, and breath and phrasing. The vocal line is beautifully set and mostly syllabic and is an organic extension of the motivic material of the delicate opening. Less secure musicians will find the emotional flat seventh easier to internalize and will find the constant piano subdivision helpful with precision with the rhythms. Short and sweet, sentimental and nostalgic, “Desire in Spring” is a terrific choice for beginning voices.

## DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

**Range:** D-flat 3-F4 **Tessitura:** E-flat 3-D-flat 4

**Best for:** Baritone, Tenor, Mezzo-Soprano, Soprano

**Text Source:** *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* by William Butler Yeats

**Location:** Oxford: Volume I, Number 4

**References:** Banfield: 196; Moore: 138; Pilkington: 8; Renas: 89-91

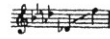
**Helps with:** New musicians, breath control, passaggio (tenor/mezzo)

**Challenges:** Long phrases, range (young soprano/baritone)

**Notable Recordings:** *English Songs*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Peters International 1980]; *English Songs: Ivor Gurney, Frederick Delius*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Etcetera KTC 1989]; *Music for a While: Britten, Purcell, Butterworth, Dowland, Finzi, Gurney*: Scot Weir (tenor), Till Alexander Körber (piano) [Eigenart 1996]; *A Shropshire Lad & The Land of Lost Content*: Anthony Rolfe Johnson (tenor), David Willison (piano) [Polydor Select 1975]; *Songs by Finzi & His Friends*: Stephen Roberts (baritone), Ian Partridge (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion 1981]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano), [Chandos Records 1990]

# DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

W. B. YEATS



IVOR GURNEY

*Poco Andante*

Voice *pp*

Down by the sal-ley gar-dens my love and I did

Piano *pp*

meet; She passed the sal-ley gar-dens with lit-tle snowwhite feet. She

## Overview

One of the simplest and most beautiful songs Gurney ever composed, the melody here is a nod to the folk song upon which Yeats likely based his poem. Perhaps this sentimentality comes from the contentment Gurney felt while residing with the Chapman family in the fall of 1920, during which time this and many other of Gurney's songs were composed. This is one of the few times during Gurney's post-war life when he felt secure and productive.

The song is strophic, with very little alteration between the two stanzas. The memorable and lovely melody is evocative of a folk song, largely stepwise but with occasional leaps of thirds and fourths. While mostly syllabic, the setting has occasional short melismas to convey emphasis on certain words. Interestingly,

adding to the folk song feeling, the vocal line is completely diatonic to the key, without a single accidental. The rhythmic augmentation on the reiteration of the final line of text is especially lovely.

One of the simplest accompaniments Gurney ever wrote, the piano part is largely chordal, with mostly half notes throughout. Eighth-note motion is mostly in the prelude, interludes, and postlude and generally mimics the vocal line.

### **Studio Use**

One of Gurney's simplest songs both vocally and pianistically, this lovely and tuneful song is a superb introduction to this composer's rich art song repertoire for beginning singers. Especially helpful for young tenors and mezzo-sopranos, the tessitura sits easily in the upper-middle voice. The range does not extend below a few brief D-flats and extends up to a high F, easily within the range of many beginning tenors and mezzo-sopranos. Beginning high baritones and sopranos with comfortable middle voices will also find this song appropriate, though the range will likely be less well-suited for them. With the exception of the last syllable of the word "foolish," each ascent into the passaggio is on an open vowel, which will ease the transition for young voices.

The vocal phrases, marked as is usually the case by Gurney, are long and ambitious. Young students with excellent breath control may endeavor to achieve them; however, catch breaths within these phrases are certainly possible in ways that will not interfere with the text. Indeed, this may be an excellent song to work

on maximizing a young singer's breath control, whereby he or she strives to complete the long phrases but has "in case of emergency" breaths memorized within the phrases.

## **Summary**

Described by Banfield as an "intensely beautiful simple love-song,"<sup>20</sup> "Down By the Salley Gardens" is as lovely as it is simple. The short text, diatonic and tuneful melody, and modest range and tessitura make this song an ideal selection for beginning singers, especially young tenors and mezzo-sopranos. Many of the vocal phrases are short and manageable, though a few are indicated to be quite long. Young singers can use these long phrases to train their breath control, and the text allows for catch breaths should they become necessary during performance.

On a personal note, this writer finds the message of the text of this song to be especially apropos for students in all phases of life but especially early on in the college experience. This connection to the text, and the feeling of being encouraged to relax and not be overwhelmed with life, make this enchantingly straightforward song all the more appealing for use in the voice studio.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 196.

## EVEN SUCH IS TIME

**Range:** C3-E4

**Tessitura:** F3-D4

**Best for:** Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** *The Prerogative of Parliaments* by Sir Walter Raleigh (originally “Epitaph”)

**Location:** Oxford: Volume IV, Number 1

**References:** Banfield: 192; Moore: 87-8; Pilkington: 18; Renas: 175-8; R. C. Smith: 83-90

**Helps with:** Breath management, middle voice, dynamic expression

**Challenges:** Piano/voice ensemble, intonation, unaccompanied singing

**Notable Recordings:** *The Dark Pastoral: Music and Poetry from World War One:* Andrew Kennedy (tenor), Julius Drake (piano), Simon Russell Beale (reader) [Altara 2008]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney:* Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]; *Wars Embers:* Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe (baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]



## EVEN SUCH IS TIME

SIR WALTER RALEIGH

IVOR GURNEY

The musical score is for a song titled "Even Such is Time" by Sir Walter Raleigh, set to music by Ivor Gurney. The score is for Voice and Piano. The tempo is "Andante con moto" and the dynamics are "pp" (pianissimo). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/2. The lyrics are: "Even such is Time, which takes in trust Our youth, our joys, and all we have, And". The score is written in a traditional musical notation style, with the voice part on a single staff and the piano accompaniment on two staves. The piano part features a prominent opening motive that is repeated throughout the piece.

### Overview

Composed in the trenches of World War I, "Even Such is Time" deals with the themes of fate, death, and rebirth, and it is obvious why Gurney would be drawn to this particular text at this time in his life. The poem was written by Sir Walter Raleigh as he awaited his execution.

This through-composed setting uses the opening vocal motive as its unifying agent. Examples of it can be found woven throughout the entire accompaniment. This motive, likely indicative of the approach of death, is inverted at the end of the piece, symbolizing rebirth or redemption. The motive is repeated alone rather than incorporated into a thicker texture in measures 50-52 near the beginning of the long postlude. R. C. Smith theorizes that this motive is a nod to the popular opening

material of Beethoven's fifth symphony.<sup>21</sup> Gurney felt a special kinship with Beethoven and, as noted earlier, claimed to have spoken directly with the deceased composer's spirit during the later decline of his (Gurney's) mental state.

The vocal line consists entirely of half notes and quarter notes and requires a wide range of dynamic levels, from *pp* to *ff*. These dynamics rise and fall regularly in two sections: during the six lines of text before the substantial interlude and in the two lines of text that follow it. Nearly every phrase in the song is four measures long. Melismas, as is often the case in Gurney settings, are used for text emphasis. In this song, though, Gurney atypically employs melismas by utilizing skips of a third and with contrary motion. This gives an impression of being unsettled, as a man awaiting execution would likely have felt. Gurney also employs the technique of unaccompanied singing to stress feelings of fear and tension throughout the piece, especially notable in the song's opening and on the words "Who in the dark...", both of which highlight the loneliness and vulnerability of the speaker.

Further, this song illustrates a rarely used technique in Gurney's songs, one in which he repeats text in his setting that is not repeated in the original text. R. C. Smith describes it thus:

Text repetition is rare in Gurney's songs, but the repetition that does exist is very important and dramatic. In this case, the colorful line "Shuts up the story of our days" emphasizes the weight of impending death by repeating "Shuts up" with tenuto markings over both repetitions.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, R. C., "The Songs of Ivor Gurney," 87.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 89.

## **Studio Use**

The vocal line exists in an extremely comfortable range and tessitura for young low voices. The lone high E natural is approached with an ornamented leading tone up from D-sharp/E-flat and is on an open neutral vowel. While the range and tessitura are comfortable, the dynamic range required is extensive: from pianissimo to fortissimo. This provides an effective teaching opportunity for well-sung and supported middle voice singing at a variety of volume levels. Without the need to prepare for the passaggio, a multitude of vocal colors and weights can be experimented with to achieve different dynamic levels in the middle voice. The regularity of the length of vocal phrases and the rests that surround them make this an ideal choice for students who are still working to gain control over their breath management and phrasing.

Musically insecure students may find this song challenging, as the accompaniment is not rhythmically supportive of the melody, nor is it melodically supportive during the disjunct melismatic passages. This song contains several unaccompanied sections, quite a few even in light of Gurney's penchant for utilizing this technique. The lack of piano support may lead to insecurity on many fronts in students who are weaker musicians.

## **Summary**

A dramatic setting of a fatalistic poem, this trench song lies very comfortably in the vocal range for low medium voices. The regular vocal phrases will allow students without mastery of breath management to successfully explore this song. The extensive dynamic range allows for the cultivation of varied colors in the middle voice, but an unsupportive accompaniment may make the song unsettling for less secure musicians. As a psychological study of Gurney's grappling with death and redemption in the trenches of World War I, this song warrants consideration in the studio and on the recital stage.

## THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED

**Range:** C-sharp3-G-sharp 4 (f#4)      **Tessitura:** E3-D-sharp 4

**Best for:** Tenor, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** *In the Seven Woods* by William Butler Yeats

**Location:** Oxford: Volume II, Number 7

**References:** Banfield: 192-5; Herendeen: 63-73; Moore: 90-1; Pilkington: 13;  
Renas: 130-4

**Helps with:** Long vocal phrases, dramatic interpretation, dynamic contrast

**Challenges:** Varied tessitura, intonation, unaccompanied singing, wide range

**Notable Recordings:** *English Songs*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Peters International 1980]; *English Songs: Ivor Gurney, Frederick Delius*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Etcetera KTC 1989]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney*: Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]

# THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED

W. B. YEATS



IVOR GURNEY

## Overview

An intensely emotional, through-composed setting of Yeats' poem, "The Folly of Being Comforted" was written during one of Gurney's stays in a war hospital in the autumn of 1917—not while in the trenches, as Pilkington asserts.<sup>23</sup> The inspiration for this song was likely Gurney's infatuation with nurse Annie Drummond. Their ill-fated relationship was beginning around this time.

Herendeen, in his analysis, doubts this assertion:

Significant by its absence, within the letters written during these early weeks in hospital, is any mention of Nurse Drummond. What is seen, however, are recurring themes of nature, purpose, art, camaraderie and hope for the future - all common thoughts in his war expressions. Considering the above, it is far more

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<sup>23</sup> Pilkington, *Gurney, Ireland, Quilter and Warlock*, 13.

supportable that Gurney wrote not of a person, but of England itself when he set the words “time can but make her beauty over again”.<sup>24</sup>

Given the intensity of his feelings for Drummond, however, as expressed in his letters, it seems likely to this author that even if the subject of the setting is indeed England rather than Drummond, it was the early stages of attraction and romantic sentiment that inspired the bed-ridden composer to craft this hitherto unexplored personification of England as a beautiful woman.

The vocal line of this song is demanding, to be sure. Though comprised mostly of stepwise motion and simple skips, and set almost exclusively syllabically, the vocal phrases begin short and expand over the course of the song. So, too, do the rhythmic values augment. Short phrases almost entirely devoid of sustained notes give way to increased prolongation until the final phrase, a seven-measure-long phrase consisting only of the words “of being comforted.” Foregoing his common technique of emphasizing syllables through well-placed melismas, in this song Gurney instead frequently utilizes the tactic of strategically placed unaccompanied singing. This can be found throughout the song punctuating the most important syllables in the piece. There seems to be almost two different climaxes to the song in the vocal line. This atypical occurrence results from Gurney’s omission of the poetic climax of the poem when he set the song in one sitting, likely from memory.

He details this in a letter to Marion Scott:

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<sup>24</sup> Herendeen, “Lanes of Severn: Ivor Gurney as Illustrated by His War Songs, 1915-1918,” 68.

(It was written in one sitting the night after I had been up all night helping in the wards. Some stunt!) Well, I finished a fairly completed written sketch, and then found out I had left out 'The fire that burns about her when she stirs Burns but more clearly'. O Blasphemy! My balance upset!<sup>25</sup>

As is common in Gurney's war songs, especially in nonstrophic settings, one musical motive serves as a binding figure for the entire piece. In "The Folly of Being Comforted," this unifying material is in the right hand during the opening two measures of the song. This musical idea can be found accompanied by chords in the left hand or with a countermelody in contrary motion throughout the entire piece. Special attention is paid to the interludes between stanzas in this piece, which are derived from the opening motive of the song but are harmonized in increasingly chromatic fashion. This is indicative of the poet's thoughts inevitably turning to his lost love in spite of every attempt at comfort. The increasing complexity of these interludes harmonically suggests that the passage of time makes this yearning more intense rather than fading as the would-be comforters suggest. Toward the end of the song, the piano fades away to allow for extended passages of unaccompanied singing, suggesting final acceptance of a lonely fate.

### **Studio Use**

Gurney's setting captures the emotional content of the poetry brilliantly, but his techniques require much of the singer who undertakes this song. Gradually increasingly long phrases require exceptional breath control, especially the final two

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<sup>25</sup> Thornton, *Ivor Gurney: Collected Letters*, 359.



phrases in the lower-middle voice. Fortunately, the tempo and rests provide opportunities to take the breaths needed to complete these phrases.

The range and tessitura make this piece difficult for less experienced singers. With prolonged passages in the lower-middle voice and two vocal climaxes in and above the *passaggio*, this song is likely best for a tenor with a comfortable middle voice and mezzo-sopranos with facility up top. Mezzos, as well as adventurous high baritones, may wish to take advantage of the optional note written to replace the high G-sharp on the first syllable of “again.” This *ossia* creates dual climaxes on F-sharp, challenging enough within the confines of this short, dramatic piece.

Passages of unaccompanied singing at a quiet dynamic level also challenge singers, especially in the realm of intonation. The last couple of phrases will particularly challenge young mezzo-sopranos, with the unaccompanied singing through the first *passaggio*. The unaccompanied piano singing is made even more taxing when juxtaposed with the two forte climaxes in the upper voice.

## **Summary**

A wonderfully dramatic and brilliantly set wartime song, “The Folly of Being Comforted” presents a challenging yet rewarding task for intermediate to advanced tenors and mezzo-sopranos—and perhaps even high baritones or wide-ranged sopranos. Through-composed, emotional, and orchestrally conceived, this song is quasi-operatic in its construction and in its ideal performance. An excellent stepping stone toward operatic arias or the demanding art song repertoire of

Mahler or Strauss, “The Folly of Being Comforted” is rarely performed yet deserving of consideration.

## IN FLANDERS

**Range:** C-sharp 3-F4

**Tessitura:** E-flat 3-C4

**Best for:** Baritone, Tenor, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** *A Gloucestershire Lad at Home and Abroad* by Frederick William  
Harvey

**Location:** Oxford: Volume IV, Number 10

**References:** Banfield: 190-2, 211; Herendeen: 36-41; Moore: 85-6; Pilkington: 22;  
Renas: 205-11; R. C. Smith: 75-83

**Helps with:** Breath control/phrasing, dramatic interpretation, vibrant phrase  
starts, passaggio

**Challenges:** Intonation, range

**Notable Recordings:** *The Dark Pastoral: Music and Poetry from World War One:*  
Andrew Kennedy (tenor), Julius Drake (piano), Simon Russell Beale (reader) [Altara  
2008]; *Music for a While: Britten, Purcell, Butterworth, Dowland, Finzi, Gurney:* Scot  
Weir (tenor), Till Alexander Körber (piano) [Eigenart 1996]; *Severn and Somme:*  
*Songs and Poems by Ivor Gurney:* David Johnston (tenor), Christopher Keyte (tenor),  
Daphne Ibbott (piano), Geoffrey Pratley (piano) [Pearl 1977]; *Songs by Finzi & His*  
*Friends:* Stephen Roberts (baritone), Ian Partridge (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano)  
[Hyperion 1981]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney:* Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius

Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]

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## IN FLANDERS

F. W. HARVEY

IVOR GURNEY

Andante espressivo

VOICE

PIANO

*pp*

*p*

*[p]*

I'm home-sick for my hills a-gain— My hills a-gain!

### Overview

The poetry Gurney set for this song was written by one of his closest lifelong friends, F.W. Harvey. Both the poem and the song were composed in the trenches of World War I. The second of Gurney's "trench songs," "In Flanders" was composed while Harvey was MIA and presumed killed in battle. Harvey was later found to have been at a German prisoner of war camp.

In a modified rondo form, "In Flanders" is intensely nostalgic for the beauty of Gloucestershire in both text and musical setting. Gurney employs various text-painting techniques in the accompaniment to pictorially describe his beloved home. R. C. Smith discusses some of these in the following way:

For the heights of the Cotswold hills he uses a pattern of ascending octave triplets- arriving at a large eight note chord at the peak. A few measures later... the piano part plays octaves in a relatively high register, which perhaps suggests the height of the giant clouds over the Malvern hills. This is followed by heavy chords in a lower register, perhaps representing the jagged ridge of the Malvern hills.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the text-painting, Gurney utilizes the accompaniment in a clever way to paint the keen yearning for a return to the idyllic countryside. After a startlingly static prelude, the piano moves from mostly quarter notes, quickening to eighth notes, and then hastening to eighth-note triplets. The sensation of longing that is achieved through this technique, especially when coupled with the two-against-three feeling created when the triplets are juxtaposed with the duplets in the voice, is very effective.

With the exception of a melisma on the word “royally,” the vocal line is entirely syllabic. When combined with the lack of customary slurs that Gurney is inclined to include in his vocal scores and the frequent use of tenudos, this indicates a uniquely declamatory style of singing intended for the singer. The vocal line, too, paints imagery of Gurney’s longed-for Gloucester, as the vocal line dips low and is accompanied chordally on the phrase “Where the land is low/Like a huge imprisoning O.”

It is worth noting that this song was conceived orchestrally, and Herbert Howells orchestrated it for performance back at the Royal College of Music while Gurney remained in the trenches of World War I. It is likely as a reaction to this

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, R. C., “The Songs of Ivor Gurney,” 76.

orchestration, which Howells lowered a half step from Gurney's original E major to E-flat major to accommodate the baritone singer, that Oxford University Press published the lowered piano-vocal version.

### **Studio Use**

The range and tessitura of the vocal line make it ideal for medium voices; however, sopranos may find the tessitura sits a bit low. Lacking the usual indicators of vocal phrasing, this song relies upon the singer to interpret the text for phrases. This job is made easier by the declamatory and syllabic setting, as well as by Gurney's painstaking work to set his dear friend's words. The resultant phrases can be adjusted to suit the needs and desires of the individual interpreter, and as a result, this song can serve as a teaching tool for vocal phrasing and breath control.

Much more so than if the song had been published in the original key a half step higher, the vowels and highest pitches line up well, especially for intermediate to advanced baritones and mezzo-sopranos, and should accommodate tenors of most experience levels. Tenors particularly may find the lowest phrase difficult, that on the text that begins "Where the land is low..." However, the subsequent color would serve the text well, and this may help young tenors gain confidence and core in the low voice. The prolonged B-flat at the end of the piece at a piano dynamic may be troublesome intonation-wise, especially with female singers.

The majority of the phrases in the song begin with eighth-note pick-up notes. These serve as an excellent opportunity to develop vibrant supported singing on

short pick-up note entrances. If a student struggles with this concept, the syllabic and declamatory vocal writing can help to ease the import of this fault in performance if necessary.

## **Summary**

An intensely personal song woven with the experience of trench warfare and infused with the feelings of loss for a dear friend, “In Flanders” was regarded by Gurney himself to be among his greatest songs. The vocal line, especially in the published key versus the original, is ideal for intermediate middle voices and any level of tenor. The declamatory style creates opportunities for young singers to experiment with vocal phrasing, and multiple pick-up notes allow students to develop vibrant and supported sound from the very onset of each phrase. The vivid musical imagery and emotional circumstances surrounding the composition make this song an interesting one for recital programming and a worthwhile consideration for the studio.

## THE NIGHT OF TRAFALGAR

**Range:** D3-F4

**Tessitura:** D3-D4

**Best for:** Baritone

**Text Source:** *The Dynasts*, a play by Thomas Hardy

**Location:** Oxford: Volume V, Number 8

**References:** Pilkington: 25; Renas: 242-5

**Helps with:** Breath management, dramatic interpretation

**Challenges:** Diction, phrasing, varied tessitura

**Notable Recordings:** *Wars Embers*: Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe

(baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]



# THE NIGHT OF TRAFALGAR

THOMAS HARDY

IVOR GURNEY

Allegro

VOICE

PIANO

*f* *mf*

In the

wild Oc - to - ber night - time, when the wind raved round the land, And the

## Overview

Written in 1913 before returning to the Royal College of Music for the fall, “The Night of Trafalgar” was likely composed as an homage to another sea song by his first RCM composition professor, Charles Stanford. Renas observes: “The two songs share many traits, among them the subject matter (a windy night at sea), key (d dorian), voice type, and mood.”<sup>27</sup>

Beginning with a prelude that sets the stormy tone for this rollicking sea-song, the piano part is built upon firm, continuous block chords, either in quarter-note or eighth-note length, on the beat. Occasionally, eighth notes or triplets fill the

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<sup>27</sup> Renas, “The Songs of Ivor Gurney as Published by Oxford University Press: A Repertoire Guide,” 243.

spaces between the beats, especially during the interludes that occur in the middle of each stanza and between the three stanzas themselves. These function mainly to ornament the primary function of the accompaniment, which is to propel the song forward with the excitement and power of the sea during a storm. This song is uncharacteristically tonally stable, modulating only once briefly in each stanza to the flattened second. Once the third stanza is capped off with a coda consisting of a repetition of the last line of text, there is a quiet postlude built from the musical material of the introduction, depicting the sense of the storm continuing to rage in the distance as it moves further out to sea.

The vocal line of the song is extremely disjunct, consisting of all manner of steps, skips, and leaps and the outlining of various triads and seven chords. Each stanza possesses two smaller sections and continues in a modified strophic form throughout until the vocal coda. The repetition of musical ideas and disjunct, declamatory vocal writing is evocative of a dramatic and masterfully told story of battle in a tempest.

### **Studio Use**

Pilkington describes this song as requiring “a strong voice and clear diction.”<sup>28</sup> The bombastic accompaniment, fast tempo, and disjunct melody work against the necessary attention to text communication in this raconteur’s sea-song.

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<sup>28</sup> Pilkington, *Gurney, Ireland, Quilter and Warlock*, 25.

This will be especially challenging for students who struggle to fully phonate on voiced consonants and support their vocal sound through final syllables of phrases.

The vocal line sits relatively low, except for one or two brief passages in each stanza that travel through the *passaggio*. The low tessitura throughout the majority of the song makes it a poor choice for tenors, and it is a potentially hazardous choice for young baritones who are learning to maneuver through this vocal transition. A naturally robust voice would suit this song best, as the inclination to make the middle-voice singing over an active accompaniment too heavy will be lessened. Most of the vowel pitch alignment will help to facilitate these high passages, with the exception of the vocal coda, where the singer is asked to sing a high *f* on the [i] vowel. Special attention to rounded buccal formation and gathered sound will be necessary here, as well as a vowel modification toward [ɪ] or [e].

A dramatic and exciting tale, this song should bring out the inner storyteller of every student to whom it is assigned. So long as young baritones avoid the temptation to overproduce the low-middle voice in response to the active accompaniment, this characterization should aid in the best vocalism, providing forward-moving breath momentum and energetic consonants. Vocal phrases are mostly short, though these short phrase lengths in combination with the rapid tempo will lead to the possibility of “stacking the breath,” whereby a singer does not exhale unused air before taking a catch breath. This is an excellent teaching song for “breathing for the phrase” rather than inhaling the maximum amount of air possible at every breath opportunity.

## **Summary**

This song is an exciting choice that could certainly add variety to a set of other Gurney songs. Ideally suited for a robust baritone voice with facility in the upper-middle and a flare for the dramatic, teachers should consider using this song to develop appropriate inhalation for the phrase to come as intermediate and advanced students gain more refined control over their breath mechanisms.

## SEVERN MEADOWS

**Range:** B2-D4

**Tessitura:** D3-D4

**Best for:** Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** *Severn and Somme* by Ivor Gurney

**Location:** Oxford: Volume V, Number 3

**References:** Banfield: 135, 192; Herendeen: 42-45; Moore: 86-7; Pilkington: 24;  
Renas: 226-9; R. C. Smith: 62-7

**Helps with:** Harmonic and rhythmic security, recital variety, middle voice

**Challenges:** Long phrases

**Notable Recordings:** *British Songs*: Valerie Baulard (mezzo-soprano), Simon Wright (piano) [Max Sound 1995]; *The Dark Pastoral: Music and Poetry from World War One*: Andrew Kennedy (tenor), Julius Drake (piano), Simon Russell Beale (reader) [Altara 2008]; *English Songs*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Peters International 1980]; *English Songs: Ivor Gurney, Frederick Delius*: Ian Partridge (tenor), Jennifer Partridge (piano) [Etcetera Amsterdam 1989]; *Severn and Somme: Songs and Poems by Ivor Gurney*: David Johnston (tenor), Christopher Keyte (baritone), Daphne Ibbott (piano), Geoffrey Pratley (piano) [Pearl 1997]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney*: Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]; *Wars Embers*: Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe (baritone),

Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]

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Written for Miss Dorothy Dawe (Dorothy Howells)

## SEVERN MEADOWS

Poem by IVOR GURNEY

IVOR GURNEY

**Lento**

VOICE

On - ly the wan - der - er

PIANO

Knows Eng - land's gra - ces, — Or can a -

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

## Overview

The third of Gurney's trench songs, "Severn Meadows" is significant for many reasons, chief among them that it is the only published example of Gurney setting his own text. Also noteworthy are the brevity of the song and the lack of imagery that usually inspired Gurney to set a text. Straying from the dramatic and emotional settings that dominated Gurney's output during his time composing in the trenches,

this song is intimate in its longing nostalgia for home. Pilkington concisely describes the song as “two short pages of pure anguish, almost unbearable in its controlled emotion; a great song.”<sup>29</sup>

Two short and simple quatrains are set in modified strophic form, with the second stanza extended musically from the first. As is common in Gurney’s songs, the tonal shifts are not accomplished through ordinary dominant and tonic cadences but rather through seventh chords and use of the supertonic, submediant, and subtonic. This song is particularly tonally ambiguous, cadencing on a D major with an added sixth after beginning on an e minor 7. Frequent suspensions, especially across downbeats, add to this tonal ambiguity. The lack of a tonal home is one long musical nod to the idea of wandering or of being separated from one’s comfortable home.

The vocal line of the piece is mostly stepwise with occasional skips and is almost exclusively half notes or longer in a drawn-out depiction of the natural rhythm of the text, implying wistfulness or longing. These longer rhythms contrast with the quarter-note motion in the right hand of the accompaniment, while the left hand moves in similar rhythmic values but in contrary motion.

### **Studio Use**

“Severn Meadows” is an exercise not only in emotional restraint but also in breath control. Seemingly manageable three- and four-measure-long phrases

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<sup>29</sup> Pilkington, *Gurney, Ireland, Quilter and Warlock*, 24.

require significant breath control given the *lento* tempo, the composer's own phrase markings, and the exposure of the text (making catch breaths much more noticeable). While tonally and rhythmically ambiguous as a result of frequent suspensions across barlines, intermediate musicians should have no problem performing the musical content with confidence. The vocal range lies comfortably for any low or medium voice.

This piece is ideal for recital selection, especially in tandem with Gurney's setting of "In Flanders," as the nostalgia for home and the circumstances surrounding the composition are so similar. "Severn Meadows" would be a great choice in a program to provide vocal rest for a singer while ensuring that breath support remains low and controlled. The fact that such a rest and reset can occur over such a beautiful song is definitely a bonus.

## **Summary**

"Severn Meadows" is a hauntingly beautiful song, especially when presented in tandem with "In Flanders" and Gurney's other trench songs. Possessing little difficulty for any intermediate-level student with a low or medium voice (aside from long vocal phrases), this piece would make an excellent choice for recitals to reset the vocal mechanism and the dramatic palate. This writer agrees with the conclusion drawn by Herendeen:

Through 'In Flanders', Gurney and Harvey voiced a mutual longing. In 'Severn Meadows', without Harvey, he remained emotionally and thematically attached, and composed what is essentially an epilogue to that first



collaboration. In support of this, the two songs should be performed together. Doing so supplies the needed background that turns the wistful mood of a first hearing into a darker experience.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Herendeen, ““Lanes of Severn”: IG, as illustrated by his war songs, 1915-1918,” 45.

## SLEEP

**Range:** B-flat 2-F4, D-flat3-A-flat 4      **Tessitura:** C3-D4, E-flat3-F4

**Best for:** Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano (Bb), Tenor, Soprano (Db)

**Text Source:** *The Woman Hater*, a play attributed to Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. Gurney indicated this text as being written by Fletcher.

**Location:** Boosey & Hawkes: *Five Elizabethan Songs* (public domain)

**References:** Banfield: 181, 187-8, 190, 195; Moore: 80-1; Pilkington: 33; D. K. Smith: 110-7, 138-49; R. C. Smith: 67-75

**Helps with:** Rhythmic accuracy, legato, vowel-pitch alignment

**Challenges:** Vocal phrasing, poetic structure

**Notable Recordings:** *An Anthology of English Song*: Janet Baker (mezzo-soprano), Martin Isepp (piano) [Saga Records 1973]; *British Songs*: Valerie Baulard (mezzo-soprano), Gerald Moore (piano) [Max Sound 1995]; *Dreams and Fancies: Favourite Songs in English*: Sarah Walker (mezzo-soprano), Roger Vignoles (piano) [CRD Cassette 1992]; *Ivor Gurney: Songs*: Susan Bickley (mezzo), Iain Burnside (piano) [Naxos 2010]; *My Heart Is Like a Singing Bird: Songs By Parry, Stanford, Quilter, Warlock & Gurney*: Sarah Leonard (soprano), Malcolm Martineau (piano) [IMP Classics 1992]; *Severn and Somme: Songs and Poems by Ivor Gurney*: David Johnston (tenor), Christopher Keyte (baritone), Daphne Ibbott (piano), Geoffrey Pratley

(piano) [Pearl 1997]; *Songs by Finzi & His Friends*: Stephen Roberts (baritone), Ian Partridge (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion 1981]; *Severn Meadows: Songs by Ivor Gurney*: Paul Agnew (tenor), Julius Drake (piano) [Hyperion 2001]; *Wars Embers*: Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe (baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]; *When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon (baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]

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*To Enmy Hunt*

13

## Sleep

JOHN FLETCHER

IVOR GURNEY

Adagio *pp*

Voice

Come, Sleep, and with thy

Adagio *pp*

Piano

sweet de - ceiv - ing Lock me in de - light a -

## Overview

Perhaps the best of Gurney's songs, and almost certainly the most well-known, "Sleep" is the fourth from his set titled *Five Elizabethan Songs*. Gurney, who referred to this set as the "Lizas," thought them almost divinely inspired, remarking, "I have done 5 of the most delightful and beautiful songs you ever cast your beaming eyes upon... How did such an undigested clod as I make them?"<sup>31</sup> Indeed, composed in 1914 during his early studies, this set of songs, with "Sleep" in particular, marks an immense step forward in Gurney's compositional faculties.

The construction of the song epitomizes Gurney's most consistently successful approaches. The poem consists of two stanzas, and Gurney's setting could best be described as modified strophic form. Great variety exists between the two stanzas, as necessitated by the text. Gurney, rather than set the poetic ideas as separate phrases, instead groups his vocal phrases into complete thoughts. In this way, he predicts the successes he would achieve in his through-composed ballad songs. This synthesis of strophic and through-composed approaches results in only four phrases for the entire song, the final and longest of which is eighteen measures long.

The vocal line is set mostly syllabically, with wonderful exceptions taking the form of melismas on emphasized words such as "feel," "idle," and "fancy." These instances of melismas prove to be exceptionally expressive in the context of the

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<sup>31</sup> Thornton, *Ivor Gurney: Collected Letters*, 10.

otherwise syllabic setting. Throughout each of the two stanzas, the vocal line ascends in pitch and dynamic level, climaxing in the highest note on the word “joys.”

Interestingly, the only entrance on a strong beat in the vocal line is the very first. All subsequent entrances occur off the beat. This often occurs in conjunction with a sustained note carrying over to the beginning of the following measure, even as the harmony shifts, creating disparate effects depending upon the interaction of this held note with the concurrent harmony. Kenneth Smith describes this phenomenon as follows:

Many times notes are held over the barline and sound like 9ths or suspensions because of an underlying change of harmony on the downbeat of the next measure. The effect can be dissonant, representing a yearning... or unexpectedly consonant, giving a sense of repose, as in mm. 17-19...<sup>32</sup>

This technique represents the concept of sleep beautifully, longing for respite away from whatever realities cause despair in the speaker, while highlighting the fogginess of exhaustion.

The accompaniment is meant to be evocative of the dreamy state that exists between wakefulness and slumber rather than for specific text-painting. One vivid departure exists after the text “all my fancies,” when Gurney places a seemingly unrelated figuration in the piano that can only be described as fanciful. The next vocal motive is derived from this fanciful piano motive when the singer describes he

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, D. K., “An Interpretive Analysis of Three Early Songs of Ivor Gurney (1890-1937): ‘Song of Ciabhan,’ ‘Tears,’ and ‘Severn Meadows,’” 70.

or she feels an influence from his or her fancies. The singer's melody is literally influenced by the depiction of fancies in the accompaniment.

The tonal ambiguity in the opening accompaniment also depicts this in-between state beautifully, omitting the tonic note from the strong beats. This harmonic uncertainty remains until the fourth measure, when the tonic is heard in the left hand of the piano. The harmony finally cadences in the relative major in the song's postlude, suggesting some measure of respite at last occurring.

### **Studio Use**

While exceedingly beautiful, the vocal line requires specific consideration before "Sleep" can be assigned to a student. The vocal phrases are exceptionally long, with the final phrase continuing for eighteen measures. While catch breaths can be taken, and even some rests are provided to facilitate this, the momentum and energy must continue across these breaths. Crescendos, too, must continue across rests, as when a crescendo begins on the text "an influence" and continues through "all my powers." These long phrases are a result of Gurney's avoidance of utilizing the poetic structure and rhyme scheme as a blueprint for his melodic setting. These are often elided to create longer phrases that coincide with thought rather than form. As a result, singers must fight the urge to punctuate these rhymes and rests within the long vocal constructions and must have a keen sense for where the linguistic and dramatic emphasis lies. Fortunately, a musically supportive setting aids students in this interpretation.

Available in two keys (the high key is almost certainly the original), this piece is uniquely suited to aid all voice types. This is especially evident in the climax of the song on the text “all my joys,” wherein the vocal line ascends above the passaggio after a lead up on open vowels to end on an open, warm, and round vowel. This shape and approach should benefit all voice types with ease of production and high rates of success.

Rhythmically complex, the vocal line only enters on the downbeat once, on the very first entrance. After this, it is imperative that a singer keep a strong sense of subdivision in order to be musically accurate. Luckily, Gurney’s choice of constant sixteenth-note motion to create a sense of insomnia makes this task easier, as the subdivision is present consistently in the piano.

## **Summary**

Hauntingly beautiful, “Sleep” presents a deceptively difficult vocal line atop a hypnotically atmospheric accompaniment. Mastery of vocal phrasing and breath control is needed, as is a strong rhythmic sense. These demands are eased through Gurney’s masterpiece setting, as are the vocal demands through excellent vowel-pitch alignment. While exploring Gurney’s lesser-known repertoire should be a goal for students and teachers alike, “Sleep” should retain its well-deserved standing in the catalogue of song for studios and recital stages.

## THOU DIDST DELIGHT MY EYES

**Range:** D-flat 3-E flat 4 **Tessitura:** E flat 3-D flat 4

**Best for:** Baritone, Tenor, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** *Shorter Poems, Book III*, Robert Bridges

**Location:** Oxford: Volume III, Number 8

**References:** Banfield: 196, 206-7; Moore: 169; Pilkington: 17; Renas: 166

**Helps with:** Vocal onset, registration, legato, dramatic interpretation

**Challenges:** Voice-piano ensemble

**Notable Recordings:** *Ivor Gurney: Songs*: Susan Bickley (mezzo), Iain Burnside (piano) [Naxos 2010]; *Wars Embers*: Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe (baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006]



## THOU DIDST DELIGHT MY EYES

ROBERT BRIDGES\*

IVOR GURNEY

Poco andante

Voice

Thou didst de-light my eyes: Yet

Piano

who am I? nor first— Nor last nor best, that durst Once dream of

*p* *cresc.* *mp* *cresc.*

**Overview**

One of Gurney's finest songs, "Thou Didst Delight My Eyes" is an excellent example of the composer's preference for modified strophic form. Renas makes mention of the key of D-flat, a tonality Gurney employs often to convey warmth and feelings of love.<sup>33</sup> Each stroph of the song incorporates more rhythmic and harmonic variation as the poetry becomes more intense. After each verse, there is an instrumental piano commentary.

<sup>33</sup> Renas, "The Songs of Ivor Gurney as Published by Oxford University Press: A Repertoire Guide," 168.

The accompaniment begins with a syncopated quarter-note accompaniment against the vocal line. These chords evoke the image of a throbbing heart, yet the accompaniment's opposition to the vocal line highlights the separation the singer feels from the object of his or her love. Pilkington remarks that this accompaniment figure is challenging for young and insecure singers; however, in spite of the difficulty created by the syncopated accompaniment in the opening of each stanza of the song, Banfield correctly posits that the piano is more helpful than not in this setting. Gurney's tendency toward meandering tonality is much more contained here, and the piano is both tonally and emotionally supportive of the singer. The climax of the song encapsulates not only the mood of the entire song but also comments on Gurney's life in a compelling way. Banfield describes it as such:

The climax and its image are very heavily loaded with emotion, the mixture of fulfillment at having been 'cheered', if only fleetingly, and tragedy at lasting self-loss being beautifully expressed in Gurney's setting of the final word, 'castaway', not on the tonic as a conclusion to the preceding downward scale but on the somewhat interrogatory dominant. The song is perhaps valedictory to Gurney's life, cheered so briefly by his creative vision, cast away as it eventually was.<sup>34</sup>

### **Studio Use**

The accompaniment, while more tonally supportive than many Gurney songs, may prove challenging to inexperienced and insecure musicians. This may, however, be an excellent opportunity to cultivate voice-piano independence and

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<sup>34</sup> Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*, 207.

internal subdivision in an intermediate or advanced student. The setting of the text is entirely syllabic. This should aid in memorization, as will the modified strophic form, but this can prove to be a challenge for students who are struggling with jaw and tongue relaxation. The text, though, is beautiful, and the setting wonderfully captures the spirit behind it. A lovely and memorable melody enhances this, providing easier memorization and huge potential for personal interpretation. The performance of this song is a superb opportunity to encourage a student to engage emotionally with a character or experience, as unrequited love from afar is a universal phenomenon of the human condition.

This song is of particular value when working with students who struggle with the onset of phonation. Nearly every phrase in the song begins with a voiced consonant, allowing for students to initiate phonation while avoiding the traps of either breathy or pressed phonation. One notable exception, found in the phrase beginning with “Ah! little praise,” allows for the opportunity to attempt onset on a vowel in an expression of emotion. A male student, especially a baritone, who is working toward mastering registration, will find this song very helpful. The highest notes are approached by leap and occur on a closed vowel, allowing these students to experience the “turning over” of the voice. Gurney, as he often did, has marked his longer poetic passages with his preferred phrasing. This will aid beginning and intermediate students in planning for breaths and singing phrases that are quite manageable. Rubato should be employed liberally and should also aid in breath management.

## **Summary**

One of Gurney's most beautiful songs, "Thou Didst Delight My Eyes" merits the consideration of any performer investigating Gurney's repertoire. While the accompaniment may dissuade inexperienced musicians in the studio, the lessons afforded in vocal onset, registration, legato, and interpretation make this song worthy of the attention of various intermediate-level students.

## THE TWA CORBIES

**Range:** C3-F4

**Tessitura:** E3-C4

**Best for:** Baritone, Mezzo-Soprano

**Text Source:** Scottish border ballad

**Location:** Oxford: Volume V, Number 9

**References:** Banfield: 183, 186, 195; Moore: 78-9; Pilkington: 25-26; Renas 246-9

**Helps with:** Dramatic interpretation, baritone registration

**Challenges:** Breathing/phrasing

**Notable Recordings:** *Wars Embers*: Michael George (bass), Stephen Varcoe

(baritone), Martyn Hill (tenor), Clifford Benson (piano) [Hyperion Helios 2006];

*When I Was One-and-Twenty: Butterworth & Gurney Songs*: Benjamin Luxon

(baritone), David Willison (piano) [Chandos Records 1990]

## THE TWA CORBIES

BORDER BALLAD

IVOR GURNEY

*Largo*

VOICE

*fp misterioso*

PIANO

As I was walk - ing all a - lone I

heard twa cor - bies mak - ing a mane; The tane un - to the ti - ther did say,

### Overview

Described by Gurney himself as “a man’s song,”<sup>35</sup> this through-composed ballad tells the tale of a fallen soldier and the musings of the crows who are about to devour his corpse. The opening piano line is reminiscent of a funeral march, and the five-note figure serves to unite the accompaniment of the entire song. The narrative in the vocal line is punctuated by frequent leaps of fourths, fifths, and sixths. The first two and the final of the five stanzas are treated very similarly musically, with an ominous and mysterious setting. In the third stanza, there is a sudden shift tonally. Banfield asserts that this modulation is not necessarily in service to the text but

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<sup>35</sup> Thornton, *Ivor Gurney: Collected Letters*, 114.

rather to build musical tension into the structure of the song as a “vastly expanded secondary dominant” for its eventual arrival in the dramatic fourth stanza.<sup>36</sup> In this verse, the crows describe the exact plans they have for the body of the fallen soldier, and the song climaxes on the word “bare” on a prolonged E natural for the singer.

Renas vividly describes this dramatic episode:

A modulation to the enharmonic parallel minor, c sharp, and a more expansive piano part signals the commencement of stanza four. The quick, sharp pecking movements of the two ravens (corbies) pecking the eyes out of the skull are depicted by the repeated notes and the plosive consonants, [p], [k], and [t], on “pike out.” The beauty of the knight’s golden hair is illustrated by another melisma. The song’s musical climax occurs with a return to the tonic, a minor, when the ravens realize that after they have had their fill of the meat of the body, they can build their home and future in leftover bones of the skeleton.<sup>37</sup>

The final stanza returns to the musical material of the opening by virtue of a piano interlude. But instead of continuing as in the opening, the postlude is interrupted by several prolonged silences, as if to communicate the passage of time or fading of memory. The climax of the final section of the song is communicated through a quiet sadness or horror, with *pp* in the voice and *ppp* in the piano. The final cadence is plagal, perhaps communicating respite at last for the fallen soldier.

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<sup>36</sup> Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*, 183.

<sup>37</sup> Renas, “The Songs of Ivor Gurney as Published by Oxford University Press: A Repertoire Guide,” 248.

## Studio Use

This wonderfully dramatic narrative is an excellent choice for intermediate and advanced baritones. The ghost story quality helps young students connect with the text, and the dramatic interpretation is aided by the fantastic and emotional setting. This ballad is served from beginning to end by the music and is a fantastic teaching tool for young singers to find and portray a character. This element is enhanced by the Scottish dialect employed in the text, specifically words such as “corbies,” “fail-dyke,” “haus bane,” and “theek.” These words represent crows or ravens, an earthen wall, neck bone, and to thicken, respectively.

The distinctly marked vocal phrases appear short on the page, but the tempo and exposed nature of the vocal line make them deceptively long and difficult, especially compounded in stanza three when the quickening tempo leaves little room for more than catch breaths. Frequent melismas and large intervals increase this difficulty, as do the held notes at the ends of the fourth and fifth stanzas.

Conceived for a baritone, “Twa Corbies” aids young, low-voiced males with negotiating the passaggio. High E-flat and E natural on the [e] vowel (“sweet” should rhyme with “mate” in the dialect) and the brief F natural on a round open [ɔ] are ideal. In addition, the rounded [ɑ] vowel on “blaw” on the final high D natural allows for an open sound and piano dynamic.



## **Summary**

“Twa Corbies” is an incredibly dramatic and effective setting. Written with a baritone in mind, the vowel-pitch alignment is ideal for traversing the passaggio, and the ballad style helps young singers perform the piece with specific dramatic intent. Phrases are deceptively long, and breaths are hard to catch, specifically in the third stanza. This song should be strongly considered for intermediate, robust, low voices and is extremely effective for the studio and stage.

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