

Sea Pictures, op 37

Five songs for contralto and orchestra:

1. Sea Slumber Song - words by Roden Noel
2. In Haven (Capri) - words by Alice Elgar
3. Sabbath Morning at Sea - words by Elizabeth Barratt Browning
4. Where Corals Lie - words by Richard Garnett
5. The Swimmer - words by Adam Lindsay Gordon

Approximate Length: 24 minutes

First Performance:

Date: 5 October 1899
Venue: Norwich Festival
Conductor: the composer
Soloist: Clara Butt

This collection of five poems set to music by Elgar has been criticised on a number of pretexts: the poems now seem rather dated; apart from the rather superficial link of the sea, there is no thematic interconnection between the poems, so that the cycle as a whole lacks a coherent structure; and Elgar's settings make little attempt at a grand portrayal of the sea as other composers have successfully attempted.

Fortunately, the listening public pay little heed to such criticisms, for the song cycle remains one of the most popular of Elgar's - and indeed any composer's - vocal works. The second song is of particular interest. The words are by the composer's wife Alice who provided texts for a number of Elgar's early songs. Elgar set the poem some three years earlier, publishing it separately under the title *Love Alone* but later incorporated it into the song cycle, in which it is undoubtedly the most charming of the five songs.