

Roundel

“The little eyes that never knew Light”

Song

Music by
EDWARD ELGAR
(1897)

Words from the poem “A Baby’s Death” by
Algernon Charles Swinburne

Available in the following keys

HIGH (D) (original) range C# to G
MEDIUM (C) range B to F

"Roundel: The little eyes that never knew Light" is a song with piano accompaniment written by the English composer Edward Elgar in 1897. The words are from the fourth roundel of a poem *A Baby's Death* written by A. C. Swinburne and originally published in the book *A Century of Roundels*.

Its first performance was at a Worcester Musical Union meeting of 26 April 1897, sung by Miss Gertrude Walker, accompanied by the composer.

Gertrude Walker was the daughter of the Thomas Walker, rector of St. Peter's Church in the Worcestershire village of Abbots Morton. She played the organ there and trained the choir, and had already known Elgar for many years.

The song was never published, but is now due to be published in the Elgar Society Edition.

From the original manuscript in the key of D
April 2007
Revised August 2008

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A Baby's Death, by A. C. Swinburne

A little soul scarce fledged for earth
Takes wing with heaven again for goal
Even while we hailed as fresh from birth
A little soul.

Our thoughts ring sad as bells that toll,
Not knowing beyond this blind world's girth
What things are writ in heaven's full scroll.

Our fruitfulness is there but dearth,
And all things held in time's control
Seem there, perchance, ill dreams, not worth
A little soul.

The little feet that never trod
Earth, never strayed in field or street,
What hand leads upward back to God
The little feet?

A rose in June's most honied heat,
When life makes keen the kindling sod,
Was not so soft and warm and sweet.

Their pilgrimage's period
A few swift moons have seen complete
Since mother's hands first clasped and shod
The little feet.

The little hands that never sought
Earth's prizes, worthless all as sands,
What gift has death, God's servant, brought
The little hands?

We ask: but love's self silent stands,
Love, that lends eyes and wings to thought
To search where death's dim heaven expands.

Ere this, perchance, though love know nought,
Flowers fill them, grown in lovelier lands,
Where hands of guiding angels caught
The little hands.

*The little eyes that never knew
Light other than of dawning skies,
What new life now lights up anew
The little eyes?*

*Who knows but on their sleep may rise
Such light as never heaven let through
To lighten earth from Paradise?*

*No storm, we know, may change the blue
Soft heaven that haply death descries
No tears, like these in ours, bedew
The little eyes.*

Was life so strange, so sad the sky,
So strait the wide world's range,
He would not stay to wonder why
Was life so strange?

Was earth's fair house a joyless grange
Beside that house on high
Whence Time that bore him failed to estrange?

That here at once his soul put by
All gifts of time and change,
And left us heavier hearts to sigh
'Was life so strange?'

Angel by name love called him, seeing so fair
The sweet small frame;
Meet to be called, if ever man's child were,
Angel by name.

Rose-bright and warm from heaven's own
heart he came,
And might not bear
The cloud that covers earth's wan face with
shame.

His little light of life was all too rare
And soft a flame:
Heaven yearned for him till angels hailed him
there
Angel by name.

The song that smiled upon his birthday here
Weeps on the grave that holds him undefiled
Whose loss makes bitterer than a soundless
tear
The song that smiled.

His name crowned once the mightiest ever
styled
Sovereign of arts, and angel: fate and fear
Knew then their master, and were reconciled.

But we saw born beneath some tenderer sphere
Michael, an angel and a little child,
Whose loss bows down to weep upon his bier
The song that smiled.

- The poetic form is a *roundel*: a variation of the French *rondeau*, devised by A. C. Swinburne. It is an eleven-line poem where the first part is repeated as a refrain in the fourth and eleventh lines.

Roundel.

Song

"The little eyes that never knew Light"

Words from the poem "A Baby's Death" by A. C. Swinburne

Edward Elgar (1897)

Moderato.

rall.

Piano introduction in 3/8 time. The music begins with a *p* dynamic and a *cresc.* marking. The tempo is *Moderato.* The piece concludes with a *rall.* and *dim.* marking.

7 *a tempo* *p* *cresc. mf*

The lit - tle eyes that ne - ver knew Light oth - er than of

Vocal line: *a tempo*, *p*, *cresc. mf*. Piano accompaniment: *a tempo*, *p*.

14 *cresc.* *f* *dim.*

dawn - ing skies What new life now lights up a - new the

Vocal line: *cresc.*, *f*, *dim.*. Piano accompaniment: *cresc.*, *dim.*.

20 *rit. espress.* *pp cresc.*

lit - tle, lit - tle eyes? What new life now

rit. p colla parte

26 *rit. p a tempo*

lights up a - new the lit - tle eyes?

rit. colla parte pp a tempo

32 *pp rit. mezza voce*

Who knows but on their sleep may rise

rit. pp

And.

38 *accel.* *rit.* ----- *a tempo*

Such light as ne ver heav'n let thro' to light - en earth from

accel. *rit.* *pp* *a tempo*

44 *cresc.* *rit.* *mf* *a tempo* *f*

Pa - ra - dise No storm, we know, may

cresc. *rit.* *mf* *a tempo* *f*

50 *cresc.*

change the blue soft heav'n that hap - ly death des - cries No

cresc.

56 *cresc.* *ff* *accel.*

tears, no tears__ like those__ in ours be - dew the lit - tle

62 *sempre f* *con passione*

eyes. No storm,__ we know,__ may change the

sf *8va* *stringendo cresc.*

68 *dim.* *p* *rit.* *espress.* *ppp*

blue__ soft heav'n that hap - ly death des - cries No

pp *rit.* *rit.*

74 *ppp* *lento* *cresc.* *rit.* *a tempo*

tears, no tears like those in ours be - dew the lit - tle eyes. No

82 *ad lib.* *rit.* *pp*

tears, no tears, like ours be - dew the lit

88

- tle eyes.