The English Poetry & Song Society

The Great War remembered in songs & poems

music by
Ivor Gurney
John Ireland
Geraint Lewis

and the best new songs from the EP&SS competition 2004

performed by
Jeremy Huw Williams (baritone)
Nigel Foster (piano)
This is a live concert recording but applause has been edited out (except at the end of the programme) for better enjoyment.

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**Total duration:** 55:37
Notes

The GREAT WAR – ‘to end all wars’ – of 1914-18 produced, as well as appalling carnage, a glorious flowering for English Poets, half of whom were dead by the end of the war: Brooke, Flecker, Sorley, Rosenberg, Owen & Thomas; while the survivors had lifelong scars. Robert Graves, who died at the age of 90 in 1984, confessed to having been haunted in old age by the thought of all the men he had killed. May we hope that the music in this collection will prove a step towards achieving peace in our world.

Ivor Gurney was certainly one of the war’s most tragic victims, being confined to an asylum from 1923 until his death from tuberculosis in 1937. His double gift as both poet and composer is probably unique since the time of the Elizabethan, Thomas Campion. The six songs are all unpublished, and follow a course from naïve optimism, through despair, to a vision of the Last Judgement. The Dying Patriot is a glorious marching song, full of hope and allusion to history so prevalent at the start of the war. Everyone Sang is another cheerful song, but in the midst of the horror of the trenches, referring to the incident one Christmas when the opposing armies dropped their weapons and sang carols together.

If We Return is the first of two poems by Gurney’s boyhood friend, Will Harvey, and begins to look forward with apprehension to the fate of soldiers after the war (this song was unfinished, and has been completed by me) while In Flanders is a piece of nostalgia and one of Gurney's most beautiful songs, here performed in the original version he wrote while serving in the trenches of France. Harvey was captured by the Germans in August 1916, and spent the rest of the war in a prison camp. In Memoriam is a simple lament for those who died on the battlefield, as did its author Edward Thomas. I Heard a Soldier is an extraordinary song, which Gurney wrote in the asylum in 1925, and has a disturbing anticipation of Britten in its musical language as it conjures visions of the Last Judgement.
John Ireland is also one of our premier song writers, though he did not serve in the war, which is apparent from the kind of poems he chose to set. On the one hand is the sentimental patriotism of Rupert Brooke (also a non-combatant) while on the other is the rather overheated melodrama of the two poems by Cooper, which seem a civilian’s idea of what a soldier should feel, whereas the actual cynical feelings of the men are more plainly shown in some of the popular songs – with their altered words.

Geraint Lewis was born in Cardiff and won a scholarship to the Welsh College of Music in 1973, from where he proceeded to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he studied under George Guest and Alexander Goehr. Subsequently he became recording manager at the original Nimbus Records company until its demise in 2001. He has composed over 70 works, including an opera, Culhwch ac Olwen, and a symphony, as well as many choral pieces such as Nobilmente, broadcast on Radio 3 for the Queen Mother.

There are seven songs short-listed from our competition for composers, which attracted 39 entries, judged by our two performers and Professor Raymond Warren. These are performed in ‘reverse’ order, finishing with the winner of the first prize.

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Artists

Jeremy Huw Williams
The Welsh baritone Jeremy Huw Williams studied at St. John's College, Cambridge, at the National Opera Studio and with April Cantelo. He made his debut with Welsh National Opera in Cosi fan Tutte, since when he has appeared in over forty operatic roles. He has performed in major venues in North & South America, Australia, Hong Kong, and most countries in Europe.

Just up to the date of this recording, he had given recitals at the Wigmore Hall, the Purcell Room, and many major Music Festivals; and has appeared with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in King Priam by Michael Tippett at the Royal Festival Hall; the CBSO in Constant Lambert’s Summer’s Last Will and Testament at Symphony Hall; the Halle in The Messiah at Bridgewater Hall; and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Carl Orff's Carmina Burana during the BBC Promenade Concerts.
He is renowned as a fine exponent of contemporary music having commissioned much new music, and given premières of works by Alun Hoddinott, William Mathias, John Tavener, Martin Butler, Julian Phillips and Huw Watkins. He has frequently recorded for BBC Radio 3, and has appeared on more than forty programmes for television including Walton's Facade for HTV with Lady Susanna Walton. He has made many commercial recordings, including several solo discs of songs.

**Nigel Foster**

Nigel Foster was born in London and studied piano accompaniment at the Royal Academy of Music, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Graham Johnson, and also with Roger Vignoles. At both the Academy and the Guildhall he won numerous prizes and awards. In 2000 Nigel was appointed an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.

Nigel regularly partners many of Britain’s leading young singers, and has also played with established artists such as Ian Partridge, Neil Jenkins, Stephen Varcoe and Jane Manning. He has performed in major London venues including the Wigmore Hall, St. John's Smith Square and the South Bank and Barbican Arts Centres.

Nigel’s many CD recordings include several discs with baritone Jeremy Huw Williams for the Sain label (including anthologies of songs of Mansel Thomas and Alun Hoddinott), ‘Songs from Latin America with soprano Marina Tafur for the Lontano label, and English songs with Stephen Varcoe and soprano Georgina Colwell.

Nigel has performed in France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, The Netherlands, the USA, Canada, South America, Japan and Malaysia. His association with Opera Plus leads to regular playing and coaching in Belgium, where he enjoys indulging in the local chocolates. Nigel has appeared on English and Welsh television and played for song recitals on Classic FM.

*Note: the brief profiles here are those included on the original printing in 2005; up to date information on the artists is likely to be available online.*
The songs

1  I Want To Go Home
I want to go home, I want to go home,
I don't want to go to the trenches no more
Where whizz-bangs and shrapnel they whistle and roar.
Take me back over the sea where the Alley-man can't get at me
Oh, my! I don't want to die, I want to go home.

2  The Dying Patriot
Day breaks on England down the Kentish hills,
Singing in the silence of the meadow-footing rills,
Day of my dreams, O day!
I saw them march from Dover, long ago,
With a silver cross before them, singing low,
Monks of Rome from their home
Where the blue seas break in foam,
Augustine with his feet of snow.

Noon strikes on England, noon on Oxford town,
Beauty she was statue-cold – there's blood upon her gown:
Noon of my dreams, O noon!
Proud and godly kings had built her, long ago

3  Everyone Sang
Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoner birds must find in freedom
Winging wildly across the white Orchards and dark green fields;
On, on, and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted,
And beauty came like the setting sun.
My heart was shaken with tears, and horror
Drifted away ... O, but every one
Was a bird; and the song was wordless;
The singing will never be done.
4 If We Return

If we return, will England be
Just England still to you and me?
The place where we must earn our bread?
We, who have walked among the dead,
And watched the smile of agony,
And seen the price of Liberty,
Which we have taken carelessly
From other hands. Nay, we shall dread,
If we return,
Dread lest we hold blood-guiltily
The things that men have died to free.
Oh, English fields shall blossom red
For all the blood that has been shed
By men whose guardians are we,
If we return.

5 In Flanders

I'm homesick for my hills again –
My hills again!
To see above the Severn plain
Unscabbarde against the sky
The blue high blade of Cotswold lies;
The giant clouds go royally
By jagged Malvern with a train
Of shadows. Where the land is low
Like a huge imprisoning O
I hear a heart that's sound and high,
I hear the heart within me cry:
“I’m homesick for my hills again –
My hills again!
Cotswold or Malvern, sun or rain!
My hills again!”

6 In Memoriam, Easter 1915

The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood
This Eastertide call into mind the men,
Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should
Have gathered them, and will do never again.

7 I Heard a Soldier

I heard a soldier sing some trifle
Out in the sun-dried field alone:
He lay and cleaned his grimy rifle
Idly, behind a stone.
“If after death, love, comes a waking,
And in their camp so dark and still
The men of dust hear bugles, breaking
Their halt upon the hill,
To me the slowly silver pealing
That then the last high trumpet pours
Shall softer than the dawn come stealing
For, with its call, comes yours!”

What grief of love had he to stifle,
Basking so idly by his stone,
That grimy soldier with his rifle
Out in the field alone?
8  It's Not Going to Happen Again

I have known the most dear that is granted us here,
More supreme than the gods know above,
Like a star I was hurled through the sweet of the world.
And the height and the light of it, Love.
I have risen to the uttermost Heaven of Joy,
But – it's not going to happen again, my boy,
It's not going to happen again.

It's the very first word that poor Juliet heard
From her Romeo over the Styx;
And the Roman will tell Cleopatra in hell
When she starts her immortal old tricks;
What Paris was tellin’ for goodbye to Helen
When he bundled her into the train –
Oh, it's not going to happen again, old girl,
It's not going to happen again.

9  The Treasure

When colour goes home into the eyes,
And lights that shine are shut again,
With dancing girls and sweet birds’ cries
Behind the gateway of the brain;
And that no-place that gave them birth,
Shall close the rainbow and the rose:-

Still may time hold some golden space
Where I’ll unpack that scented store
Of song and flower and sky and face,
And count, and touch, and turn them o’er,
Musing upon them; as a mother, who
Has watched her children all the rich day through,
Sits, quiet-handed in the fading light,
When children sleep, ere night.

10  Clouds

Down the blue night the unending columns press
In noiseless tumult, break and wave and flow,
Now tread the far South, or lift rounds of snow Up to the white moon’s hidden loveliness.
Some pause in their grave wandering, comradeless,
And turn with profound gesture vague and slow,
As who would pray good for the world, but know
Their benediction empty as they bless.

They say that the dead die not, but remain
Near to the rich heirs of their grief and mirth.
I think they ride the cairn mid-heaven, as these,
In wise majestic melancholy train,
And watch the moon, and the still raging seas,
And men, coming and going on the earth.
11  Song
All suddenly the wind comes soft,
And Spring is here again;
And the hawthorn quickens with buds of green
And my heart with buds of pain.

My heart all Winter lay so numb,
The earth so dead and frore,
That I never thought the Spring would come,
Or my heart wake any more.
But Winter’s broken and earth has woken.
And the small birds cry again;
And the hawthorn hedge puts forth its buds,
And my heart puts forth its pain.

12  Winter Warfare
Colonel Cold strode up the line
(tabs of rime and spurs of ice);
stiffened all that met his glare:
horses, men, and lice.

Visited a forward post,
Left them burning, ear to foot;
Fingers stuck to biting steel,
Toes to frozen boot.

Stalked on into No Man's Land,
Turned the wire to fleecy wool,
Iron stakes to sugar sticks
Snapping at a pull.

Those who watched with hoary eyes
Saw two figures gleaming there;
Hauptman Kalte, Colonel Cold,
Gaunt in the grey air.

Stiffly, tinkling spurs they moved,
Glassy-eyed, with glinting heel
Stabbing those who lingered there
Torn by screaming steel.

13  The Cenotaph
Not yet will those measureless fields be green again
Where only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth was shed;
There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too deep a stain,
Though for ever over it we may speak as proudly as we may tread.
But here, where the watchers by lonely hearths
from the thrust of an inward sword have more slowly bled,
We shall build the Cenotaph:
Victory, winged with Peace,
inged too at the column’s head.
And over the stairway at the foot – oh! here,
leave desolate passionate hands to spread
Violets, roses and laurel, with the small, sweet, twinkling country things
Speaking so wistfully of other Springs,
From the little gardens of little places where son or sweetheart was born and bred.
Before the Battle

Music of the Whispering Trees
Hushed by a broad-winged breeze
Where shaken water gleams;
And evening radiance fading
With reedy bird-notes calling,
O bear me safe through dark
You low-voiced streams.

I have no need to pray
That fear may pass away;
I scorn the growl and grumble of the fight
That summons me from cool
Silence of marsh and pool
And yellow lilies islanded in light.
O river of stars and shadows,
Lead me through the night.

I Stood with the Dead

I stood with the Dead, so forsaken and still,
When dawn was grey I stood with the Dead.
And my slow heart said, ‘You must kill, you
must kill:
Soldier, soldier, the morning is red.’
On the shapes of the slain in their
    crumpled disgrace
I stared for a while through the thin cold
rain...
“O lad that I loved, there is rain on your
    face.
And your eyes are blurred and sick like
the plain.”

I stood with the Dead...They were dead;
    they were dead;
My heart and my head beat a march of
dismay:
And gusts of the wind came dulled by
the guns.
‘Fall in!’ I shouted, ‘Fall in for your pay!’

I Did Not Lose my Heart

I did not lose my heart in summer’s even,
When roses to the moonlight burst apart;
When plumes were under heel and lead was
flying,
In blood and smoke and flame I lost my heart.

I lost it to a soldier and a foeman,
A chap that did not kill me, but he tried;
That took the sabre straight and took it
striking
And laughed and kissed his hand to me
    and died.

Attack

At dawn the ridge emerges massed and
dun
In the wild purple of the glowing sun,
Smouldering through spouts of drifting
smoke that shroud
The menacing scarred slope, and, one by
one,
Tanks creep and topple forward to the
wire.
The barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed
With bombs and guns and shovels and battle gear,
Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.
Lines of grey, muttering faces, lined with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists.
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!

18 The End
After the blast of lightning from the east,
The flourish of loud clouds, the chariot throne,
After the drums of time have rolled and ceased
And from the bronze west long retreat is blown,
Shall life renew these bodies? Of a truth
All death will he annul, all tears assuage?
Or fill these void veins full again with youth.
And wash, with an immortal water, age?

When I do ask white Age he saith not so:
“My head hangs weighed with snow.”
And when I hearken to the Earth, she saith:
“My fiery heart shrinks, aching. It is death.
Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified,
Nor my titanic tears, the seas, be dried.”

19 The Soldier
If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be in that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

20 Blind
God, who gave the world its fairness,
Swooning seas and ardent skies;
Fashioned it with every rareness
That could dazzle human eyes;
God, who gave me all of these,
Help me do without them, please.
Giver of the light and flowers,
Running stream and forest tree,
Help me through the heavy hours,
When I think what others see.
God, who took my sight away,
Help me do without it, pray.

21 The Cost
Take back the honour and the fame,
The victory we’ve won,
Take all the credit from my name,
If this can be undone.
Let him, my friend that used to be,
Somehow be given back to me.

Don’t mock me with the pride of it,
The glory of his death,
I only know he sighed a bit –
I felt him catch his breath.
O God, if miracles can be,
May he be given back to me.

22 The Dead
Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There’s none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been
Their sons, they gave their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth.
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage.

23 We’ll Never Tell Them *
And when they ask us
How dangerous it was
Oh! We'll never tell them,
No, we'll never tell them.
We spent our pay in some café
And fought wild women night and day,
’Twas the cushiest job we ever had.

And when they ask us.
And they’re certainly going to ask us
The reason why we didn’t win
The Croix de Guerre.
Oh! We’ll never tell them,
No! We’ll never tell them
There was a front, but damned if we knew where.

*Originally ‘They Didn’t Believe Me’ from the 1914 musical ‘The Girl from Utah’, adapted by troops in parody fashion and included in revised form in ‘Oh, What a Lovely War’
The English Poetry & Song Society was founded in 1983 in Melksham, Wiltshire, by the poet and amateur violinist, Alfred Warren, after attending a lecture-recital on English Art Song by the baritone John Carol Case, who became the first president of the EPSS until he decided to retire from post in 2000. Although he was too far away (in North Yorkshire) to become involved in our activities, he sent generous donations every year, which continued after his retirement. We were honoured by a visit from Joy Finzi, the composer’s wife, who came to our concert in Bath that year. When Alfred moved to Cornwall in 1984, the chairmanship was taken over by the organist and composer David Crocker, also resident in Melksham. At the end of that year, he too moved westward to live in Devon, when the singer, Simon Willink took over briefly, before also moving Devon. Richard Carder became Chair in March 1985, soon after starting his research into the unpublished songs of Ivor Gurney, performances of which soon featured in the concerts, such as the première of his cycle of *Seven Sappho Songs* in that year, attended by his biographer, Michael Hurd.

In 1987, the 50th anniversary of Gurney’s death led to a concert in the Pump Room, Bath, with Stephen Roberts and Graham Johnson performing songs on a nocturnal theme. Then in 1988, Gurney’s settings of his friend Will Harvey’s poems were heard, with readings from his biographer, Antony Boden. In 1992 the competitions for composers were launched for the bicentenary of poet John Clare; these have proved popular, and have involved poets such as Keats, Shelley, Coleridge; and more modern poets A.E. Housman, Robert Graves, Thomas Hardy, Wilfred Owen, Blunden and Sassoon. There were also readings by poets, Kathleen Raine, and Rose Flint.

In 2000, it was decided to appoint both a male and a female president in future, and the choice fell upon Meriel Dickinson, who suggested that a term of 5 years should be implemented for the post, and attended several of our concerts in Bath. The male choice was Ian Partridge, who sang 4 songs by Ivor Gurney at our London concert in 2003, which was recorded on the Dunelm CD, *Lights Out*.

They were succeeded in 2006 by Jane Manning and Stephen Roberts, who came to Bristol in November 2008 to give a master class for young singers, followed by a concert the same evening. This was followed up by the recording of a CD of songs by ten EPSS composers, *English Journey Songs* (Mynstrallsy- EPS102).

Our two current presidents, Sarah Leonard and Stephen Varcoe, took over in 2011, and came to Bristol in October 2012 to give a concert for the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee in the Colston Hall, which included songs by most of the previous Masters of the Royal Music, plus folksong settings by Moeran & Britten, and popular songs from the Queen’s reign, by Ivor Novello, Noel Coward, and Flanders & Swann. In addition we decided to appoint a composer, and chose Raymond Warren, who has acted as a judge in many of our competitions.

http://www.richardcarder.co.uk/EPSS.html  menistral@yahoo.co.uk
**English Poetry and Song Society Live Concert Recordings from the Diversions Dunelm series**

**DDV 24162**

**SHROPSHIRE LADS**

Songs to the poems of A.E. Housman by Benjamin Burrows, Arnold Bax, E. J. Moeran, Arthur Somervell and EP&SS Competition finalists

Stephen Foulkes (baritone)

David Bednall (piano)

**DDV 24163**

**SONGS OF DORSET**

by Finzi, Vaughan Williams, Carey, Somervell and EP&SS Competition finalists

Settings of poems by William Barnes and Thomas Hardy

Stephen Foulkes (baritone)

Colin Hunt (piano)

**DDV 24165**

**LIGHTS OUT**

songs by Ivor Gurney, E.J. Moeran, Sulyen Caradon and EP&SS Competition finalists

Georgina Colwell (soprano); Clare Griffel (mezzo-soprano)

Ian Partridge (tenor); Paul Martyn-West (tenor)

Jonathan Wood (baritone)

Peter Jacobs and Nigel Foster (piano)
This programme was recorded for the EPSS on portable equipment at two concerts – tracks 1-18 and 23 were recorded on digital minidisc on November 13, 2004 at the United Reformed Church, Henleaze, Bristol. Tracks 19-22 were recorded on compact cassette on October 17, 1993 at St. George’s, Brandon Hill, Bristol at a concert commemorating the centenary of the birth of poet Wilfred Owen. The recordings were transferred to DAT, for editing and mastering. However, the audio quality is not of the standard that would have been achieved with professional equipment, and as the performances were given at live concerts, there is some ambient and audience noise.

Recordings made by Richard Carder
Editing and mastering: Jim Pattison
Front cover image: Extract from a postcard “Remembrance of the War 1914-1917” sent from France in 1917
Back cover image: General Sir Douglas Haig, with a guard of honour, awaiting General Cadorna (the Italian Commander-in-Chief) on a visit to the British lines in France.
Programme notes: Richard Carder
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GENERAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG, WITH GUARD OF HONOUR, AWAITING GEN. CADORNA, THE ITALIAN COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ON A VISIT TO THE BRITISH LINES IN FRANCE. REF. NO. 8.