

# Dream Children, Op 43

Two short pieces for small orchestra or piano:

1 : Andante    2 : Allegretto Piacevole

**Approximate Length:** 6 minutes

**First Performance:**

**Date:** 4 September 1902

**Venue:** Queen's Hall, London

**Conductor:** Arthur W Payne

The origins of these two short instrumental pieces are obscure. Published when Elgar was at the peak of his popularity, it is strange that he should set aside time to write these two inconsequential uncommissioned works that can have earned him little money. Michael Kennedy, in his book *Portrait of Elgar*, suggests that the two pieces may have been salvaged from the discarded preparatory work for a symphony based on the life of General Gordon that Elgar had been toying with since 1898. Certainly, neither piece would be out of place in a symphony - both pieces are of considerable musical merit, conveying that typical Elgarian sense of wistful longing for lost youth that he also captured in the *Wand of Youth* suites and, much later, in the *Nursery Suite*. And Elgar, who always considered composing to be a penurious occupation, would have welcomed whatever money he could make from the pieces providing that preparation for their publication did not cause him significant extra work.

The origin of the title holds no mystery, for Elgar inscribed on the score an excerpt from the essay with the same title by Charles Lamb. The excerpt ends :

"We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all..... We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been...."

No doubt the reference to 'Alice' is significant and has encouraged speculation. Rosa Burley, friend of the Elgar family, has alleged that Elgar associated the passage with Alice Stuart-Wortley, his *Windflower*, and that he had intended to dedicate the work to her. Perhaps, but Elgar did not first meet *Windflower* until 1902 and their friendship remained an essentially formal one for many years. It seems that Elgar would more likely equate the reference with his own wife Alice. We shall never know, for Elgar published the work without a dedicatee.

But in 1921, Elgar confided to his friend Sir Sidney Colvin:

"I am still at heart the dreamy child who used to be found in the reeds by Severn side, with a sheet of paper trying to fix the sounds and longing for something very great."

Surely this quotation holds the key to the appeal that Lamb's essay must have held for Elgar.