

Sursum Corda, op 11

A ceremonial work for strings, brass and organ.

Approximate Length:	10 minutes
First Performance:	
Date:	9 April 1894
Venue:	Worcester Cathedral
Conductor:	Hugh Blair
Dedicated to:	H D Acland

By 1894, Elgar was set on the path leading some five years later to international recognition. The previous few years had seen successful first performances in Worcester of Froissart and The Black Knight; his Serenade for Strings had been published in 1893 (although a first public performance of the full work did not take place until 1896) and he also found publishers for a number of his partsongs. While national fame was still some way off, there were few to challenge his position as the foremost composer in the Worcester area. In early 1894, it was announced that the Duke of York, later to become King George V, would visit Worcester in April of that year. At comparatively short notice, Elgar produced a short ceremonial piece for performance at a service in Worcester Cathedral which the Duke was to attend. With little time in which to complete the work, Elgar built the piece around a theme intended as the slow movement of a violin sonata he had begun in 1887 but later discarded. He then recast the theme as an *Andante Religioso* in 1893 before finally adapting it for this work. He called the work *Sursum Corda*, Latin for Lift Up Your Hearts, a name first used by Liszt and later taken by a number of other composers before Elgar. The work, in three sections, is scored for strings, brass, organ and tympani. It demonstrates a considerable dynamic range. The first and last sections begin with the violin sonata theme, a wistful pastoral theme here played on strings and somewhat reminiscent of the later Sospiri, while the middle section is based around a more assertive theme exchanged between organ and the orchestral forces. But each of the three movements grows steadfastly and inexorably to an overpowering climax. The overall impression is of a slightly plodding work but of some considerable beauty - an exceptionally powerful tour de force littered with pointers to the greater works that were to follow. The score was not published until 1901 and is rarely performed today. It deserves better.