Preface

The appalling carnage of the Somme seems to us inexplicable, indefensible. Leadership’s failure to adapt in any way humanely to modern weapons created terrible carnage. Men were butchered like livestock in ways we struggle to comprehend. The war’s stalemate needed inhuman resolve to deliver victory. Who, in effect, won the Battle remains unclear. Probably the French, given they took their objectives with less horrific losses, while the battle weakened the assault on Verdun. Had Germany won, the story of the Somme would have been of their courage in the face of continual shelling – a WWI version of the Rats of Tobruk. The Germans called the Somme das Blutbad – the blood bath. Both they and the French are now overlooked in the face of the vast Commonwealth casualties.

Such incomprehensible fortitude. How did soldiers continue in the face of such certain and pointless slaughter? Through a belief on all sides that they were serving the greater good. That their sacrifice would spare further misery, hence their stoic endurance, inconceivable today.

“They came on at a steady easy pace, expecting to find nothing alive in our trenches ... a few minutes later, when the leading British line was within 100 yards, the rattle of machine-guns and rifle fire broke out from along the whole line of craters.

The advance rapidly crumpled under this hail of shells and bullets. All along the line men could be seen throwing their arms into the air and collapsing, never to move again. Badly wounded rolled about in their agony ... those less injured crawled to the nearest shell-hole. The noise of battle became indescribable ... Again and again the extended lines of British infantry broke against the German defence like waves against a cliff, only to be beaten back. It was an amazing spectacle of gallantry, courage and bulldog determination on both sides.”

(German account of the first day of the Somme, from The Old Front Line, by John Masefield)

Many who served were so damaged, they sowed the seeds of an even greater disaster.

The psychosis that produced Hitler stems partially from his experience at Fromelles, where he fought opposite the Australians. The trauma of the Somme poisoned hope, corrupted the good, maimed all it touched.

The losses were so great, the numbers numb us. This is a story of martyred villages, composers lost. Where music would have flowered, only silence. By telling the story of the songbirds of the Somme, this shared tragedy is reduced to a human scale that can be truly felt.

The Great War is over for all who fought it.

Their sacrifice must be made meaningful.

It is for us to continue to win the peace

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The Lost Songbirds of the Somme (performed without applause)

1 GF Handel Dead March from Saul in G major arr. for voice, string quartet and accordion

The archetypal work performed at Commonwealth funerals in WWI. It was played at the first Anzac Day commemorations in Egypt on April 25 1916.

2 Jacques Ibert Noël en Picardie for string quartet and accordion

This famous French composer created this work during his service as an anaesthetist working at the hospital in Amiens in 1915.

3 George Wilkinson Suzette (1915) for tenor, strings and accordion

English composer and friend of George Butterworth, served as a sergeant in the 16th Middlesex Regiment, killed trying to take the Hawthorn Redoubt at Beaumont Hamel on the 1st July 1916. His body was not found and he is commemorated on the Thiepval monument.

Willie Braithwaite Manson

4 When I came last to Ludlow 5 Loveliest of Trees for tenor, strings and accordion

The New Zealand composer Willie Manson wrote these songs while studying at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Joined the 1st/4th Battalion London Regiment (London Scottish) as a private, Jan. 1916, and served on the Western Front from May. He was killed on July 1st on his 20th birthday at Gommecourt by an exploding shell. His remains were not found and his name is inscribed at the Thiepval monument.
6  **Francis Purcell Warren**  
*Adagio* for cello, strings and accordion  
English violist and composer, a 2nd Lieutenant with the 10th Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment, was reported missing on July 3, probably killed July 2 1916 south of Thiepval. His name is recorded on the Thiepval Memorial. This Adagio was his last completed work before leaving for the Front, and was planned as the slow movement of a Cello Sonata.

7  **Ivor Gurney**  
*In Flanders* for tenor, strings and accordion  
Setting of a poem by Lt F. W. (Will) Harvey, 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment, captured 17 August 1916, by the English composer Ivor Gurney, 2/5th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment. The song was written at Crucifix Corner, Thiepval, and finished on 11 January 1917.

8  **Ivor Gurney**  
*Severn Meadows* for tenor, strings and accordion  
The only published song by Gurney that used his own war poetry, from his collection of war poems *Severn and Somme*, was written in March 1917 at Caulincourt on the far western edge of the Somme.

9  **Ivor Gurney**  
*By A Bierside* for tenor, strings and accordion  
Written in a disused trench mortar emplacement in July 1916 between Contalmaison and Ovillers-la-Boisselle, later orchestrated by his friend Herbert Howells (along with *In Flanders*) for an end-of-term concert at the Royal College of Music in London on 23 March 1917. After the war Gurney suffered a breakdown and spent the rest of his life in psychiatric institutions.

10  **Frederick Septimus Kelly**  
*Elegy* arr for string quartet and accordion  
Australian composer and gold medal winning rower, served as a Lt Commander in the Royal Naval division and was killed at Beaumont-Hamel on Nov 13 1916. The Elegy was originally written in Gallipoli but Kelly reworked it in the days just before his death.

11  **Traditional**  
*The Reel of Tulloch*  
The Canadian piper James Cleland Richardson, on 8 October 1916 at Regina Trench, under intense fire, strode up and down the German wire playing this reel, inspiring his company to take the position, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Later while transporting prisoners and the wounded back to the Canadian lines, he turned back to recover his pipes which he had left behind in No Man’s Land. He was never seen again. In 2002 his pipes were discovered in Ardvreck preparatory school in Scotland (a British Chaplain, Major Edward Bate, had found them on the battlefield and brought them back to the school where he taught). In November of 2006, they were repatriated to Canada and are now displayed at the British Columbia Legislature building.

12  **Georges Butterworth**  
*The Lads in their Hundreds* (from *A Shropshire Lad*) for tenor, strings and accordion  
Butterworth served as a Lieutenant in the 13th Battalion Durham Light Infantry, and fought near Contalmaison during the Somme campaign, capturing a series of trenches near Pozières on 16-17 July 1916, for which he was awarded the Military Cross. He was killed while recapturing Munster Alley on 5 August, and his body was lost in the fierce bombardments of the next two years. His name is recorded on the Thiepval Memorial.

13  **Reynaldo Hahn**  
*À Chloris* for tenor, strings and accordion  
Born in 1874 in Venezuela to a German Jewish father, Hahn became a naturalised Frenchman in 1912 and signed up as a private in 1914. Promoted to corporal in the 31st Infantry Regiment, Hahn served in the Somme in 1916 and wrote this exquisite song that year.

14  **F S Kelly**  
*The Somme Lament* for strings and accordion  
Kelly wrote this introduction to a planned set of orchestral variations on Oct 28 1916 while billeted at Mesnil near Thiepval. He was killed in the third German trench during the breakthrough at Beaumont Hamel on Nov 13 1916. He is buried nearby in the Martinsart British Cemetery.

15  **Walter Braunfels**  
*Vorspiel* from *Die Vögel*, for strings and accordion  
Walter Braunfels served in the German infantry in France during the Great War. His opera, *The Birds*, which he had started before the war and continued to work on during the war, was completed in 1919, and premiered to enormous acclaim in 1920. It is the great opera of WWI.
Botho Sigwart

Adagio from the War Sonata arr for string quartet and accordion

Botho Sigwart volunteered for active service in 1914 and served in the German infantry in Flanders and France, where he wrote his Kriegssonate (op.19). His regiment was then transferred to Galicia on the Eastern Front in April 1915. Promoted to lieutenant and having been awarded the Iron Cross, he was shot in the lung and died on 2 June 1915 in a field hospital in Jaslo, Poland.

Pipe Major William Laurie

The Battle of the Somme for bagpipes

A number of pipe tunes were written during the Great War by serving pipers of which the Battle of the Somme is the most famous. It was written by Pipe Major William Laurie of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who served in France from 1915 to 1916. He wrote this tune before succumbing to disease due to the terrible trench conditions. Handel’s “Dead March” from Saul was played as his coffin was taken out from St. John’s Church in Loanfern. Over 330 pipers were killed in action during the Great War from the Commonwealth and French armies.

Recitation of the Ode by Andrew Goodwin and Christine Benoist

The Last Post for tenor (words traditional)

The Flowers of War, France

Andrew Goodwin tenor (Australia), Zbigniew Kornowicz, Joanna Rezler (Orchestre de Picardie, Amiens) and Christopher Latham violins (Australia), Paul Mayes, viola (Orchestre National de Lille), Catherine Delanoue, cello (France), David Novak, accordion (Slovenia) and Jordan Aikin, bagpipes (UK).

The Flowers of War, Australia

Andrew Goodwin tenor, Sculthorpe String Quintet (Anna MacDonald, Rose Kavanagh, Chris Latham violins, Tor Fromyhr viola, Zoltan Szabo cello) Anton Wurzer accordion, Jason Craig bagpipes

Australian dates

High Court of Australia, Canberra June 21 2016 at 8pm
The Scots’ Church, Melbourne June 22 June 2016 at 8pm
St James King Street, Sydney June 24 2016 at 8pm

French dates

July 14 18:30pm Suzanne, Église Saint-Rémy
July 15 19:30pm, Guillemont, Église Saint-Pierre
July 17 17 :00, Fleurbaix Église Notre-Dame-du-Joyel
July 18 19:30pm Péronne Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste
July 19 15:30pm Fromelles, Eglise Saint Jean Baptiste
July 20 18:30pm Amiens, Cathédrale Notre-Dame d’Amiens
July 21 18:30pm, Albert Basilica of Notre-Dame de Brebières
July 22 19:30pm concert 8, Beaumont Hamel, Eglise de Beaumont-Hamel *RECORDED
July 23 19:30pm, Authuille L’église Saint-Fursy *RECORDED
July 24 15:00pm, Pozières Église Notre-Dame de l’Assomption *RECORDED

*The audio recording was taken from the three live concerts in Beaumont Hamel (where Kelly would be killed in November of 1916), Authuille (from which the British troops attacked Thiepval) and Pozières, on the centenary of the battle of Pozières.
Albert’s Madonna

Albert’s famous Basilica of Notre-Dame de Brebières, topped by Albert Roze’s Golden Madonna and Child has long been a landmark greeting visitors to the Somme. During World War I, it was hit by a shell on January 15, 1915, and for the most of the war hung miraculously, seemingly defying gravity.

Troops called her the “Leaning Virgin”, though the Australian troops called her “Fanny Durack” after the Australian female swimmer, an Olympic gold medal winner, because she looked like she was diving into a pool. A number of legends surrounding the Leaning Virgin developed among German, French, and British soldiers, and her image became a beloved and mysteriously powerful presence, made famous through postcards, photos and paintings, as she and her son sadly oversaw the gradual destruction of both her Basilica and the surrounding town in the heavy fighting of 1916 and 1918.

When she finally fell, brought down by British gunners in March 1918, the original statue was mysteriously lost. However after the war a replica of the Golden Madonna and Child was mounted on the rebuilt Basilica, a testament to the rebirth of the Somme.

AMIENS Cathedral

Amiens Cathedral (built 1220 to 1270) is both the tallest and largest cathedral in France, able to fit Notre Dame de Paris within it twice. The city’s entire medieval population (10,000) could fit inside it. Its soaring outline dominates the city and the surrounding landscape, and was a revelation to the vast number of troops who arrived there by rail during World War 1.

A strategic rail hub for both supplies and troop transport, Amiens was always a key strategic goal for the German army. On 31 August 1914, forward units of the German army entered Amiens, capturing around a thousand young men, to work as forced labourers.

During World War I, extensive measures were taken to protect Amiens Cathedral: the stained glass windows were carefully removed and sandbags were stacked high in the nave. The cathedral was hit nine times by shells. More tragically a fire in the artist’s studio used to store the stained glass, destroyed the majority of the medieval windows.

On 21 March 1918, Ludendorff’s great Spring offensive (Operation Michael) tried to take the city again. The German Army had been greatly strengthened by tens of thousands of shock troops from the Eastern Front after Russia’s withdrawal from the war. Ludendorff planned to punch through the Commonwealth lines and push them back to the Channel, forcing France to surrender. The ‘Emperor’s Battle’ started on March 21 1918, with a bombardment by the largest concentration of artillery of WWI to that point. By April 5, the Germans had advanced 28 miles, as far as the town of Villers- Bretonneux, where they were finally stopped by British and Australian troops.

The massive allied counterattack by Commonwealth, French and American troops on August 8 1918 (known as the Battle of Amiens) caused the German army to lose more ground than on any other day on the Western Front, as well as 16,000 prisoners. Referred to as “the black day of the German Army”, it caused German morale to collapse, leading Ludendorff to report to Kaiser Wilhelm II that the war was now irretrievably lost. The Australian forces captured a large 15-inch railway gun, now called the Amiens gun, which had been brought up to shell the city, and which now adorns the grounds of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. To this day Australians have a special relationship with Amiens and its magnificent cathedral, which they and many others fought bravely to save.
Flowers of the Great War

FLEURBAIX / FROMELLES
Tragedy

The Battle of Fleurbaix, now more commonly known as the Battle of Fromelles, was Australia’s first major battle on the Western Front. Intended as a feint to draw German troops away from the main fighting in the Somme, it was notable for poor planning and deeply flawed tactics, and ended in disastrous failure.

Troops from the 5th Australian and 61st British Divisions attacked at 6 pm on 19 July 1916 over open ground under direct observation with no element of surprise, suffering terrible casualties from German machine guns in reinforced bunkers. Small sections of the German trenches were captured by the 8th and 14th Australian Brigades, but running short of ammunition and under intense fire and counterattacks from three sides, they were forced to withdraw.

Over 5,500 Australians became casualties (around 90% of those involved), with almost 2,000 killed, and around 400 captured. It is understood to be the greatest loss by a single division in 24 hours during the entire First World War. The British suffered over 1,500 casualties while German casualties were little more than 1,000.

Australian official war correspondent Charles Bean walked the battlefield after the Armistice and “found No-Man’s-Land simply full of our dead ... skulls and bones and torn uniforms were lying about everywhere”. It remains the worst 24 hours in Australia’s military history, possibly the worst day in Australian history, the losses equivalent to the Boer War, Korean War and Vietnam War put together.

In 2007, the remains of over 200 Australian and 50 British soldiers buried in a mass grave by German troops at Pheasant Wood were uncovered and in 2010, their remains were transferred to the Pheasant Wood Military Cemetery in Fromelles with full military honours.

AUTHUIILLE
THIEPVAL
The Missing

On July 1st 1916, the British 96th Brigade rose from their trenches in Authuille to make a direct attack uphill on the village of Thiepval. Consisting of three pals battalions (volunteers recruited largely from the same towns and occupations), they faced nearly a hundred buildings which had been converted into fortresses by the German troops, whose machine guns commanded perfect views of the attacking troops. Those that survived the machine gun and artillery fire, found the wire uncut, and the few that reached the village were soon cut off.

Typical of the losses of that day, of the 24 officers and 650 men from the 1st Salford Pals who attacked Thiepval, 21 officers and 449 men became casualties.

The total casualties from the first day on the Somme was almost 60,000 men, including around 20,000 dead, making it the worst day in British army history. The losses were worst between the Albert–Bapaume road and Gommecourt, where few British troops even came close to reaching the German front lines. Thiepval would be
successfully defended by the Germans troops for three months, the ridge falling finally on the 28th of September, 1916.

Curiously in the south, the French Sixth Army fared far better, forcing out the German Second Army from their positions on both sides of the Somme while the British mainly took their objectives from where the two armies met at Maricourt to the Albert-Bapaume road.

After the war, the Thiepval memorial to the 72,195 missing British and South African servicemen, with no known grave (over 90 percent of whom died in the Battle of the Somme) was built as an Anglo-French Battle Memorial. The arch represents the alliance of Britain and France during the Battle of the Somme, and a cemetery with equal numbers of French and Commonwealth unmarked graves sits at its base.

Despite its name, the memorial is actually located in Authuille.

**GUILLEMONT**

**The German Experience**

The defence of Guillemont throughout July and August 1916 is considered one of most tenacious efforts by the German army during the Battle of the Somme. Ernst Juenger gave a rare insight into the German experiences there, in his book, *Storm of Steel*:

> A man in a steel helmet reported to me as a guide ... I asked him, naturally enough, what it was like in the line... ‘Where you fall, there you lie. No one can help you. No one knows whether he will come back alive. They attack every day, but they can’t get through. Everybody knows it is life and death.’

> At last we reached the front line. It was held by men covering close in the shell-holes, and their voices trembled with joy when they heard that we were relieving them. My platoon front formed the right wing of the position held by the regiment. It consisted of a shallow sunken road which had been pounded by shells filled with pieces of uniform, weapons, and dead bodies. The ground all around, as far as the eye could see, was ploughed by shells. You could search in vain for one wretched blade of grass. This churned-up battlefield was ghastly. Among the living lay the dead. As we dug ourselves in we found them in layers stacked one upon the top of another. One company after another had been shoved into the artillery bombardment and steadily annihilated. The corpses were covered with the masses of soil turned up by the shells, and the next company advanced in the place of the fallen.

> The sunken road and the ground behind was full of German dead; the ground in front of us with English dead. Arms, legs, and heads stuck out stark above the lips of the craters. In front of our miserable defences there were torn-off limbs and corpses over many of which cloaks and ground-sheets had been thrown to hide the fixed stare of their distorted features.

> The village of Guillemont was distinguished from the landscape around it only because the shell-holes there were of a whiter colour by reason of the houses which had been ground to powder.

> Junger was later wounded and evacuated:

> I heard the subsequent fate of my company from friends who were wounded after I was. My unit went back into the line the day after I was wounded, and suffered severe losses during a ten hour artillery bombardment. They were then attacked from all sides owing to the large gaps in the line. Little Schmidt, Fähnrich, Wohlgemut, Lieutenants Vogel Sievers - in fact, nearly the whole company - died fighting to the last. A few survivors only, Lieutenant Wetje among them, were taken prisoner. Not one man got back to tell the tale. Even the English army command made honourable mention of the handful of men who held out to the last near Guillemont.

**BEAUMONT-HAMEL**

**Lost and Found**

The German soldier Lt George Mueller (1883-1977) of the 99th R.I.R. found a fragment of stained glass containing the mournful face of the Virgin in the ruins of the church of Beaumont–Hamel, which had been destroyed early on in the German occupation of 1914. Mary’s face seemed a symbol of all grieving mothers mourning their lost sons, and being uncertain if he would ever return home, he sent it to his mother. Long after the war, on June 16, 1962, he sent the relic back to its place of origin as a gesture of reconciliation, where it was incorporated into one of the stained glass windows of the rebuilt church.

In a similar way, the Australian composer Frederick Septimus Kelly, our greatest cultural loss of the 1st World War has been lost, and now found. A famous gold medal winning athlete, considered the greatest amateur rower of the first half of the last century, he was an even more talented musician, playing piano for the great Spanish cellist Pablo Casals, as well as appearing in recital and as soloist in England and Australia. Had he survived he would have become an important composer in the music worlds of both countries.

Kelly wrote more music while serving during the Great War than any other soldier, with the possible exception of the German composer, Johannes Schmiedgen, whose *Requiem*, subtitled *Das Hohe Lied vom Tod* (*The High Song of Death*) was completed in the deep German bunkers during the Battle of the Somme before he was killed, but has not been seen since the 1919 premiere.
Kelly’s music, like that of Schmiedgen, was long lost and only recently rediscovered. We hope that both of them will be remembered in their home countries, and that Schmiedgen’s Requiem can one day be found in order to give voice to the little known German experiences in the Battle of the Somme.

**PERONNE**

**From the Ashes**

For most of World War 1, the town of Péronne was occupied by German troops. Civilian life was deeply affected and the town suffered heavily through from subsequent waves of artillery bombardments from all sides, with almost a third of the town’s inhabitants becoming civilian casualties of the shelling. Still today, the bells of the Town Hall defiantly ring out *La Madelon* each day, an iconic patriotic French song from the War, similar in status to It’s a Long Way to Tipperary.

The war was particularly cruel to Péronne’s Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church. In October 1914, the Germans occupied the church and the bell tower became an important observation post overseeing the front lines. A heavy machine gun was even mounted there for anti-aircraft defence.

At the end of January 1916, the Péronne Church was temporarily transformed into a prison, housing around 500 French prisoners. On 7 July 1916, the city was heavily shelled by French artillery, and the church lost its windows and several sculptures. The following day, the civilians were evacuated, Father Dubois depositing the relics of Saint Fursy in the vault of the sacristy before he left. They were never seen again.

Péronne was abandoned by the Germans in March 1917 when they withdrew eastwards to the Hindenburg line, and the town was then occupied by the British, until they in turn were driven out by the German offensive in March 1918. It was finally liberated on the 2nd September 1918 by Australian troops, an action General Rawlinson considered one of the great feats of the war.

After the Armistice of 1918, the inhabitants returned to find their church a shell, with only the walls still standing, the centre of the town reduced to ruin by Allied and German bombardment. The Church was chosen to be one of the first buildings to be rebuilt, and by April 1920, this powerful symbol of Péronne’s resilience and rebirth was restored to its previous glory.

**POZIERES**

**Sacrifice**

In late July 1916, the Australian troops fought their first battle in the Somme. The goal was to seize the ridge east of Pozières to enable an attack on the German strongholds on the Thiepval Ridge, which had resisted the British since the opening day of the battle.

While British divisions were heavily involved, Pozières is primarily remembered today as an Australian battle.

Pozières was initially taken by the 1st Division on 23 July 1916, however their success brought unwanted attention from German command, which deemed it a crucial element of their defensive system, and ordered it retaken at any cost.

The subsequent German bombardment of Pozières was the equal of anything yet experienced on the Western Front and far surpassed what the Australians had previously experienced at Gallipoli. By the time they were relieved on July 27th, they had suffered 5,285 casualties. One observer said “They looked like men who had been in Hell... drawn and haggard, and so dazed that they appeared to be
walking in a dream, their eyes glassy and starey.”

The 2nd Division took over mounted two further attacks, on July 29th, a costly failure; and on August 2nd, when they took German lines beyond the village, but again suffered heavily from the resulting artillery barrage. By the time they were relieved on August 6th, they had suffered 6,848 casualties.

The 4th Division was next into the line at Pozières. They too endured a massive artillery bombardment, and defeated a German counter-attack on 7 August; the last attempt by the Germans to retake Pozières, for a cost of almost 7,100 casualties.

In six weeks of fighting at Pozières and Mouquet Farm, the three Australian divisions suffered around 23,000 casualties, including 6,800 dead, losses comparable with those sustained at Gallipoli over eight months.

Charles Bean described the Pozières ridge as “more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth.”