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Citation for published version (APA):

Nesbit, E. (Composer). (2021). In Antarctica. Composition

Citing this paper

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Edward Nesbit

In Antarctica

*Six songs for
soprano and piano*

IN ANTARCTICA

EDWARD NESBIT

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Duration c. 15' 00"

PROGRAMME NOTE

In November 1911, Robert Falcon Scott and a large support party set out from their hut on Ross Island, Antarctica, in a bid to become the first people to reach the South Pole. A much reduced 'polar party', consisting of Scott and an inner circle of four other men, reached the pole the following January, only to find that the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen had beaten them to it by five weeks. All five men died on the return journey.

The expedition is not without its controversies, and it is clear that its status as a story of glorious failure stems in significant part from a peculiarly early-20th century brand of English nationalism which seems very alien to us today. The story has maintained its iconic status, however, in part because of the remarkable journal that Scott wrote while on the expedition. *In Antarctica* sets six extracts of this journal, starting with the journey to Antarctica on board the *Terra Nova* and ending with Scott and his two surviving companions extremely cold and short of food, knowing that the short journey to the next supply depot will prove to be beyond them. The first three songs take place before Scott and his companions embark on the Southern Journey – the final bid to reach to the Pole – and these songs are relatively light-hearted; the final three songs narrate the explorers' increasingly precarious situation over the course of the Southern Journey, and are correspondingly darker in tone.

All of the songs of *In Antarctica* refer to other music relating – more or less directly – to the *Terra Nova* expedition. 'The Gramophone' is a reimagining of the song 'I Want Yer, Ma Honey!' by Fay Templeton, a recording of which, with singer Yvette Guilbert, is known to have been played in the hut on Ross Island on the Antarctic coast. 'Penguins' takes as its basis music written by Ralph Vaughan Williams for a scene about penguins in the 1948 film *Scott of the Antarctic*. This reference is then reprised in 'Daydreams'; the 'pleasanter scenes and places' in this rendition, then, are the conditions of relative safety in and around the hut.

Most important are the repeated references to Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*). *Winterreise* narrates the story of a wanderer who undertakes a solitary journey in nature, with imagery of ice and snow accompanying the protagonist's physical and psychological journey towards resignation and – perhaps – death. In *Voices from Antarctica*, Scott implicitly becomes identified with the idea of the wanderer, as he makes his own lonely journey far away from urban civilisation. The direct referent is *Winterreise*'s opening song, 'Gute Nacht', in which the grimly repeating chords in the piano part represent trudging footsteps. These chords make prominent appearances in 'Sky' (with a degree of pictorial inaccuracy, as Scott is travelling by boat at this point), 'Marching', and finally 'Cold'.

Scott has his detractors, and some writers have suggested that the tragedy that befell the Polar Party was a direct result of Scott's mismanagement of the expedition. I am, of course, in no position to form an opinion one way or another on such questions. In the immediate aftermath of the expedition, Scott was constructed as an English hero who had lain down his life for his country, and was held up as a role model for young soldiers being sent off to the trenches of World War 1. This I do have strong feelings about, and I would want to distance myself sharply from such ideas. I am, however, inspired by the sheer resilience of these men, as well as by their idealism, and am fascinated by their willingness to put their bodies through such extreme pain for such an intangible purpose. It is this human aspect of the expedition that I have attempted to explore in this song cycle; I am interested in Scott not as a hero, but as a human being.

In Antarctica

I – Sky (*9 December 1910*)

The sky has been wonderful, with every form of cloud in every condition of light and shade; the sun has continually appeared through breaks in the cloudy heavens from time to time, brilliantly illuminating some field of pack, some steep-walled berg, or some patch of bluest sea. So sunlight and shadow have chased each other across our scene. To-night there is little or no swell – the ship is on an even keel, steady, save for the occasional shocks on striking ice.

II – Penguins (*4 January 1911*)

Meares and the dogs were out early, and have been running to and fro most of the day with light loads. The great trouble with them has been due to the fatuous conduct of the penguins. Groups of these have been constantly leaping on to our floe. From the moment of landing on their feet their whole attitude expressed devouring curiosity and a pig-headed disregard for their own safety. They waddle forward, poking their heads to and fro in their usually absurd way, in spite of a string of howling dogs straining to get at them. 'Hulloa,' they seem to say, 'here's a game—what do all you ridiculous things want?' And they come a few steps nearer. The dogs make a rush as far as their leashes or harness allow. The penguins are not daunted in the least, but their ruffs go up and they squawk with semblance of anger, for all the world as though they were rebuking a rude stranger—their attitude might be imagined to convey 'Oh, that's the sort of animal you are; well, you've come to the wrong place—we aren't going to be bluffed and bounced by you,' and then the final fatal steps forward are taken and they come within reach. There is a spring, a squawk, a horrid red patch on the snow, and the incident is closed. Nothing can stop these silly birds. Members of our party rush to head them off, only to be met with evasions—the penguins squawk and duck as much as to say, 'What's it got to do with you, you silly ass? Let us alone.'

III – The Gramophone (*12 January 1911, 19 January 1911, 22 June 2011*)

Meares has become enamoured of the gramophone. We find we have a splendid selection of records. Nothing remains to be brought but mutton, books and pictures, and the pianola. So at last we really are a self-contained party ready for all emergencies. If good will and happy fellowship count towards success, very surely shall we deserve to succeed. It was matter for comment, much applauded, that there had not been a single disagreement between any two members of our party from the beginning. By the end of dinner a very cheerful spirit prevailed, and the room was cleared for Ponting and his lantern, whilst the gramophone gave forth its most lively airs.

IV – Marching (*3 December 1911*)

We steered with compass, the drifting snow across our ski, and occasional glimpse of south-easterly sastrugi under them, till the sun showed dimly for the last hour or so. The whole weather conditions seem thoroughly disturbed, and if they continue so when we are on the Glacier, we shall be very awkwardly placed. Every mile seems to have been hardly won under such conditions.

V – Daydreams (*29 December 1911*)

The marches are terribly monotonous. One's thoughts wander occasionally to pleasanter scenes and places, but the necessity to keep the course, or some hitch in the surface, quickly brings them back. There have been some hours of very steady plodding to-day; these are the best part of the business, they mean forgetfulness and advance.

VI – Cold (*16/17 March 1912*)

The cold is intense. My companions are unendingly cheerful, but we are all on the verge of serious frostbites, and though we constantly talk of fetching through I don't think any one of us believes it in his heart.

In Antarctica

I - Sky

ROBERT FALCON SCOTT

EDWARD NESBIT

Calmato ♩ = 50

p *poco* *p*

Soprano

The sky has been won - der - ful, _____ with ever - y form of cloud in

Piano

p

con ped.

5 *poco* *p*

S.

ever - y con-di-tion of light and shade; _____ the sun has con - ti-nu-al-ly ap - peared _____

Pno.

(p sempre)

mp

9 *poco* *p*

S.

_____ through breaks in _____ the cloud-y heavens from time to time, _____ bril - li - ant-ly il - lu-mi-nat-ing

Pno.

(p) *(mp)*

12 *poco* *p*

S.

some field of pack, some steep - walled berg, _____ or _____ some patch _____ of the blu - est sea.

Pno.

(mp)

15 *p* *poco*

S. *p* *poco*
So sun-light and sha - dow_ have chased each o - ther ac-ross our scene.

Pno.

18 *poco rit.* - - *A tempo* *p*

S. *p*
To- night__ there is lit - tle or

Pno. *mp* *p* *poco rit.* - - *A tempo* *p*

mf *mp* *p*

22 *poco* *p* *p* *poco* *p*

S. *p* *poco* *p*
no swell - the ship__ is on an e - ven keel,__ stea - dy,___

Pno.

(*p*)

26 *pochiss.* *p* *pp* *rit.* - - - -

S. *pochiss.* *p* *pp* *rit.* - - - -
save_ for the oc - ca-sion-al shocks_____ on strik-ing ice.

Pno. *rit.* - - - - *pp*

II - Penguins

Marziale ♩ = 138

Soprano *p*

Mearse and the dogs were out ear - ly, and have been

Piano *pp* *p* *pp* *p*

senza ped.

6

S. run - ning to and fro most of the day with light loads. The great

Pno. *pp* *p*

11

S. trou - ble with them has been due to the fa - tu - ous con - duct of the pen - guins.

Pno. *pp*

16

S. *p* Groups of these have been cons - tant - ly leap - ing on to our floe. From the mo - ment of

Pno. *p* *pp* *p*

21

S. *poco* *p*
land - ing on their feet their whole at - ti - tude ex - pressed de - vour - ing cu - ri - o - si - ty and a

Pno. *pp sempre*
pp *p* *pp*
(p sempre)

26

S. *poco* *p*
pig - head - ed dis - re - gard for their own safe - ty.

Pno. *p* *pp* *p* *(mf)*

32

S. *p*
They wad - dle for - ward, pok - ing their heads to and fro in their u - sual - ly ab -

Pno. *f sfz p*

38

S. *mp* *p* *p*
surd way, In spite of a

Pno. *mf* *p*

43

S. *mp* string of howl - ing dogs *p* strain - ing to get at them.

Pno.

48

S. 'Hul-lo - a,' they seem to say,

Pno. *f* *ff sfz* *f*

← ♩ = ♩ → (♩ = 138)

52

S. 'here's a game - what do all you ri - di-cu-lous things want?' And they come

Pno. *mp* *p*

← ♩ = ♩ → (♩ = 138)

55

S. — a few steps near - er. The dogs make a rush as far as their leash - es or

Pno.

60 *mf* *mp* *f*

S. har - ness al - low. The pen -

Pno. *mf* *mp* *f sfz*

65

S. - guins are not daunt - ed in the least, but their ruffs go up and they

Pno. *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

70

S. squawk with a sem - blance of an - ger, for all the world as though they were re -

Pno. *f* *p*

75 *molto f* *p* *mf*

S. buk - ing a rude stran - ger - their at - ti-tude might be i - ma - gined to con - vey

Pno. *f sfz* *p*

80 ← ♩ = ♩ → (♩ = 138) *f*

S. 'Oh, _____ that's the sort of a-ni-mal you are; well, you've come to the wrong place -

Pno. *ff sfz f*

83 ← ♩ = ♩ → (♩ = 138) *p*

S. we aren't go-ing to be bluffed and bounced by you,' and then _____ the fi - nal

Pno. *sfz mf p*

87 *mp mf f*

S. fa-tal steps for-ward are ta - ken and they come with - in reach. There is a spring,

Pno. *mp f* con ped.

92 *ff p*

S. a squawk, a hor - rid red patch on the snow, _____

Pno. *ff p*

98 *pp* ← ♩ = ♩ → (♩ = 138)

S. and the in - ci - dent is closed._____

Pno. *pp* *p* senza ped.

106 *pp* 3

S. No-thing can stop these sil - ly birds. Mem-bers of our pār - ty rush to head them off,

Pno. (*p sempre*) *pp* 3

110 *poco* *p* 3

S. on-ly to be met with e - va - sions - the pen-guins squawk and duck as much as to say,

Pno. *mp* *poco* *p* 3

113 *pp*

S. 'What's it got to do with you, you sil - ly ass? Let us a-lone.'

Pno. *pp*

III - The Gramophone

Grazioso ♩ = 132

(sempre *p*)

Piano

p *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*

(sempre *p*)

5

rit. *mp* A tempo

Pno.

p (sempre *p*)

9

quasi $\frac{4}{2}$

S.

mp *poco* *p*

Meares has be-come en - a - moured of the gra - mo - phone.

Pno.

poco *mp* *poco*

14

quasi $\frac{4}{2}$

S.

mp

We find we

Pno.

mp (sempre *p*) *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p*

18

S. *poco* *p*

— have a splen - did col - lec - tion of re - cords...

Pno. *poco* *mp* *mf* *p*

23

Pno. *mp sempre* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

molto rit. . . . *Meno mosso, tempo rubato* ♩ = 76

26

S. *poco f* *p*

No - thing re - mains to be brought but

Pno. *mf* *poco f* *p*

molto rit. . . . *Meno mosso, tempo rubato* ♩ = 76

29

S. *A tempo* ♩ = 132 *leggiere*

mut - ton, books and pic - tures, and the pi - a - no - la.

Pno. *A tempo* ♩ = 132 *leggiere* *(p sempre)* *mp* *pp* *(p sempre)*

32 *p* *leggiero*

S. So at last we real-ly are a self-con-tained par - ty rea-dy for

Pno. *p* *pp* *p* *mp* *(p sempre)*

35

S. all e - mer - gen - cies.

Pno. *mp* *mf* *mp*

38 *quasi 4/2-*

S. If good will and hap - py fel - low - ship

Pno. *p*

43 *p* *poco*

S. count to - wards suc - cess,

Pno. *mp* *p*

47

S. *p* *poco*

ve - ry sure - ly shall we de - serve to suc - ceed.

Pno.

51

S. *p*

It was a mat - ter for

Pno. *mp* (*p sempre*)

55

S. *p* *mp*

com - ment, much ap - plaud - ed,

Pno. *mp*

59

S. *pp espress.*

that there had not been a sin -

Pno. *p meccanico* *pp sempre*

14
63
S. *poco* *pp* *poco*
gle dis - ag - ree - ment bet - ween a - ny two mem - bers of

Pno. *(p sempre)*
(pp sempre)

67
S. *pp* *ppp*
our par - ty from the be - gin - ning.

Pno. *(p sempre)*
(pp sempre)

71
S. *p*
By the

Pno. *pp* *p*

75
S. *p cresc.* *mp cresc.*
end of din - ner a ve - - ry

Pno. *pp* *p* *p cresc.* *mp*

78 *f* *subito* *p leggiero*

S. cheer - - ful spi - rit pre - vailed, and the room was cleared for Pon - ting and his

Pno. *f* *subito* *p leggiero* *mp* *p leggiero*

Ped. *p leggiero*

81 *p*

S. lan - tern, whilst the

Pno. *p* *pp* *p* *pp*

84 *p* *mp* *p*

S. gra - mo - phone gave forth its most live -

Pno. *p* *mp* *p*

87 *f* *mf* *f* *sfz*

S. - - - ly airs.

Pno. *f* *mf* *f* *sfz*

IV - Marching

Calmato ♩ = 50

p

Soprano

We steered with com - pass, _____ the drift - ing snow ac - ross our ski, _____ and oc -

poco

p

Piano

p

mp

5

mp

S.

ca - sion - al glimpse of south - eas - ter - ly sas - tru - gi un - der them, _____ till the

mp

p

p

Pno.

mp

p

8

S.

sun showed dim - ly for the last hour or so. The whole wea - ther con - di - tions seem _____

p

p

Pno.

mp

mp

11 *mp* *p* *mp cresc. poco a poco* *mf*

S. *mp* *p* *mp cresc. poco a poco* *mf*

thro-rough-ly dis-turbed, and if they con-ti-tue so when we are on the Gla-ci-er,

Pno. *mf*

13 *pp* *p*

S. *pp* *p*

we shall be ve-ry awk-ward-ly placed. Ev-ery

Pno. *pp sub.* *p*

16 *poco* *p*

S. *poco* *p*

mile seems to have been hard-ly won— un-der such con-di-tions.

Pno. *mp*

20 *rit.* *mp* *p* *pp*

Pno. *mp* *p* *pp*

V - Daydreams

Delicato ♩ = 60

Piano *p*

con ped.

S.

Pno.

pp

4

The march-es are ter-rib-ly mo-

7

no-to-nous. One's thoughts

p

pp

10 *poco* *poco*

S. *3* *3*

wan - der oc - ca - sion - al - ly to plea - sant - er scenes and pla - ces,

Pno. *3* *mp*

13 *p*

S. but the ne - ces - si - ty to keep the course, or some

Pno. *3* *p* *3* *3* *3* *3*

16

S. hitch in the sur - face, quick - ly brings them back.

Pno. *3* *3* *3* *3* *mf*

18 *cresc. poco a poco*

Pno. *3* *3* *3* *3* *3*

20

S. *mp*
There have been some

Pno. *f* *mp*

22

S. *poco* *p*
hours of ve - ry stea - dy plod - ding to - day; these are the best part_ of the

Pno. *p*

25

S. *poco* *p*
busi - ness, they mean for - get - ful - ness and ad -

Pno.

28

S. *pp*
vance.

Pno. *pp dim. poco a poco* *rit.* *ppp*

VI - Cold

Nobilmente-Desolato $\text{♩} = 60$

Piano

f

con ped.

Pno.

poco \rightarrow *f*

Pno.

più f \rightarrow *molto f*

13

quasi $\frac{3}{2}$

S.

pp 3:4

The cold is in-tense.

pp 3:4

Pno.

f \rightarrow *pp*

16

S. *pp* 3:4
My com - pan - ions

Pno. *p* *pp*

19

S. *poco* 3:4 3:2 3:4 *pp* 3:4
are un - end - ing - ly cheer - ful, but we are

Pno. *poco* 3:4 3:2 3:4 3:4

22

S. 3:2 3:4 3:2 3:4
all on the verge of se - ri - ous frost - bites,

Pno. 3:2 3:4 3:2 3:4 *p*

25

Pno.

mp cresc. *f* *molto f* *mp*

29

S.

pp *pp*

and though we con-stant-ly talk of fetch-ing

Pno.

p *pp*

32

S.

through I don't think a - ny one of us be-lieves it in his heart.

Pno.

p *pp* *ppp*

35

Pno.

dim. poco a poco *ppp*

8^{vb}