

Symphony No 1 in A flat major, op 55

A symphony for large orchestra, in four movements:

**1 - Andante/Nobilemente e Semplice/Allegro; 2 - Allegro molto;
3 - Adagio; 4 - Lento/Allegro.**

Approximate Length: 50 minutes

First Performance:

Date: 3 December 1908
Venue: Free Trade Hall, Manchester
Conductor: Dr Hans Richter
Orchestra: Hallé Orchestra

Dedicated to: Hans Richter, "true artist and true friend"

Elgar had first considered composing a symphony, to be based on the life of General Gordon, as early as 1898 but the work never materialised. He continued to toy with the idea of a symphony in the years that followed, prompting his close friend Alfred Rodewald to offer him a commission to produce it. Elgar declined that offer but accepted a commission from the Leeds Festival Committee to write a symphony for the 1904 festival, before soon changing his mind again. This incurred some displeasure with the committee, but Elgar realised that a work on the scale he intended could not be rushed.

Eventually, shortly after his fiftieth birthday in 1907, he settled down to work in earnest on the symphony. What emerged proved to be a totally different work from the Gordon symphony he had for so long contemplated. It begins with a broad, noble theme which binds the work together, recurring at intervals throughout the four movements before eventually emerging as a triumphant march at the very end of the symphony. The third movement (adagio) is widely considered to be the most perfect and lyrical of all Elgar's output.

The symphony was an immediate success, with Elgar being recalled to the platform several times both during and after the symphony's first performance and the first London performance four days later. The symphony received around 100 performances during its first year and remains a standard of the classical repertoire, still performed regularly today.