

The Tunes

1. Fields: fiddles, organ, percussion (5.25)

Memories of fields of childhood in a quiet moment on the field of battle. Comforting half-remembered songs and tunes play against both each other and a church organ theme, against a rumbling backdrop of thunder or guns. In a quiet moment, a wee jig played by the first fiddle is followed by the second, before the organ theme rejoins to the song of a skylark soaring above (my thanks to Ralph Vaughan Williams here!)

2. Goodbye to All That: fiddles, organ, piano, percussion, bass (4.31)

The journey away from the battlefields. A retreat march. Relief, hope building, memories of comrades lost and sights best forgotten. Immense longing for home.

3. Known Unto God: bagpipes (2.19)

A stand-alone pipe lament for all those people, young, old, service personnel or civilians, lost to the ravages of war.

4. Home: fiddles, bagpipes, piano, organ, percussion, bass (4.35)

The home thought about constantly, but changed forever. This last part begins with a playful version of a jig which appeared in “Fields” played along with the “journey” theme from “Goodbye to All That”. A recollection of memories pleasant, wistful, painful, unwelcome – and recurrent. This is what we are, this is what we have, this is what we have lost.



The Background

“Farewell to the Battlefields” is based on the imagined thoughts and experience of a soldier surviving the Great War and going home. It was partly inspired by the experience of taking school parties on tours of the Great War Battlefields over a 20 year period, in my previous existence as a Principal Teacher of History. In the latter years of this, we were greatly helped by Mercat Tours of Edinburgh, whose tours offer such a powerful experience for school groups and adults alike. Watching our students leaving Ypres at the end of the tour, it was obvious what an effect a week's visit could have.

It was also partly inspired by the experience of my own grandfather, whom I never met, and whose thoughts I thus had to imagine for myself. He fought in the Great War, and, while happy to regale my mother and her siblings with tales of rats and lice and other “horrors”, was quieter on his experience of the conflict. He was, however, a changed man from the easy-going character who went to war. For a long time after he came home he could not easily sleep, and kept a weapon under his pillow to keep him safe at night. It made me wonder – if my students could be affected by a week's visit to the site of the battles, what would the experience of the “survivors” of the war itself be like?

Eric Falconer, composer

The Musicians

Fiddles: Iain Fraser, Carly Blain

Piano and Organ: Paul Beck

Bagpipes: Darren Scurfield

Percussion: Neil Turnbull

Bass: Eric Falconer

Album recorded and mastered at Big Sky Studios by Tom Roseburgh. 2017

With thanks to the Live Borders Arts and Creativity Team for their support for this project with a New Work Award, which made the recording possible.



All rights of the producer and of the owner of the recorded work reserved. Unauthorised copying, public performance, broadcasting, hiring or rental of this recording is prohibited. Brigside Music Publishing Ltd. 2017