

IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER

Instrumentation

SATB Choir

Soprano Solo

Violin Solo

Alto Flute

Horn in F

Percussion 1 - Orchestra Bells

Percussion 2 - Vibraphone

Percussion 3 – Chimes, Suspended Cymbal

Percussion 4 – Triangle, Wind Chimes, Crotales

Harp

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Contrabass

Organ (optional – doubles strings)

Notes

This tender setting of Gustav Holst's beloved carol, "In the Bleak Midwinter," arranged by Douglas Mears, is a musical word painting of Christina Rossetti's inspired poetry. Its introduction and first verse are uniquely set in a minor mode, with glistening, icicle-like harp and bell parts, evoking the "bleak midwinter" scene. In the second verse, "Our God transcends all heaven, earth and its domain," a violin's accompanying solo begins high in the range and descends steadily to the instrument's lowest notes. With the start of the third verse, "Angels and archangels may have gathered there," a rustling violin solo, alto flute and harp portray a multitude of angels rejoicing over the Christ child. Then, at the words "But his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the beloved with a kiss," the accompaniment is transformed by pianissimo upper strings into an ethereal hymn of praise and adoration. The final verse, "What can I offer, poor as I am," is sung plaintively by a soprano soloist as the atmosphere returns to the opening winter setting. Ultimately, the accompaniment drops out as Mary realizes that the best gift of all, only she can give: her heart. The solo violin responds with Holst's soaring melody sounding this time in the violin's stratosphere and in its original major key—God expressing joy and delight in Mary's precious gift.