

The Music Makers, op 69

A cantata for contralto, full choir and orchestra, based on the poem by Arthur O'Shaughnessy.

Approximate Length:	40 minutes
First Performance:	
Date:	1 October 1912
Venue:	Birmingham Festival
Conductor:	the composer
Dedicated to:	Nicholas Kilburn, amateur musician and close friend

The Music Makers is frequently criticised on two counts. Firstly, Elgar took as his libretto a poem by Arthur O'Shaunessey whose works were then in fashion but now seem curiously dated. And secondly, Elgar includes a number of quotations from his earlier works (Sea Pictures, The Dream of Gerontius, The Enigma Variations and both symphonies), leading to accusations that the work lacks originality and inventiveness.

Both criticisms are ill-founded. Whatever the past and current views of O'Shaunessey, there is no doubting that Elgar felt a strong affinity with the words of the poem, identifying himself with the 'dreamer of dreams' in the first line of the poem. And accepting the autobiographical links Elgar saw in the work, what should be more natural than that he should recall his earlier career through a series of quotations from those works.

Fortunately, the public does not slavishly follow the critics. The work achieved an immediate popularity, receiving frequent performances in the years following its composition. And while its initial popularity may have declined somewhat, the work is still performed regularly if infrequently, with the quotations adding a certain novelty value to what is undoubtedly a mellow and heartfelt work.