

Text

In the bleak midwinter
 Frosty wind made moan,
 Earth stood hard as iron,
 Water like a stone;
 Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
 Snow on snow,
 In the bleak midwinter,
 Long ago.

Our God, Heav'n cannot hold Him
 Nor earth sustain;
 Heav'n and earth shall flee away
 When He comes to reign:
 In the bleak midwinter
 A stable-place sufficed
 The Lord God Almighty
 Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
 Worship night and day,
 A breastful of milk,
 And a manger full of hay;
 Enough for Him, whom angels
 Fall down before,
 The ox and ass and camel
 Which adore.

Angels and archangels
 May have gathered there,
 Cherubim and seraphim
 Thronged the air;
 But only His mother
 In her maiden bliss
 Worshipped The Belovéd
 With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
 Poor as I am?
 If I were a shepherd
 I would bring a lamb;
 If I were a wise man
 I would do my part;
 Yet what I can I give Him
 Give my heart.

Text by Christina Georgina Rossetti
 (1830–1894)

Program Notes

Born in Portland Place, London, on December 5th, 1830, Christina Georgiana Rossetti originally wrote the text of *In The Bleak Midwinter* under the title of “A Christmas Carol.” Its exact date of authorship is unknown, but it was probably commissioned and written well before 1872.

We do know that her Brother, William, recorded November 1871 as the date she received “a liberal payment of £10 for the little poem.” That amount came from “American Pre-Raphaelite” William James Stillman, the editor at *Scribner’s Monthly*, where the poem was soon published in January of 1872.

It was later in 1906 that it appeared in *The English Hymnal*, where it was accompanied to the music of Gustav Holst, and edited by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958). Rossetti also later wrote the Poem *Love Came Down At Christmas* in 1885.

Christina was born the youngest child of Gabriele (an Italian refugee, scholar, and patriot) and his wife Francis [Polidori] Rossetti, a homemaker. Christina had one sister, Maria Francesca (1827), and two brothers: Dante Gabriel (1828) and William Michael (1829).

Educated at home, Christina Rossetti spent a quiet, uneventful, devout Anglican life mostly in Portland Place and Euston Square, London.

Her brother, Dante, became an influential painter *and* poet. He painted two noteworthy canvases titled *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (PRB 1849), and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (PRB 1849-50), both of which displayed his sister Christina, as a model.

After their father’s eyesight illness in 1840 and death in 1854, financial hardship plagued the family. Christina’s mother, Francis, took a teaching position to keep her family out of poverty. William added income from his salary as a clerk in the Excise Tax Office. Their sister, Maria, worked as a governess for a short time, and then in 1875 she became a nun, joining the All Saints’ Sisterhood.

In 1848 with his Brother, William, Holman Hunt, and four other men, Dante started a secret, avant-garde Art reform movement called the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

They wanted to duplicate in their works the craftsmanship shown by painters and poets from *before* the period of Raphael (1483–1520).

Then, after rejecting three suitors for religious and financial reasons, Christina published her first book, *Goblin Market*, in 1862, at age thirty-two. The reviews were laudatory. *The Prince’s Progress* was published in 1866. *Commonplace* followed a long time later in 1870.

However, in 1871 Christina was stricken with Graves’ disease. Five books followed after her agonizingly slow recovery, but the quality of them was uneven.

Christina lived in retirement from 1876 until 1893 and then, later, she was diagnosed as having breast cancer. Sadly, her death followed on December 29, 1894, at Torrington Square, Bloomsbury.

Finally, in 1896 all her many uncollected poems were published posthumously in a volume titled *New Poems*, edited by her brother, William Michael Rossetti.

A study of Gustav Holst’s early life reads like a page out of Charles Dickens. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” There is no diplomatic way to put it—Holst was neglected as a child.

His daughter, Imogen, in her biography of Holst, paints an unusual portrait of her father’s early life. (*Gustav Holst: A Biography*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Gustav—born Gustavus Theodore von Holst [1874–1934]—was an overly sensitive child. Imogen reports Holst’s birth date and place as being September 21, (1874), in a small house in Pittville Terrace (now Lawn), Cheltenham, (Gloucestershire).

His mother, Cara Cox von Holst (nee Lediard) [1841–1882], was a pianist. She married Adolph in 1871, and later gave birth to two sons, Gustavus Theodore, and Emil Gottfried (1876–1951). She also had a third child, who was stillborn; that trauma caused the mother to have a heart attack: both died on February 12, 1882.

The father, also an excellent pianist, was Adolph von Holst (1846–1901). After Clara’s death Adolph remarried in 1885—this time to Mary Thorley Stone, who later gave birth to their two (new) sons.

According to Imogen, Gustav’s early childhood at age eight, after his mother died, was left “to the tender mercies of a father who practiced [the piano] all the time...”

Gustav had an asthmatic chest, weak eyes, and neuritis in his right arm. He and Emil needed parental attention. “The household was in a state of chaos, and Adolph’s sister Nina was asked to come and look after the children.”

Nina, a pianist, was of little help to the boys, since she also spent all her hours at the piano. However, Gustav endured the hardships, and finally survived until he was sent to Cheltenham Grammar School.

With his physical disability, Gustav knew he would never become a competent pianist, so he next set his sights on composing music. At seventeen, he was given permission and money to study counterpoint in Oxford with G. F. Sims (dates?).

He worked diligently, applied for a composition scholarship at the Royal College of Music [RCM], and was turned down; but he continued his search by sending out applications to other London colleges.

He went back home, took small musical jobs, and then composed an operetta titled *Lansdown Castle*. It was performed in Cheltenham on February 9th 1893, with modest success.

His father, however, was so impressed with the operetta that “he borrowed a hundred pounds from one of his relations, and sent Gustav as a student to the RCM,” in May, that same year.

A series of ups-and-downs followed him next. The “ups” were his hearing Bach’s *Mass in b minor* and Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* for the first time. He was equally delighted to have Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) as his composition professor. However, in 1894, the low point in his life was the realization that his father’s borrowed money would run out near Christmastime.

Fortunately, in February of 1895, he was awarded a scholarship to RCM. The next event he considered his highest joy: meeting and marrying (Emily) Isobel Harrison (1876–1969) in 1901.

Isobel was soon the best stabilizing force he ever had. She helped him organize his life, and encouraged him to eat nutritiously to improve his bad health. He had been living on dried nuts!

He took up many new teaching positions. His longest appointment was as Musical Director of the St. Paul’s Girls’ School (1905–1934); although, in 1919, he was appointed a professor at RCM, where he also taught until 1923, concurrently with the St. Paul’s Girls’ School.

In 1918, During World War I, Holst dropped the “von” from his name, in fear of the negative German connotations that prefix brought to his last name.

Then came the creation of some of his best compositions: *The Planets* (1914–16), *The Hymn Of Jesus* (1917), and *The Perfect Fool* (1918–1922). His total music output would contain almost 200 works.

This activity proved to be too much mental stress, because Holst had a nervous brake-down in 1924. Thereafter, he took a year away from his composing to rest, following his doctor’s orders.

However, Holst resumed a grueling schedule of attending more performances of his works; noteworthy is the *First Choral Symphony* (1925). Then, in 1932, he made a hectic visit to America where he was appointed lecturer in composition at Harvard University. He also spoke at the Library of Congress on the music of his beloved Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809).

Holst was taken ill in March of 1932. For two years he was an invalid, and then died, sadly, on May 25, 1934.

Holst’s connection to the present composition is usually associated with the appellation “Cranham.” It is because that quaint Gloucestershire village of Cranham, England, inspired the creation of this lovely music, and because his grandparents and family had lived there for many years. Gustav (von) Holst was, indeed, “the hero of [his] own life.”

Some theology scholars have accused portions of Rossetti’s text as being blasphemous. In the full second verse starting with “Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him / Nor earth sustain...,” does she imply that the Son, Jesus, is more powerful than His Father, God? And that heaven cannot hold God?

The music is less problematic, thankfully. The original tune is set in F major using traditional harmony. The suspensions are set at words which reveal tension to be resolved, which I have not always done. The tonal structure is of a modified strophic design (A-[A]-B-A) in five verses.

The textual structure and punctuation are curious and even novel for that era. The A-(A)-B section of each verse makes “mixed” use of the words. Yet, the ends of the *last* “A” sections contain only three words or three syllables.

Thus, “give my heart” sounds strangely empty on first hearing. However, it makes the structural beat pattern consistent. Yes, the rhyme scheme is A-B-C-B-D-E-F-E, and yes, the codetta is new. Also, I have purposefully used all five original verses so as to obtain full, glorious, Christmas storytelling!

Finally, *what gift can I give to the Christ Child?* If the midwinter snow fully covers up all my transgressions, only to have them revealed again in spring, then I will give The Christ Child my *contrite heart* to balance the wager of my soul!

—James McCullough

For Dr. Lee Nelson,
 Patricia R. Zahn Chair in Choral Conducting and Director of Choral Activities
 and for The Wartburg Choir,
 Waverly, Iowa,
 and also for Mr. Richard W. Vallone,
 for his endless kindness and generosity of spirit
 all year long

In the Bleak Midwinter Earth Stood Hard as Iron

Arranged for Baritone Solo, SATB Chorus unaccompanied

Christina Georgina Rossetti
 (1830–1894)
 (1871?)

Gustav(us Theodore von) Holst
 (1874–1934) (H73, No. 1)
 Arranged by James McCullough

Andante semplice ♩ = 72
p always flowing, with gentleness, and reflection

Soprano
 In the bleak mid - win - ter Frost - y wind made moan, _____

Alto
 In the bleak mid - win - ter Frost - y wind made moan, _____

Tenor
 In the bleak mid - win - ter Frost - y wind made moan, _____

Bass
 In the bleak mid - win - ter Frost - y wind made moan, _____

Andante semplice ♩ = 72

Keyboard
 (for rehearsal only)

This arrangement is in the original key, but it may also be performed a half or whole tone higher.

5 *mp*

Earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;

mp

Earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;

mp

Earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;

mp

Earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;

9 *mf*

Snow had fall en, snow on snow, Snow on snow,

mf

Snow has fall - en, snow on snow, Snow on snow,

mf

Snow has fall - en, snow on snow, Snow on snow,

mf

Snow has fall - en, snow on snow, Snow on snow,

13 *mp* *p poco rit.*

In the bleak mid - win - ter, — long a - go. —

mp *p poco rit.*

In the bleak mid - win - ter, — long a - go. —

mp *p poco rit.* *mf* Tell the story

In the bleak mid - win - ter, — long a - go. — Our

mp *p poco rit.* *mf*

In the bleak mid - win - ter, — long a - go. — Our

poco rit.

17 *a tempo*

Nor earth sus - tain;

p

mf

God Heav'n can - not hold Him Nor earth sus - tain;

p

God Heav'n can - not hold Him Nor earth sus - tain;

a tempo

21 *pp* *p*

Ah! He comes to reign:

mf

Heav'n and earth shall flee a - way When He comes to reign:

p

Heav'n and earth shall flee a - way When He comes to reign:

mf

Heav'n and earth shall flee a - way When He comes to reign:

25 *mf* *dolce e con calore* *f*

In the bleak mid - win - ter A sta - ble - place suf - ficed The

mf *dolce e con calore* *f*

In the bleak mid - win - ter A sta - ble - place suf - ficed The

mp *dolce e con calore* *f*

In the bleak mid - win - ter A sta - ble - place suf - ficed The

mp *dolce e con calore* *f*

Ah! The

(*h.*)

a tempo

Tell the story *mf*

29

Bar. Solo

S

A

T

B

Lord God Al - might - y Je - sus Christ

stately

mf poco rit.

stately

mf poco rit.

stately

mf poco rit.

stately

mf poco rit.

poco rit.

a tempo

33

nough for Him, whom cher - u - bim Wor - ship night and day, A

mp as a comforting chant

For Him, whom cher - u - bim Wor - ship night and day, —

mp as a comforting chant

For Him whom cher - u - bim Wor - ship night and day, —

mp as a comforting chant

For Him, whom cher - u - bim Wor - ship night and day, —

mp as a comforting chant

For Him, whom cher - u - bim Wor - ship night and day, —

breast - ful of milk, And a man - ger - ful of hay; E -

Breast - ful of milk, And man - ger - ful of hay;

Breast - ful of milk, And man - ger - ful of hay;

p Breast - ful of milk, And man - ger - ful of hay;

Breast - ful of milk, And man - ger - ful of hay;

nough for Him, whom an gels Fall down be - fore, The

mp For Him, whom an - gels Fall down be - fore,

mp For Him, whom an - gels Fall down be - fore,

mp For Him, whom an - gels Fall down be - fore,

mp For Him, whom an - gels Fall down be - fore,

* The adjacent parallel fifths are intentional, to get a stacked chord of opened fifths in m. 38.

45

ox and ass and cam - mel Which a - dore.

p Ox, ass, and cam - mel Which a - dore.

p Ox, ass, and cam - el Which a - dore.

p Ox, ass, and cam - el Which a - dore.

p Ox, ass, and cam - el Which a - dore. (Go, *mp*)

Con calore
f Tell the story

S An - gels and arch - an - gels May have gath - ered

f Tell the story

A An - gels and arch - an - gels May have gath - ered

f

T An - gels and arch - an - gels May have gath - ered,

f

B an - gels, go!) (They) may have gath - ered,

Con calore

53 *poco* *f*

there, Cher - u - bim and ser - a - phim Thronged the

there, Cher - u - bim and ser - a - phim Thronged the

mf *mf legato*

May have gath - ered, Cher - u - bim and ser - a - phim Thronged the

mf *mf legato*

May have gath - ered, Cher - u - bim and ser - a - phim Thronged the

57 *mp* *warmly*

air: But on - ly His moth - er In her maid - en

mp *warmly*

air: But on - ly His moth - er In her maid - en

air:

mp *warmly*

air: Ah!

61 *mf stately* *poco rit. mp gently*

bliss _____ Wor - shipped The Be - lov - éd _____ With _____ a _____

mf stately *poco rit. mp gently*

bliss _____ Wor-shipped The Be - lov - éd _____ With _____ a _____

mf stately *poco rit. mp gently*

Wor - shipped The Be - lov - éd _____ With _____ a _____

mf stately *poco rit. mp gently*

Wor-shipped The Be - lov - éd _____ With _____ a _____

65 *tenuto... a tempo pp espressivo, with a contrite heart*

kiss. _____ What _____ can I give Him, _____ Poor _____ as I

tenuto... pp espressivo, with a contrite heart

kiss. _____ What _____ can I give Him, _____ Poor _____ as I

tenuto... pp espressivo, with a contrite heart

kiss. _____ What _____ can I give Him, _____ Poor _____ as I

tenuto... pp espressivo, with a contrite heart

kiss. _____ What _____ can I give Him, _____ Poor _____ as I

tenuto... a tempo

69 *mp*

am? _____ If I were a shep - herd I would bring a

mp

am? _____ If I were a shep - herd I would bring a

mp

am? _____ If I were a shep - herd I would bring a *p*

mp

am? _____ If I were a shep - herd I would bring a

73

lamb; _____

lamb; _____

mp dolce _____ *poco*

lamb; _____ *mf dolce* If I were a wise man I would do my

mf dolce _____ *poco*

lamb. If I were a wise man I would do my

Allargando

With finality

poco rit.

77

mp

mf

mf

f

Give_ my_ heart. *poco*

Yet what I can I give Him_ Give_ my_ heart_

mp

mf

poco rit.

poco

Yet what I can I give Him_ Give my heart_

mp

mf

poco rit.

poco

part;_ Yet what I can I give Him_ Give_ my_ heart_

mp

mf poco rit.

poco

part;_ Yet what I can I give Him_ Give_ my_ heart.

Allargando

With finality

poco rit.

The piano accompaniment for the final section consists of two staves. The right hand features a melodic line with a final cadence, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Allargando' and the ending is marked 'With finality poco rit.'.

* The parallel fifths are intentional.



82 **Meno mosso al fine**

Bar. Solo

mp dolce

In the bleak mid-win-ter.

S

mp dolce *p*

(Take my heart!_ Take my heart! Take it with a kiss.)

A

mp dolce *p*

(Take my heart!_ Take my heart! Take it with a kiss.)

T

mp dolce *p*

(Oh, take my heart! Oh, take it with a kiss.)

B

p dolce

(Oh, take it with a kiss.)

Meno mosso al fine

* The parallel fifths are intentional.

August 15, 2015
Cambridge, Massachusetts
4'30"

James McCullough (b. 1939)

For biographical information about the arranger, please visit this website.

<www.ecspublishing.com/composers/m/mccullough>