

# ***Bach and the Sentry***

(2016)

Music by  
**G. A. Marshall**

Original poem by  
**Ivor Gurney**

## ***Bach and the Sentry (2016)***

### **PROGRAMME NOTE**

I decided to set 'Bach and the Sentry' to music as I found Ivor Gurney's poem to be particularly moving. It's difficult to place a finger on a single reason why I found this to be the case. Instead, I believe it was a combination of many things, such as the poem's immediate context, the author's wider biography and his relationship to music and music composition, which conjured up a particularly potent amount of empathy within me. For example, the poem juxtaposes a feeling of optimism and pessimism between its stanzas. In the first, music is anaesthetising the dull dread of the war, which at least helps make the situation, if not bearable, then slightly more tolerable than it would have been without the music. In the second stanza, Gurney worries about whether his use of music as a means of solace, to anaesthetise the experience of war, will impact his love for music after it is over. Firstly, from my perspective, this was moving as I would genuinely struggle to conceive my own life without music. Secondly and tragically, Gurney did struggle, immensely, before and after the war with mental health issues, threatening suicide shortly after and later dying of tuberculosis in London Mental Hospital in 1937. Textually, I was drawn to the poem through its references to music, both in the title and the use of the term 'Prelude'. It is for this reason that I use quotation as a compositional technique in the work, making use of the opening of Bach's Prelude from his Cello Suite No. 1 in G. A very popular classical piece I wanted people to be able to easily identify the quotation and easily identify the relationship between the text and music.

— George Marshall

### **TEXT**

'Bach and the Sentry' (1917)  
by Ivor Gurney

*Watching the dark my spirit rose in flood  
On that most dearest Prelude of my delight.  
The low-lying mist lifted its hood,  
The October stars showed nobly in clear night.*

*When I return, and to real music-making,  
And play that Prelude, how will it happen then?  
Shall I feel as I felt, a sentry hardly waking,  
With a dull sense of No Man's Land again?*

## **PERFORMANCE NOTE**

Vertical dashed lines mark where parts should be aligned. The rest is spatially notated and should be interpreted this way. The vocal line should take precedence in shaping wider phrases and sections.

In the final sections, care needs to be taken in repeating the phrases for the defined period of time so as to allow the aleatory counterpoint/asynchronous parts to come out.