The Wordsmith’s Guide to English Song: Poetry, Music & Imagination

Volume I: The Songs of Roger Quilter
Volume II: The Songs of Ivor Gurney

By Nicola Harrison

KEY INFORMATION:

- Meticulously researched with biographies, context and new interpretations.
- Unique links between poetry and word painting are carefully observed.
- By a highly respected author, journalist and lecturer with many years of experience.

BLURB:

The result of years of study, teaching and performance, and informed throughout by the author’s love of poetry, Nicola Harrison invites the singer and accompanist to think more expansively about the way they approach and perform English Song.

Focusing on the compositions of two separate composers – Roger Quilter and Ivor Gurney – Nicola examines the poetry of their songs, taking into account the symbolism, mythology, religion, philosophy, historical and romantic background and the many other influences on the writer – digging deep into the text with fascinating results.

This exploration of English Song is entertaining, witty and illuminating, exploring the magical relationship of words and music, and the way each separate art is painted by the other. To this end, each song is offered as a mini narrative that invites the singer into a new world, firing the imagination and guiding them to make their own interpretations. The result is a work which is unique, refreshing, and is certain to change the way singers perform and experience these classic songs.

Here, the singer and the accompanist will find new songs to perform – and a fresh and authentic way of performing them in this original and absorbing approach to the interpretation of the songs of Roger Quilter and Ivor Gurney.

THE AUTHOR:

Nicola Harrison is Lecturer in Singing and Song Interpretation at Pembroke College, University of Oxford, Lecturer in Teacher’s Voice at Westminster College of Education, London, and is a visiting lecturer at Oxford Brookes University. She is voice coach at Exeter College Choir, Oxford and has been the voice and singing coach to the choral scholars of Brasenose College and to the young stars of Billy Elliot the Musical. Many of her students have gone on to become highly successful professionals.

Nicola has trained with Pamela Bowden (LCM), Pam Cook (RNCM) MBE, and the internationally famed Spanish mezzo-soprano Teresa Berganza (Madrid). She has also trained extensively in a number of related performance disciplines with world-class pedagogues, and in posture, movement and acting through song in the UK, Switzerland, France and Spain. In addition, she continues to perform the Spanish repertoire with the critically-acclaimed touring company, Casa Margarita.

Nicola has presented cutting edge material in lectures and workshops on poetry, the language of song and the power of the imagination, including at the Oxford May Music Festival. She has written for a wide number of local and national newspapers including writing extensively on English Song for The Singer and Classical Music Magazine in which she ran a column for five years on text and music and a further series of extended articles on musical theatre and for BBC Radio 4. A member of many organisations related to voice, literature, language and culture, Nicola is at the forefront of new developments in vocal teaching across the board. In her teaching and research she has focused on clarifying the language used to teach singing, resulting in a highly effective anatomy-based vocabulary for conveying a solid and liberated vocal technique.

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For more about Nicola Harrison see her website: www.nicolaharrison.co.uk
PRAISE FOR THE WORDSMITH’S GUIDE, ARTICLES, EDITORIAL AND REVIEWS:


‘Song Cannot Live Without Words – In all, The Wordsmith’s Guide is an invitation to think differently about the way we approach the singing of English song, to offer a widening understanding of the repertoire and a deeper exploration of the text.’ Classical Music Magazine: September 2016


‘Go Lovely Rose: the Songs of Roger Quilter – The last verse closes with a fading echo of the first, both poetically and musically, underpinning the poet’s fine argument about love, beauty, and the passage of time.’ The British Music Society Journal: Volume 38, October 2016

‘A highly perceptive, thoughtful book... discerning in the way it explores the background to each author and poem text Gurney sets... [The author] leads us through well-sculpted biography, and often excellent and insightful analysis of the poetry.’ Review by Roddy Dunnett in The Ivor Gurney Society Newsletter, Volume 60, October 2016

‘From the Severn to the Somme: Exploring the Poetry and Music of Ivor Gurney.’ Cotswold Life Magazine: November 2016

‘A Brief History of the English Rose – At heart a romantic, Quilter set to music at least five poems that reference the rose.’ BBC History Magazine, December 2016

‘Gives us an insight into the life and working practice of Quilter, as well as the meaning of the lyrics and their symbolism.’ Review in Caring for Sussex Magazine, December 2016

‘Harrison’s minute annotation of the poems selected by Quilter adds greatly to our appreciation. This is a worthwhile tribute to a talent not sung nearly enough.’ Review in Sussex Life Magazine, February 2017

‘These two volumes represent a real labour of love, and one can only thank Nicola for sharing her enthusiasm and expert knowledge in this accessible and interesting form.’ Review in Singing Magazine, the magazine of The Association of Teachers of Singing, issue 71, 2017


FROM THE FOREWORD:

‘The way in which music and words become a song is a kind of alchemy - two elements fused in an imaginative process, resulting in a new artefact that is self-sufficient and hopefully more than the sum of its parts... focusing the reader’s attention on some of the fine poems set to music by Roger Quilter (and other composers), Nicola also reminds us of the myriad of poetical-musical decisions that have gone into their conversion into song. If only for this reason, her book is an invaluable aid to performers.’ From the Foreword to Volume I by Roger Vignoles

‘In nearly all art songs the composer sets an already existing poem, rather than adding words to an existing tune. That is, the poem is his starting point and therefore should also be the starting point for the singer... I have spent the last fifty years trying to persuade singers to start by learning the words rather than the music, and this fascinating book will be invaluable in helping them understand the full meaning of the poems and their dynamic relationship with the music.’ From the Foreword to Volume II by Michael Pilkington

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