

## ABOUT "THE GOLDEN STAIRS" BY E. BURNE JONES

Fill the gaps with the right term.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/victorian-art-architecture/pre-raphaelites/v/sir-edward-coley-burne-jones-the-golden-stairs-1880>

staircase      playing      harmonious      sameness      figures      invented      down      visual      specific

**Steven:** They're walking ..... the staircase. They're holding musical instruments. They're not really ..... them. The horns are held vertically. A finger can be seen ready to pluck the harp, but it isn't quite. There is this sense of anticipation.

**Beth:** We're looking at Edward Burne-Jones' The Golden Stairs, which he began in 1876 and exhibited in 1880. We see a long stream of ....., holding musical instruments walking down this winding .....

**Steven:** Not just any figures, but these young women in these long classicized gowns in this wonderful Italian ..... architecture. This is a painting that has no strong colors whatsoever. It is very much this set of harmonies of whites, sort of gold and silvers.

**Beth:** But it's also really poetic and evocative and I think that sense of mystery was really important to Burne-Jones.

**Steven:** This is a painting that for me, is so much about the idea of progression and he's using the ..... to create musical scale. We have the stairs functioning almost as a ladder of tone and we have the figures alternating between silvers and gold, that kind of patterning that's taking place and of course there's the invocation of music because of the instruments as well, but it's this beautiful, tight relationship that's being created between the figures and the architecture all of which seems to recall beautiful, ..... sound.

**Beth:** We get a sense of before and after, that they're coming out of a space that we can see at the top left. There are more figures, perhaps, that are going to come down. They move down the stairs. They walk into this doorway and one figure right at the doorway, stops and turns back: that does give it a sense of some important passage of time.

**Steven:** Painting is something that we see all at once. Music is something that takes place over time. I think the artist is, perhaps, thinking about how can a painting exist over time in the way that music does.

**Beth:** Two possible titles for this: before it was titled The Golden Stairs, were The King's Music and Music on the Stairs and that idea of the King's Music makes me think that's music for a royal court and almost even reminds me of the angels in van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece playing the music of heaven. There's something about the repetition of those figures and the ..... of their faces and the way that they don't exactly communicate with one another, that they appear to be in their own world, that really gives us a sense of an interior life.

**Steven:** Well, there's a play between a solemnity in this painting and also informality. The figures seem as if they are other worldly.

**Beth:** The British public were used to seeing paintings that showed very ..... subjects that they were familiar with, from Shakespeare or ancient Greek and Roman mythology or other literary sources. In the 1860s, we see a move away from that specific subject matter. Here we have a painting that really has no literary source and it's simply evocative.

**Steven:** In a sense, trying to do what music does.