

School of Music

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**STUDENT RECITAL SERIES
KATZIN RECITAL HALL
MONDAY, MARCH 14TH, 2016 • 5:00 PM**

Program Notes

In the late 19th century the British Empire began to feel the strain of its massive global reach. The monarchy reached from Canada, to Africa, to India, and to Australia. Growing and maintaining the empire required that many of Britain's finest join the war effort. Some in Britain began to grow weary as they continued to see young men shipped to far off lands never to return again. In this era specifically, the conflict in the South African Republic was beginning to escalate into a war that would claim tens of thousands of lives. This escalation provided the backdrop for Alfred Edward Housman to write his collection of poems titled *A Shropshire Lad* (1896). This collection of poetry portrays such themes as: a strong connection to the land in Shropshire, the tragedy of war, and the consequences of death in one's youth. Many songs feature the souls of the lost, pondering their misfortune from beyond the grave. Housman's poems resonated so much with British readers, that many composers chose to set them to music.

George Butterworth (1885-1916) set eleven of these poems from 1911-1912, and published them in two installments (just 4 years before his death in WWI). The second of those installments is the first portion of today's recital. Originally composed for baritone, all songs have been raised a minor 3rd. This is possibly the first performance of its kind, as no high-key transpositions of this work have been published, nor have any recordings been made. The songs were highly regarded by his colleagues, particularly Benjamin Britten, who would avoid setting any of Housman's poetry. He did not think that Butterworth's settings could be improved upon.

Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) is another prominent British composer (though perhaps better known for his poetry) that fought in the First World War. He spent most of his life suffering from a mental illness known as Delusional Systemized Insanity. This is better known today as Paranoid Schizophrenia. Gurney would cope with this illness with varying degrees of success throughout his life. He would attend the Royal Academy of Music where his teacher called him potentially "the biggest of them all" but also the "least teachable". Two years later Gurney would write *Five Elizabethan Songs*, set to poetry by Shakespeare. They would be simpler than his later work, but still containing unique style. Gurney's music would grow in its complexity throughout his life. Some attribute this to the development of his voice as a composer, while others point to his

mental illness causing increased disorganization in his music. While both may be true, there is certainly evidence to the latter reasoning, as nearly all of the music Gurney wrote after his institutionalization in 1922 was deemed unworthy of publication even by his admiring colleagues.

“Ludlow and Teme” was mostly composed in 1920 and was originally orchestrated for string quartet, piano, and voice. It is complex, yet maintains a cohesion that still allows the character of Housman’s poetry to be heard. Gurney struggled to write cohesive works in the years following the publication of “Ludlow and Teme.” It ended a very prolific period that had started in the middle of the war. Once he returned to England from the service, he moved constantly all over the country. This constant longing for a place to call home may have attracted him to *A Shropshire Lad*, as Housman’s poetry contains such a strong connection to the English countryside.

Predating all of these works is Ralph Vaughan Williams’ (1872-1958) “On Wenlock Edge.” Composed in 1909, Vaughan Williams’ work (along with Butterworth’s “Bredon Hill”) provides an eerie foreshadowing to the many men lost in the Great War. Like “Ludlow and Teme”, the work was originally orchestrated for string quartet, piano, and voice. Vaughan Williams’ work is perhaps the most complete, as the first song discusses the history of Shropshire, the 2nd discusses the character’s origins, and from then on, the work begins to deal with the themes of youthful death and the character’s inability to cope with the separation from the land and life that he knew. His only resolution comes in the final song, “Clun”, when the character speaks of somewhere where he can lay down the baggage of life. A place “where doomsday my thunder and lighten, and little twill matter to none”. Following this text there is a familiar texture in the piano heard in the 2nd song of this cycle and in “The Infinite Shining Heavens” in Vaughan Williams “Songs of Travel” song cycle. This block chord structure appears many times when Vaughan Williams is alluding to the afterlife, or more specifically, heaven.

Special Thanks: To Haeju Choi, for her beautiful playing, and for being so fun to collaborate with. To David Britton, for his constant guidance over the last decade. To his family for their support. Most of all, thank you to Penny for being the perfect mom and wife, and for putting up with long hours while I get this DMA done!

Program

Bredon Hill

George Butterworth
(1885-1916)

- I. Bredon Hill
- II. Oh Fair Enough Are Sky and Plain
- III. When the Lad For Longing Sighs
- IV. On the Idle Hills of Summer
- V. With Rue My Heart is Laden

Five Elizabethan Songs

Ivor Gurney
(1890-1947)

- I. Orpheus
- II. Tears
- III. Under the Greenwood Tree
- IV. Sleep
- V. Spring

There will be a 10-minute intermission

Ludlow and Teme

Ivor Gurney
(1890-1947)

- I. When Smoke Stood Up From Ludlow
- II. Far in a Western Brookland
- III. 'Tis Time
- IV. Ludlow Fair
- V. On the Idle Hill of Summer
- VI. When I Was One and Twenty
- VII. The Lent Lily

On Wenlock Edge

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

- I. On Wenlock Edge
- II. From Far from Eve and Morning
- III. Is My Team Ploughing
- IV. Oh, When I Was in Love With You
- V. Bredon Hill
- VI. Clun

Out of respect for the performers and those audience members around you, please turn all beepers, cell phones and watches to their silent mode. Thank you.