

Various short pieces written for small orchestra:

Title	Year	Approx. Length
Cantique	1912	
Carissima	1913	3 mins 45 secs
May Song	1928	4 mins
Mina	1933	4 mins 10 secs
Minuet	1898	4 mins 30 secs
Obligato for Carillon	1927	
Romance for Bassoon	1910	5 mins 15 secs
Rosemary	1915	3 mins 30 secs
Serenade Lyrique	1900	4 mins 50 secs
Sevilliana	1884	4 mins 50 secs
Soliloquy for Oboe	1930	5 mins 30 secs
Three Characteristic Pieces	1899	
1. Mazurka		3 mins 10 secs
2. Serenade Mauresque		4 mins 45 secs
3. Contrasts : The Gavotte - AD 1700 and 1900		3 mins 45 secs

While Elgar's ambitions from an early age may have tended towards the large-scale works for full orchestra that flowed from his pen from Froissart onward, a struggling composer must be more pragmatic if he wishes his works to be played and should write them for ensembles within his geographical ambit as well as his technical competence. Elgar's earliest compositions were for musical groups over which he had a measure of control - the fraternal Wand of Youth ensemble, the wind quintet he formed with his close friends, the organs of various churches in the Worcester area and the Powick Asylum band. But after a number of aborted early attempts at writing chamber works, Elgar took his first tentative steps towards reaching a wider audience with two works for small orchestra - the Suite in D of 1882-83 and Sevilliana of 1884.

The Suite comprised four movements - a mazurka, an intermezzo (subtitled *Serenade Mauresque*) a fantasia gavotte and a march - Pas Redoublé. The second and fourth movements received performances as separate pieces in Worcester in April 1883 and February 1882 respectively. But a first performance of the complete work had to wait until March 1888 in Birmingham when the conductor was W C Stockley, later to conduct the disastrous première of *The Dream of Gerontius*. Elgar was nevertheless sufficiently encouraged by the work to revise the first three movements for publication in 1899 as *Three Characteristic Pieces*. He dedicated it to Lady Mary Lygon, the subject of the thirteenth Enigma Variation.

Sevilliana is a shorter work with, as its name implies, a Spanish feel to it. This Spanish influence was to recur intermittently throughout Elgar's later works, notably in the Spanish Serenade of 1891 and in *The Black Knight*. But although Sevilliana is a pleasant and tuneful

little number, there is little in it to suggest that Elgar was capable of writing the masterpieces of his later years. Elgar dedicated *Sevilliana* to Stockley as if in anticipation of the help he was later to give Elgar's career.

Over the next twenty-five years, Elgar's output for small orchestra was no more than a few arrangements of pieces written for solo piano or for piano and violin : admittedly these included the immensely popular *Salut d'Amour* and the *Chansons de Nuit et de Matin* and the *Minuet* of 1897 which Elgar published in an orchestral arrangement the following year. But the success of these orchestral arrangements makes it all the more surprising that he did not attempt more. Only the *Serenade Lyrique* of 1900 emerged as a piece intended for performance by small orchestra from its conception.

Then, in the years leading up to the First World War, emerged three works in quick succession. In style, origin and motivation, the three are each quite distinct. The first of the three, the *Romance for Bassoon and Orchestra*, was written in the early part of 1910 and thereby fulfilled a promise to Edwin James, principal bassoonist of the London Symphony Orchestra (and its new Chairman), who first performed it the following year. James does not feature elsewhere in the Elgar biography and it seems likely that the dedication was more a token of gratitude for 'services rendered' than a sign of deeper affection.

The little work nestles between the *Second Symphony* and the *Violin Concerto* and was composed at the same time as the latter. Jerrold Northrop Moore sees a connection between the *Concerto's* opening and the opening figures for orchestra and bassoon, and certainly the dying falls and general mood of gentle melancholy are echoes from both other works. Elgar was himself a bassoonist from his time of the *Shed Music*, written for his wind quintet of 1878-82. However, this work is no throwback to the wind quintet days: the lazy, meandering melody of the *Romance* is in marked contrast to the lively, rather agitated style of many of the pieces for wind quintet and the formality of the slower movements. Here, he treats the solo instrument with charm and sensitivity and explores the more plaintive side of the instrument's character. A short orchestral introduction heralds the start of almost continuous solo playing, beginning with a yearning, wistful theme. Unlike in the *Soliloquy for Oboe*, there is thematic interplay between soloist and orchestra, both with the first theme and a contrasting one composed of descending broken chords. There is only one climactic outburst of the main theme from the orchestra, and the piece ends with two subdued chords.

The last of the three works from this period, *Carissima*, is also a reworking of a piece from Elgar's sketchbooks. But the significance of the piece is not its precedents but in the portent it held for the future, for this was the work that introduced Elgar to the recording industry. The work was first performed in January 1914 at a recording session at the HMV studios at Hayes, Middlesex. It was to be the start of a long and productive relationship with the record company, lasting right up to his death. His last completed work, *Mina* (the name being that of his Cairn terrier), also received its first performance at a recording session for EMI, as HMV had by then become. And it is somehow fitting that Elgar dedicated the work to Fred Gaisberg, the HMV/EMI executive who had done much to encourage Elgar's interest in the new medium.

Elgar wrote the Soliloquy for Oboe (1933) for Leon Goossens, having heard him play the Froissart solos divinely - "what an artist!" – in the LPO recording of the overture in 1933. He planned a suite dedicated to Goossens but almost completed only one movement in short score with orchestration indicated before his final illness intervened. Goossens asked Gordon Jacob to orchestrate it, who was also responsible for the excellent 1947 orchestral arrangement of the Organ Sonata No. 1.

A short section of music harking back in mood to the "Woodland Interlude" of Caractacus introduces the oboe that dominates in its virtuosic but reflective writing. There is no extended tutti writing, the orchestra acting as an atmospheric backdrop, and the short movement quietly fades to nothing.

The Obligato for Carillon, which Elgar composed in 1927, is the counter-melody to the choral refrain of Land of Hope and Glory, and the work began when Cyril J. Rickwood, Director of Music for the Dominion Jubilee Celebrations, wrote to Elgar on 19 April 1927, explaining about the celebration on Friday 1 July of the Diamond Jubilee of the Canadian Confederation and suggesting that "it would be very fitting if you would write a counter-melody to the chorus in crotchets to be performed on the carillon during the singing. It seems to me that the chorus would lend itself splendidly to this treatment and if carried out would form a wonderful climax to our programme." The Ottawa Carillon was installed in the Peace Tower of the Parliament Buildings to commemorate the peace of 1918 and in remembrance of the Canadians who died in the Great War. In 1927 it was the largest carillon on the North American continent possessing, claimed the Ottawa Journal, "the greatest tone volume of all the carillons in the world", though at the same time "as delicate and sensitive as a violin". The bells had been cast and tuned in the Gillett and Johnston foundry of Croydon, England.

Although in virtual retirement (the only other piece composed in 1927 was the Civic Fanfare for the Hereford Festival), Elgar complied. He had, after all, experience of this sort of thing with his Memorial Chimes for a Carillon performed at the opening of the Loughborough War Memorial Carillon in 1923. The work accompanied the singing of a massed choir that involved 11,000 participants and was heard live by an audience of some 50,000 as well as being broadcast coast to coast across Canada and further afield.

On 6 July Rickwood wrote again, reporting that "The performance was a decided success and created a profound impression on the audience of 50,000 souls". The carillon music "floated down from the heavens in limpid drops of gold" and, as the Ottawa Journal recalls, "to conclude the programme the sonorous tones of 'Land of Hope and Glory' resounded". The choir was "most impressive" in its singing and "perfect unison" prevailed throughout. "The experiment was in every way a success, bell tones of ineffable sweetness and charm adding immeasurably to the effect of the work". It was a fitting climax to what had in the end been a memorable afternoon.

The broadcast, too, was a great success: "a triumph of whole-souled nation-wide co-operation ... a wholesome stimulation of the patriotic impulse from ocean to ocean ... that will survive in the memory of thousands for years to come", claimed the official report of

the transmission, publishing numerous letters from delighted listeners testifying to the clarity of reception.