

## Nursery Suite

A suite for full orchestra, in seven parts :

- 1 - Aubade
- 2 - The Serious Doll
- 3 - Busy-ness
- 4 - The Sad Doll
- 5 - The Wagon (Passes)
- 6 - The Merry Doll
- 7 - Deaming - Envoy

**Approximate Length :** 25 minutes

**First Performance :**

**Suite**

**Date :** 23 May 1931  
**Venue :** Kingsway Hall, London  
**Conductor :** the composer

**Ballet**

**Date :** 21 March 1932  
**Venue :** Old Vic theatre, London  
**Conductor :** Constant Lambert

**Dedicated to :** Their Royal Highnesses the Duchess of York,  
and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret  
Rose

In 1924, Elgar was appointed Master of the King's Musick. There had been talk of the position being abolished following the death of his predecessor, Sir Walter Parratt. But although Elgar had argued strongly for the position to be retained, he claimed to attach little personal importance to his appointment. He had been knighted some twenty years earlier and a member of the Order of Merit since 1911, both honours that he considered far more prestigious.

The Master of the King's Musick has few official duties but he normally writes the occasional small work to commemorate a Royal occasion. With the Imperial March, the Coronation Ode and The Crown of India Suite behind him, Elgar was well practised in writing such works on quite a grand scale. But his time in the role lacked Royal occasions of comparable significance and Elgar had by this time all but given up composing. As a result, he wrote only two works in response to his position. The first, Good Morrow, was a carol written in November 1929 to wish King George V a speedy recovery from a serious illness. The composition of the second, The Nursery Suite, was prompted by the birth in August 1930 of Princess Margaret. The work is dedicated to "The Duchess of York and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose."

Elgar had just completed *The Severn Suite* so was free for the act of composition to proceed relatively quickly. Elgar conducted the first performance of the work in HMV's recording studio, Kingsway Hall, on 23 May 1931. It was intended that the work should be recorded in its entirety but this plan was thwarted because the final piece (*Dreaming- Envoy*) proved to be ten seconds too long. Such were the limitations of recording techniques at that time! A further session at the Kingsway Hall was arranged for 4 June, at which the recording of the work was completed. This latter performance was attended by the Duke and Duchess of York, later to become King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, now the Queen Mother.

The work's public premiere took place in August 1931 at a Promenade Concert. It was well received and was later performed as a ballet at Sadler's Wells. The work marks a return to the style of *The Wand of Youth* suites, capturing with remarkable skill images of childhood. Particularly apt are the contrasts between the serious, sad and merry dolls; *The Wagon Passes* contains echoes of the frantic central passages of the Third Movement of the Second Symphony; while *Dreaming - Envoy* recalls the adagio of the First Symphony. But the inventiveness of the orchestration of *Wand of Youth* is not quite there and, overall, the work slightly disappoints, leaving the impression of a Master attempting but not quite succeeding in recreating the success of the earlier suites.