

Various short pieces written for solo piano:

Title	Year	Approx. Length
Adieu	1932	2 mins 45 secs
Chantant	1872	5 mins 10 secs
Concert Allegro	1901	10 mins 00 secs
Griffinesque	1884	0 mins 30 secs
In Smyrna	1905	4 mins 15 secs
May Song	1901	3 mins 45 secs
Minuet	1897	4 mins 30 secs
Presto	1889	2 mins 00 secs
Rosemary	1882	2 mins 45 secs
Serenade	1932	3 mins 05 secs
Skizze	1902	1 min 15 secs
Sonatina :	1889	
1 – Andantino		1 min 45 secs
2 – Allegro		1 min 35 secs

A composer generally makes his reputation from large-scale orchestral works - symphonies, concertos, choral works and opera - but his money from lighter, less significant efforts. In this respect, Elgar was no exception. While he regularly and vociferously complained of the penurious financial rewards he received from the works by which he is known today, during his lifetime he received a steadier income from royalties on short pieces composed for publication and sale in the form of sheet music to the home market. Whereas today, films and television, advertising jingles and other forms of recorded music provide serious composers with a means of making a living from which to indulge their more portentous efforts, in Elgar's day the most common instrument of home entertainment was the humble upright piano. This is reflected in the numerous small works he wrote for solo piano, for piano and violin, and songs for solo voice with piano accompaniment. Of the works created originally for solo piano, the majority stem from the early part of his career prior to 1890, or the very end of his life. The Concert Allegro (1901), Skizze (1901) and In Smyrna(1905) are the main exceptions. It is also curious that these, mostly miniature, piano works, were hardly numerous and were admixed up until 1889 with other small-scale works for wind quintet, for violin and piano, and for voice, in a small yearly output during Elgar's twenties that would have been even thinner without the demands of composing the "Shed" Music for wind. It has frequently been noted that, from 1889 (the year of his marriage) Elgar's output started to increase, the works began to lengthen and the structure increase in accomplishment. Far from using the piano to compose apprentice works, and then abandoning them for the orchestra, his two major works, the Concert Allegro and In Smyrna, together with

some minor works, coincide in the same years with some of his biggest orchestral achievements.

Some of the works for solo piano - piano versions of the Enigma Variations, Dream Children and Echo's Dance from The Sanguine Fan - are clearly by-products of Elgar's compositional method. Although the violin was his first instrument, he was also a proficient pianist. While he claimed that playing the piano gave him no pleasure, it was a far more appropriate instrument on which to compose works intended for subsequent orchestration. This left Elgar with piano scores which, with little additional effort, could be published to bring in additional royalties from home sales. It is interesting to note that the piano arrangement of the Enigma Variations was published before the first performance of the orchestral score, with Elgar urging Novello's also to publish Dorabella as a separate item.

But the majority of the works for solo piano were composed specifically with that instrument in mind. They display a variety of inspirations and motivations. For example, some, mainly early, pieces were composed by Elgar as musical gifts for friends and relatives. As might be expected, while the shorter pieces share a certain gaiety and rhapsodic charm, they have no great depth. Indeed, they are all of a somewhat similar style, suggesting that Adieu and Serenade, although published considerably later, are reworkings of much earlier pieces. As pieces written for the moment, these works have not survived into the standard repertoire. The life of some was prolonged by their subsequent publication in arrangements by Elgar for small orchestra - Minuet in 1898, Rosemary in 1915, May Song in 1928 - in which form they remain better known, while violinist Josef Szigeti made his own transcriptions for violin of Adieu and Serenade and Henry Geehl, with Elgar's blessing, arranged Adieu and Serenade for string orchestra in order that they might be broadcast by the strings of the BBC Orchestra in March 1933. Geehl, of course, was the man who worked from Elgar's short score to complete the Severn Suite for brass band.

Notes on individual works

Chantant (1872)

Elgar was only fifteen when he wrote this work, in the style of a Mazurka. The mazurka (Polish: mazurek, named after Poland's Masuria district) is a Polish folk dance in triple metre with a lively tempo, containing a heavy accent on the third or second beat. The dance became popular at ballroom dances in the rest of Europe during the nineteenth century. The Polish national anthem is an example of the form.

Chantant is longer than most of Elgar's early piano works but achieves this by simply repeating the principal theme with slight changes of colour. There is an interesting "chorale"-type interlude, a brief return to the main theme and a dramatic flourish to conclude.

Rosemary op. 12 (1882)

This was originally composed during a visit to Yorkshire in 1882 as a trio for Elgar, his friend Dr Buck and the latter's mother to play through. It was recast for piano, with the title *Douce Pensée*. With the new title, *Rosemary*, and a subtitle *That's for Remembrance*, the work was revised to become a piece for violin & piano and, at the request of the publisher Elkin in 1913, share the same opus number as *Salut d'Amour* and *Carissima*.

Elgar first met Dr Charles Buck at a concert given to entertain the members of a convention of the British Medical Association in Worcester in 1882. This proved to be the start of what was to become a life-long friendship, and an invitation for Elgar to stay with Buck at his home in Giggleswick, Yorkshire, soon followed. Buck was a competent amateur cellist and his mother played the piano. So that they could make their own musical entertainment during his visit, Elgar took sketches for a trio section for piano he had penned the previous year and expanded it, adding a minuet section to form an essentially complete movement for piano trio. On his return from Giggleswick, Elgar recast the completed trio section once more for piano, calling it *Douce Pensée* (Gentle Thought).

The years immediately preceding the First World War were pioneering days for gramophone recordings, a medium in which Elgar was a great exponent, conducting recordings of many of his works for The Gramophone Company, later to become HMV and then EMI. In 1913 Elgar was invited by W. W. Elkin, a publisher of light music, to produce two further orchestral pieces as companions for *Salut d'Amour*. In response, together with *Carissima*, Elgar wrote the intense, brooding *Sospiri* which Elkin considered an unsuitable companion. Elgar therefore turned to his sketchbooks and quickly produced an orchestral arrangement of *Douce pensée* which he renamed *Rosemary* (with the subtitle 'That's for Remembrance'), the name by which the trio tune is now most familiar.

In June 2007, Paul Adrian Rooke returned to the original Giggleswick sketches to complete a performing version for piano trio, close to what Elgar and the Bucks must have played in 1882. It was premiered in Rickmansworth on 6 June 2007.

Griffinesque (1884)

Hailing from the same year as *Sevillana* for small orchestra and *Une Idylle* for violin and piano (Elgar's first published work), this tiny piece was written for Frank Griffin, a piano pupil of Elgar, and is a short fluttering study.

Waltz “Enina” (1886)

A short, idiomatic though nondescript waltz in which the same theme is simply repeated throughout. Its sole claim to our attention is that it was the only work written in 1886.

Presto (1889)

Presto was a twenty-first birthday present for Isabel Fitton, having been written on 8 August 1889. Isabel was a daughter of one of Elgar’s great friends, Harriet Fitton, a splendid local pianist and organisational dynamo. One of three daughters, Isabel was a tall viola player whose name and instrument were to be celebrated when the sixth *Enigma* variation was dedicated to “Ysobel” and began with a viola figure that was a reminiscence of a viola exercise Edward had written for her. As well as occasionally helping the composer with checking of publishers’ proofs, Isabel showed her mother’s flair for musical organisation in the area when she took on the secretaryship of Worcestershire Orchestral and Ladies’ Choral Society.

A boisterous opening gives way to a short Chopin-esque episode and, as is customary with Elgar’s short piano works, both are then repeated. A characteristically sequential, rising passage raises the tension to re-introduce the original theme and then bring about a quiet close.

Sonatina (1889)

1 – Andantino

2 - Allegro

Wulstan Atkins recalled how, in 1932, Elgar was working on old piano sketches and completed one, Sonatina, before putting the others (Adieu and Serenade) on one side. It was originally composed in 1889 for his eight-years’-old niece, May Grafton, the daughter of Elgar’s favourite sister, Pollie. May lived on and off between 1904 and 1908 with the Elgars in Plas Gwyn, their Hereford home, and helped run the household and look after Carice. She was also a particular help to Edward after Alice’s death and, as a keen photographer, she added to the images of the composer that we have.

Sonatina was not published until 1932 and David Owen Norris compares the two versions from 1889 and 1932 calling the metamorphosis “a marvellous lesson – not just in composition ... but also in writing for the piano. Textures which were straight-forward in 1889 are refined ... to a point where the thought of Webern’s attenuated music is not at all ridiculous”.

The piece is short and in two movements. The first contains a sentimental, gently rocking melody that gives way briefly to a tiny contrasting section before reverting to the repeated first section. In contrast, the second movement is jaunty

which slows down for a few seconds near the end before gathering up the reins again for a gallop to the finish.

Minuet (1897) op. 21

A longer work than most other piano works of Elgar, it was originally written for Nicholas Kilburn's son, Paul. Of Paul, little beyond this piece is of Elgarian note, but Nicholas (1843-1923) was an iron merchant in Sunderland who was also a remarkable amateur conductor in Bishop Auckland and an early champion of Elgar's works. He directed all of Elgar's choral works from King Olaf in 1897 and Elgar gratefully referred to him as "The Saint". He nearly immortalised him in the Enigma Variations - there remains a fragment of a variation headed "Kilburn" - but recognised his friendship by dedicating to him The Music Makers. Like John Austin, the dedicatee of the Serenade for piano, he helped (though only occasionally, such as with The Kingdom in 1906) with correcting publisher's proofs of orchestral parts and was a lifelong friend, supporter and correspondent. Elgar revealed to him a certain amount about the mysterious dedication of the Violin Concerto and Jerrold Northrop Moore asserts that Kilburn "had tried to take upon the dead Jaeger's role of chief encourager".

The music is charming and in the unusual form (for this early music of Elgar) of ABACABA. The chief characteristic of theme A, the first half of the first part, is a little upward-turning figure, and the second part has a tune against moving middle and bass parts. After the reprise of theme A, the middle section contains a contrasting melody that produces a lovely, gently pastoral effect. ABA returns but this time theme B is shortened and the final appearance of theme A is very brief.

Elgar orchestrated it and performed it in New Brighton on 16 July 1899 with Granville Bantock's orchestra in a marathon although not unusually long programme that included the Imperial March, the Enigma Variations with their original ending, the Serenade for Strings, extracts from The Light of Life, King Olaf and Caractacus and the first performance of the Three Characteristic Pieces. It was published in its orchestral form in 1897 by Joseph Williams and in the same year as a piano work both by Williams and in The Dome magazine which appeared between 1897 and 1900 and was advertised as "An Illustrated Monthly Magazine and Review of Literature, Music, Architecture and the Graphic Arts". Elgar apparently produced criticism for it, and other contributors were Yeats, Housman and Francis Thompson.

Concert Allegro op. 46 (originally op. 41) (1901)

Elgar wrote the Concert Allegro in response to requests for a piano concerto from Fanny Davies, a well known concert pianist of the day. She was a pupil of Clara Schumann and a friend of Brahms, of whose works she was a recognised

executant. Elgar first appeared on a concert platform with her when she played the Schumann concerto in Birmingham Town Hall under Stockley on 21 October 1886 and he was among the first violins.

Although Elgar did toy over many years with writing a piano concerto, the work never materialised beyond his sketches (but see the article on the Piano Concerto elsewhere on the website). However, the Concert Allegro was given its true impetus following a campaign by Fanny Davies culminating in a letter on 6 November 1901, asking him to compose something for her in the next three weeks! "I am so disappointed if you can't let me have just a wee 'little Elgar' for my recital on Dec: 2nd ... I could learn it very quickly if I had it – and the Concert is not till December 2nd." What emerged for the concert platform was a much grander work than a "wee little Elgar", and he originally subtitled it "Concerto (without Orchestra) for pianoforte", then "Allegro (Concert Solo)". Unfortunately, the critics were not enthusiastic, believing the piece too long for its material. David Owen Norris speculates interestingly that the "classically"-trained Fanny Davies, who pencilled on the manuscript a whole series of changes that Elgar, perhaps not trusting his own judgement, incorporated, might have played the piece "at anything down to half speed", which makes more understandable the criticism over the work's length.

Equally unfortunately, the publishers were also unenthusiastic. Elgar offered it to Novello for 40 guineas plus royalties and Jaeger demurred on their behalf. Schotts also balked at his price and he quietly put the work away, although he did subsequently make cuts and other amendments, and the manuscript was altered significantly with, inter alia, pages pasted over some original ones. At that point, it did not disappear altogether. Elgar wrote on 17 March 1906 to Troyte Griffith, "If Fanny Davies is playing solos ask her to play the MS. piece if there's time if she would like to do so". There did indeed prove to be further performances in 1906 by Fanny Davies, who reported that Richter allegedly exclaimed that the work was "as if Bach had married Liszt!"

Meanwhile, Elgar had considered making an orchestral arrangement of the Concert Allegro as well but the score disappeared until 1968 when it was found among papers in the estate of the late conductor and pianist, Anthony Bernard. (It was Bernard and Billy Reed who gave the first private performance of the Violin Sonata on 5 October 1918.) What had happened was that Bernard had been consulted in 1942 on scoring the work for piano and orchestra, he opting to leave it as it was. But his library was bombed and it was not until after his death in 1963 that his widow found Elgar's manuscript five years later.

Diana McVeagh and John Ogdon prepared a revised performing version in 1968 that was premiered on television on 2 February 1969 and a recording was subsequently released. This version, whilst of the original length, did not go back to the originally conceived work and was, in effect, what Fanny Davies had performed. David Owen Norris has prepared and recorded a version as close to the original as possible, restoring the work to its rightful place in pianistic literature whilst regretting that its poor original reception might have deprived the world of any further original and substantial piano works, apart from *In Smyrna*.

This is not the place to give a detailed analysis of the twelve-minute work, but an indication of what to expect may be helpful. There are five distinct musical ideas that are all introduced within the first three minutes and some of them are repeated in a different mood or developed as well during that time, at the end of which is introduced the sixth of the themes, a cantabile melody very different from the other five. The reappearance of this sixth theme, in different guises and imaginatively developed, will punctuate the episodes of the rest of the work.

The second quarter embraces rhapsodising on the sixth theme and developments of the first two themes, with the cascade of notes that is the second part of theme 1 sounding distinctly like an organ. The halfway point is marked by the reappearance of the cantabile melody and the third quarter features a development of themes 4 and 5, from a cadenza on which latter the cantabile emerges again to introduce the last quarter. This time the cantabile theme is cast in different keys and developed once more, giving way to an episode that reviews themes 1, 2 and 3. The cantabile theme appears once more, the piano muses for a short while until it morphs into theme 1 that brings the work to an assertive close.

May Song (1901)

As a piano solo, this work hails from 1901, subsequently published by Elkin in a version for violin and orchestra. The first half of the melody, and the accompaniment to the second half, are founded on two dotted rhythmic figures that lend the work unity, if perhaps slightly overstaying their welcome. A short, lyrical second theme cedes to the opening material that Elgar ingeniously changes to offer a contrast and bring the piece to a quiet close.

Skizze (1901)

Skizze, the German word for sketch, was completed by 16 November 1901 and was originally published in Germany in 1903. Its composition shares the same year, therefore, as the first two *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, *Cockaigne* and the music for *Grania and Diarmid*, as well as Elgar's biggest piano work, the *Concert Allegro*. In fact, it seems to have been composed alongside this last

work, as an advanced draft for *Skizze* is dated 16 November 1901 and the Concert Allegro arose from a letter from the pianist, Fanny Davies, on 6 November 1901, asking him to compose something for her in the next three weeks. It was dedicated to *Meinem lieben Freunde* (my dear Friend), Professor Julian Büths, Düsseldorf. A friend of Jaeger, Julius Büths (1851-1920) was the conductor and director of the Lower Rhine Festival who attended the unfortunate première in 1900 of *The Dream of Gerontius* and took it to Germany, where it received the performance and the recognition it deserved. The gratitude to *The Dream's* saviour was exhibited in this tiny work, that was effectively lost until published by Novello's in 1976. The lilting allegretto melody that dominates the work starts quietly (pp = pianissimo = very quiet) and Elgar requests even less at the end, with a *più tranquillo* accompanying pppp! Another feature is the long pedal point on F that lasts nearly two-thirds of the work.

In Smyrna (1905)

Like *Skizze*, this was also a work that was effectively lost until it was published by Novello's in 1976. It was first published in the Daily Mail's *Queen's Christmas Carol Book* of 1905, and is the fruit of a month-long cruise of the Mediterranean that Elgar took in September/October 1905 in HMS *Surprise*, along with his friend and patron Frank Schuster and others. Unusually, he went as a guest of the Navy, his host being Vice-Admiral Beresford, Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet from 1905-07. Elgar's diaries show that, despite the rigours and, indeed, dangers of such a voyage, he opened himself to the myriad new sensations that such a trip afforded him. One of the places they visited was the ancient Greek city of Smyrna (now the Turkish city of Izmir). Jerrold Northrop Moore records that Elgar noted in his sketchbook, next to an early idea for the work, "In Smyrna (In the Mosque)". In his diary, he wrote "drove to the Mosque of dancing dervishes ... music by five or six people very strange & some of it quite beautiful – incessant drums and cymbals (small) thro' the quick movements".

Curiously, the music does not reflect these entries and is more of an episodic meditation than an attempt to write programme music. Starting with a shimmering opening and a definite resemblance to the *canto popolare* from *In the South*, the episodes are characterised by unusual but effective keyboard writing. There is no major climax and the work ends quietly. Of all the works for solo piano, *In Smyrna* is one of the best, rising (like the Concert Allegro) above being merely a pretty tune. Whether or not it conjures up images of the mosque, it succeeds in capturing a sense of mystical drama and shares with *Dream Children* the feeling of wistful innocence that is so typically Elgar.

The composer subsequently used some of the material in the Crown of India suite from 1912, particularly the section 'Hail, Immemorial Ind!', where Smyrna is transformed into a leitmotif for the city of Agra.

Serenade (1932)

The Serenade, along with Adieu and the Sonatina, was revised in 1932, when Elgar was working on sketches for an opera, the Piano Concerto and the Third Symphony. It was dedicated to John Austin, "Honest John" as Elgar called him, who was a friend for over 40 years. Austin was the leader of the Worcester Festival Choral Society (a position he took over from Elgar in 1897) and of the Worcestershire Orchestral and Ladies' Choral Society, as well as being a local composer (his *Romance and Bolero* was played by Elgar's Worcestershire Philharmonic Society in 1901). Most importantly for Elgar, however, was Austin's invaluable help in copying out parts and checking publishers' proofs of the composer's works.

The piano accompaniment's off-beat figure is reminiscent of *Salut d'Amour* and the pleasant theme has a little originality in its scurrying ending. The middle section, although superficially contrasting, is directly related to the principal theme, which brightly returns.

As with *Adieu*, the violinist Josef Szigeri made his own transcription for violin of *Serenade* and Henry Geehl arranged both these works for string orchestra in order that they might be broadcast by the strings of the BBC Orchestra in March 1933.

Adieu (1932)

Elgar's shorter piano pieces plumb no great depths, sharing a certain gaiety and rhapsodic charm as well as stylistic features, betraying the fact that *Adieu* and *Serenade*, although published considerably later, are reworkings of much earlier works. *Adieu* was completed in 1932 and was one of three pieces that he sent in September of that year to Keith Prowse to publish: the others were *Serenade* and *Mina*, the name of one of his Cairn Terrier pets (and, doubtless completely coincidentally, the pet name of Lady Charles Beresford, wife of Vice-Admiral Beresford, Elgar's host on his 1905 Mediterranean trip that gave us *In Smyrna*).

A somewhat trite introduction precedes a yearning middle section much more characteristically Elgarian. The texture is refined and the piece, having started in B minor, ends in F sharp minor, leading Elgar to point out on the manuscript to future pedants that "I know this does not end in the key it begins in".

As with Serenade, the violinist Josef Szigeri made his own transcription for violin of Adieu and Henry Geehl arranged both these works for string orchestra in order that they might be broadcast by the strings of the BBC Orchestra in March 1933.