

# The Big Picnic Suite

All music, instruments and programming:
Desprez, unless otherwise noted
Vocals: Thilde Meer, Desprez
2000/2026 Desprez

In 2000 Desprez was inspired by Peter Vansittart's book Voices from the Great War to set some of these poems and ditties to music. This suite is based on that work.

*"I adore war. It's like a big picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. I've never been so well or happy. No one grumbles at one for being dirty."*

*Julian Grenfell, killed May 26, 1915*

**1. Bombed last night**

Bombed last night, and bombed the night before.
Going to get bombed tonight if we never get bombed anymore.
When we're bombed, we're scared as we can be.
Can't stop the bombing from old Higher Germany.

They're warning us, they're warning us.
One shell hole for just the four of us.
Thank your lucky stars there are no more of us.
So one of us can fill it all alone.

Gassed last night, and gassed the night before.
Going to get gassed tonight if we never get gassed anymore.
When we're gassed, we're sick as we can be.
For phosgene and mustard gas is much too much for me.

They're killing us, they're killing us.
One respirator for the four of us.
Thank your lucky stars that we can all run fast.
So one of us can take it all alone.

*Text: anon.*

**2. Deep-Sea Blues**

Oh, all day long I'm lookin' for trees,
Lookin' for sand, lookin' for land.
'Cause I've got those awful weepin', sleepin',
Got those awful sailin', wailin',
Got those awful deep-sea blues.

Soldiers down below, layin' cold and dead,
Everybody 'cept me.
Drop 'em overboard, loaded down with lead,
While we're at sea.

Colored soldiers now shippin' out for France.
All these soldiers and me.
Goin' to help the whites, make the Kaiser dance,
Just wait and see.

*Text & music: anon.*

**3. Willie**

O compound of wrecked flesh, rent and torn asunder,
How do we e'er digest thy potency, I wonder --
Cold, killed cattle pounded into paste,
Pressed into tins and shipped to us in haste.

Greedily we eat thee, hot or cold or clammish,
How welcomely thou thuddest in the mess tins of the famished.
O leavings of a jackal's feast, O carrion sublime,
No matter how we scoff at thee, we eat thee every time.

Ah, CORNED WILLIE.

*Text: Sgt. H.W. White in Stars and Stripes, 1919*

**4. When I lay down**

When I lay down and die on my tired old hunkers
The family back home'll get ten thousand plunkers.
Oh, this man's war is a mean man's war for sure.

I wanna live but I know I must die,
The fun I'll have be in the sweet bye and bye.
Oh, this man's war is a mean man's war for sure.

Can't think about livin' when you're bound to die,
Can't think about lovin' when the Heinie's nearby.
Oh, this man's war is a mean man's war for sure.

Findin' out every day how to be a fighter,
I'm totin' my gun but my pack's gettin' lighter.
Oh, this man's war is a mean man's war for sure.

There's a sniper over yonder in what's left of a tree,
But he'll be a snipin' son-of-a-gun before he snipes me.
Oh, this man's war is a mean man's war for sure.

*Text & music: anon.*

**5. Oh it's a lovely war!**

Up to your waist in water, up to your eyes in slush,
using the kind of language that makes the sergeant blush,
Who wouldn't join the army? That's what we all enquire.
Don't we pity the poor civilian sitting by the fire.

Oh, oh, oh, it's a lovely war.
Who wouldn't be a soldier, eh? Oh it's a shame to take the pay.
As soon as reveille has gone we feel just as heavy as lead,
but we never get up till the sergeant brings our breakfast up to bed.
Oh, oh, oh, it's a lovely war.
what do we want with eggs and ham when we've got plum and apple jam?
Form fours. Right turn. How shall we spend the money we earn?
Oh, oh, oh it's a lovely war.

When does a soldier grumble? When does he make a fuss?
No one is more contented in all the world than us.
Oh it's a cushy life, boys, really we love it so:
Once a fellow was sent on leave and simply refused to go.

Come to the cookhouse door, boys, sniff the lovely stew.
Who is it says the colonel gets better grub than you?
Any complaints this morning? Do we complain? Not we.
What's the matter with lumps of onion floating around the tea?

*Text: R. P. Weston*

**6. Does it matter**

Does it matter? - losing your leg?...
For people will always be kind,
And you need not show that you mind
When the others come in after hunting
To gobble their muffins and eggs.

Does it matter? - losing your sight?...
There’s such splendid work for the blind;
And people will always be kind,
As you sit on the terrace remembering
And turning your face to the light.

Do they matter? - those dreams from the pit?...
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won’t say that you’re mad;
For they’ll know that you’ve fought for your country,
And no one will worry a bit.

*Text: Siegfried Sassoon 1916*

**7. Lafayette**

We meet ’neath the sounding rafters,
The walls around us are bare;
They echo the peal of laughter;
It seems that the dead are there.

So stand by your glasses steady,
This world is a world of lies.
Here’s a toast to the dead already;
Hurrah for the next man who dies.

Cut off from the land that bore us,
Betrayed by the land that we find,
The good men have gone before us,
And only the dull left behind.

So stand by your glasses steady,
The world is a web of lies.
Then here’s to the dead already,
And hurrah for the next man who dies.

*Text: anon. (Lafayette Escadrille Mess Song 1916)*

**8. Suicide in the Trenches**

I knew a simple soldier boy
Who grinned at life in empty joy,
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
He put a bullet through his brain.
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

*Text: Siegfried Sassoon*

**The Bells of Hell**

The Bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling, for you but not for me.
And the little devils have a sing-a-ling-a-ling, for you but not for me.
Oh death where is they sting-a-ling-a-ling, oh grave thy victory?
The Bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling, for you but not for me.

*Text: anon.*