

Symphony No 2 in E flat major, op 63

A symphony for large orchestra, in four movements:

**1 - Allegro vivace e nobilmente; 2 - Larghetto;
3 - Rondo (Presto); 4 - Moderato e Maestoso.**

Approximate Length:	55 minutes
First Performance:	
Date:	24 May 1911
Venue:	London Music Festival, Queen's Hall, London
Conductor:	the composer
Orchestra:	Queen's Hall Orchestra
Dedicated to:	(to the memory of) King Edward VII

Although the second symphony followed the first by only three years, in the intervening period the world and Elgar had changed. The ebullient, confident mood of the early years of the century was dying, the tensions that culminated in the First World War were beginning to emerge and, by the time of the symphony's first performance, King Edward VII had also died.

While the symphony was well received by most standards, the audience's response to the first performance was polite and restrained in comparison to the uninhibited reception given to its predecessor, leading Elgar to liken them to stuffed pigs. In some respects, this symphony has never fully recovered from that start - it is probably the less popular and less frequently performed of the two symphonies despite being melodically more inventive and varied than the first symphony. This may be because it is the more complex work. Rather than a single theme recurring in all four movements, structural unity is achieved through extensive cross-references between movements, most dramatically when the rather ghostly theme from the first movement re-emerges as a frenzied outburst in the middle of the rondo.

And there is a marked contrast in mood. In place of the lyrical dreaminess of the first symphony's adagio, the second contains a somewhat sombre funeral march. (Many assumed this to be in memory of the recently deceased king, but sketches of the movement exist from some years before. Elgar probably composed the theme as a tribute to his friend Alfred Rodewald, the Liverpool businessman who conducted the first performance of the first two Pomp and Circumstance marches in 1901 and who died two years later at the age of 43.) And in contrast to the jaunty confidence of the first symphony, the second has an inner restlessness and mood of conflict which is only resolved when, in the closing minutes, the "spirit of delight" theme which opens the symphony returns to bestow a satisfying tranquility.