

Orchestral Arrangements and Transcriptions

Transcriptions for full orchestra of works by Bach, Parry, Handel and Chopin

National Anthem

Approximate Length: 1 minute 30 seconds

Date of transcription : 1902

Bach - Fugue in C Minor

Approximate Length: 6 minutes

First Performance :

Date : 27 October 1921

Venue : Queen's Hall, London

Conductor : Eugène Goossens

Bach - Fantasia in C Minor

Approximate Length: 5 minutes

First Performance :

Date : 7 September 1922

Venue : Gloucester Festival

Conductor : the composer

Parry - Jerusalem

Approximate Length: 3 minutes

First Performance :

Date : 1922

Venue : Leeds Festival

Handel - Overture in D Minor

Approximate Length: 5 minutes

First Performance :

Date : 2 September 1923

Venue : Worcester Festival

Conductor : the composer

Chopin - Funeral March (from Piano Sonata no 2 in B Flat Minor)

Approximate Length: 7 minutes

First Performance :

Date : 30 May 1932

Venue : EMI Abbey Road recording studio,
Maida Vale, London

Conductor : Adrian Boult

As a young musician in Worcester, Elgar filled a succession of roles which required him to produce music for performance on a variety of instruments - as organist of St. George's church in Worcester, for the wind quintet that he formed with his brother and friends in 1878, for the various local orchestras in which he played, and for the Powick Asylum Band that he conducted. To meet this demand, in addition to the small works he himself composed, he also turned to the masters with whose music he was well acquainted - Bach, Beethoven, Handel, Mozart and others - for pieces that he could readily transcribe, usually in abridged form, for the relevant combination of instruments. But, as he matured and his ambitions to make a career as a composer crystallised, he abandoned transcription and devoted his full energies to the composition of original works.

Nevertheless, commercial considerations made him return occasionally to his own compositions in one medium and transcribe them into another, particularly the solo instrumental works into orchestral form. In the latter part of his life, however, his creative originality diminished, particularly after 1920 when Lady Elgar died. This came as a crushing blow to Elgar, depriving him of his main source of motivation, and he increasingly turned to his old sketchbooks and to the works of others for inspiration. The main transcriptions covered here are the works by Bach, Chopin, Handel and Parry.

Anonymous - National Anthem (first performed 1745)

A week before the Coronation Ode was due to be premiered at the June 1902 "Coronation Gala Concert" at Covent Garden (it was cancelled, owing to the King's illness), Elgar introduced an arrangement of Land of Hope and Glory as a solo song performed by Clara Butt at a "Coronation Concert" at the Albert Hall. Novello seized upon the prevailing patriotism and requested that Elgar arrange the National Anthem as an appropriate opening for a concert performed in front of the Court and numerous British and foreign dignitaries. The gorgeously orchestrated version was also performed at the opening of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley on St. George's Day, 1924.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) – Fugue in C minor op. 86 (1921)

J.S. Bach – Fantasia in C minor op. 86 (1922)

The first work to follow Alice's death came about through a chance conversation with Richard Strauss. Elgar, eager to heal the rifts caused by the First World War, was quick to resume a friendship with Strauss dating back to the early German performances of *The Dream of Gerontius* in 1901-2. Over a lunch in 1920, the two discussed the orchestration of J.S. Bach's organ works. The lunch ended with Elgar agreeing to orchestrate the Fugue in C Minor (BWV 537) while Strauss was to orchestrate the Fantasia.

Elgar completed his part of the agreement by 25 April 1921 and sent it to Novello, who reluctantly paid 100 guineas for the copyright. (At the same time, Elgar sold to Novello the copyright in a number of smaller pieces, such as part-songs, anthems, piano arrangements of his works and the Romance for Bassoon, no longer earning significant royalties – five years of sales had yielded only £250. His spirits were at a low ebb and, with typical exaggeration, the composer wrote in a letter of 12 June 1921 to the publishers "I never really belonged to the musical world – I detest my slightest necessary connection with it.")

In a better frame of mind, Elgar wrote on 5 June 1921 to his friend, the organist Ivor Atkins, "I have orchestrated a Bach fugue in modern way – largish orchestra – you may not approve. ... many arrgts have been made of Bach on the 'pretty' scale & I wanted to shew how gorgeous & great & brilliant h e would have made himself sound if he had had our means." Far from disapproving, Atkins listened with Elgar to the work being rehearsed by Eugène Goossens at the Queen's Hall, London, on 26 October 1921 prior to its première the following day where "It sounded magnificent".

The 1922 Three Choirs Festival was to be held in Gloucester and Elgar's friend and festival director Herbert Brewer, the organist at Gloucester Cathedral, turned to Elgar for advice on promising British composers who might be approached for new works for the festival. Brewer also asked Elgar if he would consider writing something. With no sign that Strauss intended fulfilling his side of the bargain struck two years earlier, Elgar now set about orchestrating the Bach Fantasia. He completed his task by June 1922, in good time for the Fantasia and Fugue to be performed together under his baton at the festival on 7 September.

Hubert Parry (1848-1918) – Jerusalem (1922)

In the same year (1922) as his Bach transcription, Elgar gorgeously orchestrated the accompaniment to Sir Hubert Parry's setting of part of William Blake's poem Jerusalem, a short poem from the preface to his epic Milton: a Poem of 1804.

*And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

*And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among those dark Satanic Mills?*

*Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of Desire;
Bring me my Spear; O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of Fire!*

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land.*

Parry was a bastion of that English musical establishment that Elgar heartily despised, but Elgar clearly recognised something in Parry - the musical idealist, the perfect gentleman, the gentle soul who rebelled against his own privileged upbringing - that set him apart from other establishment figures. True, Parry had long championed Elgar's music, but hardly

more so than others such as Stanford who had nevertheless felt the cutting edge of Elgar's tongue. Elgar had, however, admired Parry's music for many years: he and his wife visited the 1892 Gloucester festival especially in order to hear Parry conduct a performance of his *Job*. Parry died in 1918 and, as if by way of tribute to him, in 1922 Elgar provided *Jerusalem* with the clothing in which it is most widely known today. Parry's song was first performed at a "Votes for Women" concert in 1916, and Elgar's transcription received its own première at the 1922 Leeds Festival.

George Frederic Handel (1685-1759) – Overture in D minor (1923)

The Bach transcription was sufficiently well received for Elgar to orchestrate another work for the 1923 Three Choirs Festival, held in Worcester and directed by the Cathedral's organist, Elgar's old friend, Ivor Atkins. This time it was a work by Bach's near contemporary, Handel. Handel's *Overture in D Minor* and, for the same event, to please Atkins, Elgar arranged Atkins' *Abide with me* and two motets: Battishill's *O Lord, look down from Heaven*, and Wesley's *Let us lift up our heart*. Also included in the same festival were Elgar's arrangements of the *National Anthem* (1902) and *Jerusalem* (1922). The Handel was the overture to his second *Chandos Anthem* and Elgar referred to it on a letter of 16 July 1923 to Novello's music editor, John E. West: "I have known the overture from the old two-stave organ arrangement since I was a little boy and always wanted it to be heard in a large form – the weighty structure is (to me) so grand – epic." Novello eventually agreed to publish it (along with the Battishill) in time for the Worcester festival and the first performance was held in Worcester on 2 September 1923 and must have sounded marvellous in the acoustic, whatever today's period instrumentalists may say.

The work begins with the stately introduction giving way to the fugal allegro, initially on the strings but then using all the orchestral colour that comes with piccolo, cor anglais, bass clarinet and contrabassoon added to the usual woodwind section plus, for good measure an ad lib organ. The introduction reappears to bring the work to its "grand – epic" conclusion.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) - Funeral March (from Piano Sonata no. 2 in B flat minor) (1932)

This final orchestration came about at the suggestion of Elgar's record company which by 1930 had become Electrical and Musical Industries (EMI). The record company had recently signed up the newly formed BBC Symphony Orchestra with Adrian Boult as conductor. Looking for suitable material for the orchestra to record, the company suggested to Boult that Elgar should be approached to provide a transcription of Chopin's *Funeral March* from his second *Piano Sonata*. Boult wrote to Elgar who accepted the invitation. The première took place when the orchestra recorded the work on 30 May 1932 in EMI's Abbey Road recording studio at Maida Vale in London. Although Elgar's orchestration does not fully conceal the origins of the piece as piano music, the population at large now think of it primarily in its orchestral arrangement.