

Grania and Diarmid, op 42

Three pieces of incidental music for orchestra, including a song for solo voice and orchestral accompaniment:

Incidental Music

Funeral March

Song : *There are Seven that Pull the Thread*

Approximate Length: 12 minutes

First Performance:

Date: 21 October 1901

Venue: Gaiety Theatre, Dublin

Dedicated to: Henry J Wood

The play *Diarmuid and Grania*, written by George Moore and W B Yeats and first staged at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin in 1901, is rivalled only by *Tristan and Isolde* in the arena of great Celtic Heroic legends. But whereas Wagner took *Tristan and Isolde* and turned it into a massive and hugely successful opera, Moore wanted only a short piece of incidental music for his and Yeats' play. It had nevertheless to be incidental music with an impact and stature to match that of the legend. At the time Moore was looking for a musical collaborator, Elgar had just achieved his first nationally acclaimed success with the *Enigma Variations* whose centrepiece, *Nimrod*, is an understatement of nobility, dignity and serenity. Perhaps it is these qualities that caused Moore to turn to Elgar.

Moore is believed to have wanted only a horn call or a funeral march (the latter to accompany *Diarmuid's* death scene) - accounts differ, and Moore himself may have been undecided. In the event, Elgar wrote the horn call (which became the piece now normally referred to simply as *Incidental Music*), a funeral march to rival that of Chopin (which Elgar himself orchestrated in his dying years) and a song to words by Yeats, entitled *There are Seven that Pull the Thread*, which Laban sings as she watches, spinning, over the death scene.

As incidental theatre music, *Grania and Diarmid* (the Anglicised title under which Elgar chose to publish the work) is rivalled among Elgar's output only by his music for *King Arthur*. Moore and Yeats separately expressed themselves exceptionally pleased with the music. Moore commented that 'Elgar must have seen the primeval forest as he wrote', while Yeats described the music as 'wonderful in its heroic melancholy'. Apt descriptions. The horn call evocatively summons up the mystery of the ancient landscape while the funeral march combines an immense grandeur with a heartfelt, tragic sadness, truly one of Elgar's greatest and most effective marches.