

From The Bavarian Highlands, op 27

Six choral songs with piano or orchestral accompaniment
and words by C Alice Elgar:

- 1 - The Dance
- 2 - False Love
- 3 - Lullaby
- 4 - Aspiration
- 5 - On the Alm
- 6 - The Marksman.

Songs 1, 3 and 6 also arranged as an orchestral suite, **Three Bavarian Dances.**

From the Bavarian Highlands :

Approximate Length: 25 minutes
First Performance:
Date: 21 April 1896
Venue: Worcester Festival
Conductor: the composer
Dedicated to: Mr and Mrs Henry Slingsby-Bethell

Three Bavarian Dances :

Approximate Length : 15 minutes
First Performance :
Date: 23 October 1897
Venue: Crystal Palace, London
Conductor: August Manns

During the 1890s, the Elgars spent a succession of holidays in Southern Bavaria, staying in Oberstdorf in 1892 and in Garmisch in four of the following five years. The holidays were arranged by Mary Frances ('Minnie') Baker, sister of William Meath Baker, who is pictured in the fourth Enigma Variation, and subsequently to become stepmother of Dora Penny, Dorabella of the tenth variation. In those days, Garmisch had not developed into the bustling resort it is today and evening entertainment was sparse and unsophisticated. The Elgars spent a number of evenings in local hostelries where they drank while watching displays of folk dances of the region. During the day they walked and admired the Alpine scenery.

Both activities fired their imagination. On returning from their 1894 holiday, and despite having already embarked on the composition of King Olaf, Elgar began work setting to music six poems Alice had written in the style of Bavarian folksongs. It should be stressed that words and music were original parodies of the Bavarian style, not translations or transliterations of genuine folksongs. The influence of the Elgars' recent holidays is, however, clear.

Slightly less obvious is the relevance of the subtitles Elgar gave each song : each subtitle is the name of a location in the region but has no apparent thematic relevance to the song to which it is attached. Their significance seems to be no more than that of places the Elgars visited and admired, placing their admiration on record in much the same way as in the dedication of a work to a favoured individual. This is reflected in the title by which the work has come to be known - not Songs but Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands. Incidentally, the dedicatees of this work, the Slingsby Bethells, were the expatriot owners of the guesthouse the Elgars stayed at in Garmisch.

Elgar completed the songs in their original form with piano accompaniment in April 1895. He then set about writing an orchestral accompaniment, completed the following year. Finally, he took three of the songs (*The Dance*, *Lullaby* and *The Marksman*) and provided arrangements for orchestra alone, publishing these as *Three Bavarian Dances* in 1907 (although they had been completed and first performed some ten years earlier). The multiplicity of versions may have been Elgar's way of extracting maximum financial benefit from the tunes. But it may equally reflect his deep personal affinity with the music and the area it represents. Each version has its own particular merits and, while this is definitely the lighter side of Elgar - there is no significant development or elaborate intrinsic structure to each piece - as simple melodies the pieces are unsurpassed, containing an undeniable warmth and spirited happiness.