

The Elgar Society

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The Elgar Society

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*The Editor does not necessarily agree with the views expressed by contributors,
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Front Cover: Elgar at the Gramophone, c.1933

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Presentation of written text:

Subheadings: longer articles benefit from judicious use of these.

Dates: use the form 2 June 1857. Decades: 1930s, no apostrophe.

Plurals: no apostrophe (CDs not CD's).

Foreign words: if well established in English (sic, crescendo) in Roman, otherwise italics.

Numbers: spell out up to and including twenty, then 21 (etc.) in figures.

Quotations: in 'single quotes' as standard. Double quotes for quotes within quotes.

Longer quotations in a separate paragraph, *not* in italic, *not* in quotes; please leave a blank line before and after.

Emphasis: ensure emphasis is attributed as '[original emphasis]' or '[my emphasis]'. Emphasized text *italic*.

References: Please position footnote markers *after* punctuation – wherever possible at the end of a sentence.

In footnotes, please adhere as far as possible to these forms (more fully expounded in the longer version of these notes):

Books: Author, *Title* (Place of publication: Publisher, year of publication), page[s]. Thus: Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 199.

Periodicals: Author, 'Title of article', *Title of periodical*, issue number and date sufficient to identify, page[s]. Thus: Michael Allis, 'Elgar, Lytton, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 84', *Music & Letters*, 85 (May 2004), 198.

End a footnote with a full stop, please, and never put a comma before a parenthesis.

Titles that are 'generic' in Roman: e.g. Violin Concerto. Others in *italics* (e.g. *Sea Pictures*; the *Musical Times*). Units within a longer work in single quotes, e.g. 'Sanctus fortis' from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Editorial

Although 2007 was the Elgar Year, and last year belonged to Ralph Vaughan Williams, we witnessed a considerable amount of Elgar-related activity in 2008. One culmination was the conference jointly sponsored by the two composer societies at the British Library, fully reported here by our Chairman, Steven Halls. The proceedings are expected to be turned into a book in the near future.

Among other contributions, Anne Crowther's is no less timely, given the recent establishment of a blue plaque at 66 Huskisson Street, Liverpool, the birthplace of Alfred E. Rodewald. It was unveiled on 15 November 2008 by the distinguished composer and pianist John McCabe, Honorary President of the Rodewald Concert Society. Anne Crowther's article nicely complements John Kelly's article at the centenary of Rodewald's death, which discussed him mainly for his connections with Elgar.¹ I am also delighted to welcome a major contribution from one of our Vice-Presidents in which Donald Hunt traces Elgar's connections with the Three Choirs Festivals. Dominic Guyver's *trouville* shows a different and endearing aspect of Elgar; while Lewis Foreman contributes to our occasional series on Elgar's forebears, with an intriguing question about Cowen.

Among the book reviews the editor is mildly embarrassed to find himself filling so much space. The scholar to whom I sent *Elgar and his World* was unable for personal reasons to complete the review. I am grateful to the editor and publishers of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* for permission to reprint my own review instead. Among the CD reviews, I hope readers will enjoy having two experienced listeners' views on the Lincoln Center recording of the Piano Quintet; responses to these or other reviews are cordially invited for the correspondence pages. I am grateful to our contributors and reviewers, to Geoffrey Hodgkins for his centennial pursuits, and to Michael Byde for setting the Journal.

* * * * *

Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore kindly telephoned to remind me of a BBC Radio 3 broadcast in December of three short plays by the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949); he also supplied the illustration for *LIntruse*. The 1899 programme note for the Variations, Op. 36 ('Enigma'), mentions that 'the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late Dramas – for example Maeterlinck's "LIntruse" and "Les sept Princesses" – the chief character is never on the stage'. The same is true of the third drama, *Intérieur*, presented by the BBC: all concern the deaths of young women. Given the superior pictures provided by radio, these dramas created a remarkable atmosphere of inaction and menace, somewhere between

¹ John Kelly, 'Alfred Edward Rodewald (1862–1903), this Journal 13/3 (November 1903) 28–35.



Translation of Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* (1913). Cover illustration by Jessie M. King (1875–1949), who trained at the Glasgow School of Art.

Edgar Allan Poe and Samuel Beckett; it is no surprise to learn that Maeterlinck appreciated Wilde's *Salomé*.²

All three dramas are filled with motifs more familiar to musicians from Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*: a departing ship, isolated houses, presentiments, and the death of young women. Like Elgar, Maeterlinck sometimes connected his works by cross-references. One of Bluebeard's wives is called *Mélisande* (Paul Dukas marks this in his opera *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* by quoting Debussy). Is the young Ursula of *L'Intruse* the dying Princess Ursula of the later play? A tormented relationship between child and grandfather is common to *L'Intruse* and *Pelléas*, and so on.

Maeterlinck supplies enigmas of his own. The *Intruder* is clearly Death, whose presence is felt only by the blind old man; the principal character who never appears is his daughter, the dying mother of a baby who cries for the first time at her death (another anticipation of *Pelléas*). More weird is the group of seven princesses (why seven?) who fall asleep at midday; they are all ill, and Ursula never wakes up. She is the principal character whom we never see; the drama is enacted by characters peering through a window which they cannot open, and through which they cannot make themselves heard.

Not, one might think, material much to the Elgars' taste, although Edward was perhaps more broad-minded in such matters than we normally assume.

Dr Moore reminded me that the letter to Charles Barry, which the programme note purports to quote, is lost.³ It is therefore conceivable that it was Barry, rather than Elgar, who supplied the names of the Maeterlinck dramas. Elgar can hardly have seen these plays; but did he read them? Brian Trowell remarks that *L'Intruse* (1890) appeared in English as *The Intruder* in 1892, but *Les sept Princesses* (1891) was not translated until 1905; if Elgar read it, it must have been in French.⁴ Byron Adams has documented Elgar's connection with the culture of decadence.⁵ But Elgar's mental landscape extended a good deal further than that, and whether or not the allusion to Maeterlinck was his, such morbid and haunting material is happily remote from the energy and high spirits of E.D.U.

Julian Rushton

² Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin, 1988), 354.

³ See also Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 269–70.

⁴ Brian Trowell, 'Elgar's Use of Literature', in Raymond Monk (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 216–7.

⁵ 'Elgar's later oratorios: Roman Catholicism, decadence and the Wagnerian dialectic of shame and grace', in Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81–105.

'Let Beauty Awake': British Library Symposium

Steven Halls

'Let Beauty Awake' was the symposium held at the British Library on 22–23 November 2008, to consider 'the influences of literature and poetry on Sir Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams'.¹ In preparation, I re-read *Elgar and Literature*, the volume edited by Raymond Monk, and I wondered what new might be said about the subject, at least where Elgar is concerned. I soon learned! Is it not curious how a single approach opens up new vistas of perception? – as when the light of a candle is placed before a range of concave mirrors and the consequent beam is many times stronger than the original light source.

Hugh Cobbe's 'full-juiced apple' and Roger Savage's funny and frenetically full fruit bowl illustrated for us the sheer range of Vaughan Williams's literary influences, especially the Bible, Shakespeare and other Tudors, Blake, and, indeed, Ursula. Roger Savage's careful ordering of the telephone directory of writers into three circles of influence, his consequent identification of the writers of 1890 to 1905 who chiefly engaged Vaughan Williams's imagination, and his acute observation of how the figures of the traveller, the wordsmith, and their consequent books led to Vaughan Williams's synthesis of, and equipoise between, Voice and Verse, was particularly helpful. Byron Adams concentrated on Vaughan Williams and Shakespeare, providing us with such *aperçus* as Vaughan Williams's hatred of 'Merrie England'. (I could not help thinking of Dixon's lecture of the same name in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, where his drunken debunking in a range of inappropriate accents put paid to Merrie England and his own career.) I particularly liked Byron Adams showing us the paradox of music pervading and civilising all strata of Renaissance Italian and English society in the midst of amazing cruelty, and also how Vaughan Williams transformed Shakespeare just as Shakespeare transformed his own sources.

Stephen Johnson, with enthusiastic erudition, described how Elgar, in contrast to Vaughan Williams, chose verse in which he could 'show himself' (as Elgar did in the Violin Concerto). Such verse was often, at generous best, second rate, but Stephen then illustrated how Elgar could add to it and transform words and music into great art – something Juliette Pochin reinforced by the example of *Sea Pictures* during the

1 This is the text of Steven Halls' summary of the first day, used to introduce the second day. It is followed by his thoughts on the second day, incorporating his envoi to the contributors and audience. A book of the symposium is to be published by Albion Press.

splendid evening concert. Andrew Neill, with Anna Neill and the recorded voice of Laurence Binyon, reminded us of the poignancy of Elgar's and Vaughan Williams's response to the European wars. The example of 'literature under pressure' in *The Spirit of England* showed Elgar, in my opinion, on top form. Meanwhile, the trumpet solo over hushed strings, sounding the Last Post for the dead in the trenches in the *Pastoral Symphony*, amply illustrated Michael Kennedy's description of Vaughan Williams's 'humanity, curiosity and ability to affect all he met'.

Michael Pope performed the feat of neatly linking Walt Whitman with the different generations of Stanford and Parry, Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Beginning with Parry's view of 'the artist's loyalty to his art', he drew together Parry's fusing of the spiritual with the secular, Stanford's setting of Whitman in his *Elegiac Ode* of 1884, the poet's underlying theme of democracy, Parry's notion that one 'cannot prolong a man's life but one can widen and deepen it through art', and his influence by Elgar's music and on Vaughan Williams's thinking. Stephen Connock then led Richard Hickox to entertain us with a good-humoured drawing on a lifetime of conducting, to reflect across a whole range of musical interests. I particularly liked Richard's comment, having studied the score of Elgar's 'Third Symphony', that he subsequently found that all the bits he thought were by Anthony Payne were by Elgar, and all the bits he thought were by Elgar were by Anthony Payne! We were shocked and saddened to hear of Richard's sudden death only 24 hours after this relaxed, happy and informative event: a sad blow for British music, and that of Elgar and Vaughan Williams in particular. On the day, however, it was delightful to end with a special concert that concluded with Roderick Williams and Iain Burnside performing Vaughan Williams's splendid song cycle, *Songs of Travel*.

For the second day, I could think of no better epigram than Vaughan Williams's aspiration 'to stretch out to the ultimate realities through the medium of art ... to see past facts to the essence of things'. David Owen Norris, in characteristically witty and erudite form, took us through the approach to making playable and more effective Karg-Elert's transcription of *Falstaff*. There followed a fascinating exposition of the debate between abstract and programme music, with the penetrating observation that the latter might invoke *characters*, but all music should achieve *character*. Clearly there were three masterly musicians to admire in the talk, K-E., E.E., and Norris himself.

Philip Lancaster talked of A.E. Housman's influence on Vaughan Williams, and added new insights to familiar material that amply confirmed the view that, early in his career, Vaughan Williams was raised to genuine inspiration in setting Housman's verse (despite the poet's disapproval of the cuts). On questioning the erudite audience, I was relieved to find that I was not the only person not to know *Along the field*, Vaughan Williams's 1927 cycle for voice and violin, and the brief extract played convinced me I should get better acquainted with it. Alain Frogley took up one of the themes of the previous day and examined even further the effect of Walt Whitman on Vaughan Williams, arguing that the poet had a more wide-ranging influence on him than on any other composer. Certainly the compositions and sketches covered in the talk added weight to the view that the optimistic, inspirational Whitman opened Vaughan Williams's creative floodgates, even if he ended after World War I more in sympathy with the pessimism of Thomas Hardy.

The final part of the day began with John Bridcut's introduction to the screening of his BBC film on Vaughan Williams. Any reservations that those who had seen it before might be disappointed by its repetition were swept away by the power and dignified emotion of the film, leaving the whole room visibly moved. This mood persisted with Michael Kennedy's keynote address, 'The light we sought is shining still: Elgar, VW and the inspiration of literature'. In the film, we had seen the young Kennedy with his friend 'RVW'; and now he was there before us, the living link between then and now, the critic who had done so much to further scholarship and appreciation of so many aspects of twentieth-century music. On top of the content of his talk, who better to chart for us the changes in reputation of two of our greatest composers, having lived through the years since their deaths? Like us, he had been moved by the film and the memories it evoked, and I was struck as his talk progressed by the humanity and wisdom he clearly shared with Vaughan Williams. Finally, Michael Kennedy was joined on stage by Philip Lancaster, Alain Frogley, and Byron Adams, for a panel discussion that brought questions and comment over a wide range of topics.

The whole was fittingly concluded with Byron Adams's moving salute to Michael Kennedy for his lifetime's devotion to music and his expert preparation of the ground for subsequent scholars both of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. A spontaneous and noisy wave of agreement, affection, respect, and gratitude swept over the auditorium. I was privileged to have the last words. 'How can one possibly sum up such a day, indeed such a weekend? I have continually had a sense of so much knowledge and wisdom behind the half an hour or so allotted to each speaker. I know I could have listened to each one for much longer and therefore concluded that *that* must be the essence of a good symposium. We shall each go away with our own separate thoughts but I know you will all want me to offer thanks. First, to Richard Chesser and Rupert Ridgewell and all their technical, catering and box office colleagues at the British Library; to Stephen Connock and Andrew Neill for organising such an inspiring programme; to today's and indeed all our speakers and performers – all deserve our thanks and applause. Finally, ladies and gentlemen, thank *you*. I sensed a palpable comradeship between our two societies as we journeyed through these two days, and I hope our rather more prosaic journeys home will not only be safe but enriched by the enjoyment we have shared this weekend. On behalf of Em Marshall and of both societies, thank you for coming and I look forward very much to our next meeting.'

Steven Halls is Chairman of the Elgar Society.

Alfred Rodewald and the Liverpool Orchestral Society

Anne L. Crowther

The sight which met my eyes on entering the concert room at the Liverpool City Hall was at once gratifying and interesting. Lounging in comfortable chairs were 200-300 contented looking men, each adding his modest contribution to the fragrant cloud of smoke which floated about the ceiling. The platform was occupied by some 80 instrumentalists.¹

The foundation of the People's Orchestral Society, which performed at Father Nugent's People's Concerts and was later called the Liverpool Orchestral Society, is usually attributed to Elgar's close friend Alfred E. Rodewald (1862–1903). By profession a cotton merchant, Rodewald was Chairman of the Liverpool Board of the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company between 1899 and 1902, and a Bimetallist.² However, the Thursday 26 February 1885 edition of the *Liverpool Mercury* states that 'Mr Meyder [of the] People's Orchestral Society, which is of his training, is on Saturday afternoon next to be a recipient of a Benefit by members of the Society'.

The People's Orchestral Society was made up of ten first violins, eight second violins, six violas, six cellos, four double basses, three flutes, piccolo, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, euphonium and drums. The leader was Mr F. Hartung. Karl Meyder, born in Bavaria in 1838, was a professional music director. He conducted orchestras in Buxton, at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, and at the Liverpool City Hall, Eberle Street. Performances included works by Handel, William Sterndale Bennett, Richard Wagner, Richard Wuerst, Alphons Czibulka, Charles Gounod, Wilhelm Taubert, and others.

A substantial number of the musicians were professionals from the Liverpool Philharmonic and Hallé orchestras, but they were not paid for their work with the Liverpool Orchestral Society, otherwise made up of amateurs. The quality of Meyder's orchestra is illustrated by its including such musicians as the horn player Franz Paersch (1857–1921). Born in Thalheim, near Halle, Paersch came to England in 1882. His first playing engagement was in Buxton, where Charles Hallé heard him and subsequently invited him to join his orchestra. He became the principal horn both of the Hallé and the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden. Once the benefit

1 A correspondent reporting on a smoking concert of the Liverpool Orchestral Society, *Liverpool Mercury*, Wednesday, 24 October 1894.

2 A 'League of Bi-Metalism' was formed in Liverpool, and Rodewald gave an address before the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. See Anne L. Crowther *The People's Concerts. North West Catholic History*, vol. xxxiii (2006), 36–40.

concert had been given for Meyder, Paersch left the orchestra, only rejoining it once Rodewald became established.

The People's Orchestral Society resumed rehearsals and public performances, now under Rodewald, in October 1886 (not 1884 as stated in *The New Grove*).³ Mrs Mathilde Loeb, daughter of Hans Richter, recalled in conversation with Jerrold Northrop Moore that Rodewald was Richter's only conducting student.⁴ A passage in the *Liverpool Mercury* describes how, during a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphony, Rodewald ceased to indicate tempo, leaving the musicians to themselves: 'Dr Richter has more than once adopted a similar attitude during performance of the same movement'.

By 1887, Rodewald was a member of the Music Committee for the second Liverpool Exhibition, held to celebrate the golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. The committee's work included acoustical experiments around the 35-acre Edge Lane estate. The committee of the previous exhibition (1886) had been criticized in the letters page of the *Liverpool Mercury* by the pseudonymous 'French Horn' and 'Bagpipes': the Concert room, which occupied the east part of the exhibition building, with a seating capacity of 4,000 and with additional room for 300 choristers and instrumentalists, was not ready, and the Pleasure Gardens, rescued from their former use as a brick works, were unsuitable for the thin sound of the Viennese Ladies String Orchestra, 'the music struggling to be heard over the crunch of gravel'. And 'Cornet' complained that of the 42 musicians in the Exhibition Orchestra, as many as twelve came from Manchester.⁵

The music offices were to be found in the main entrance of the Exhibition building, approached through the turnstiles and up the grand staircase. This time, in 1887, 49 players from the Hallé, De Jong's Glasgow Choral Union, and the Crystal Palace were selected. The musicians were paid as they left the platform. Music, including organ recitals and performances by visiting brass bands, was played between 1 p.m. and 10 p.m.. Programmes were available but they were considered 'worse than useless' as the afternoon items were incorrectly listed, as were also those of the evening. The variety in musical performance drew in thousands of people.

The change of name of the People's Orchestral Society to Liverpool Orchestral Society (hereafter LOS) came in March 1890. With the words 'wines and beers are conducive to health and happiness' delivered during his lecture to the Liverpool Sunday Society in November 1891, Rodewald made a public break with the ideology of Nugent's People's Concerts, continuing: 'what a horribly inartistic concern charity

3 Fritz Spiegl, 'Liverpool', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition (2001), vol. xv, 19.

4 Jerrold Northrop Moore *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 286.

5 Entitled *The International Exhibition of Navigation, Travelling, Commerce and Manufacture* and nicknamed *The Shipperies*. The Exhibition building, shaped like a cross, was shipped from the Antwerp Exhibition, and re-erected by Mr Summers of Central Building, North John Street, who also designed the Liverpool Greek Orthodox Church of St Nicholas.

concerts usually are'.⁶ Nugent's response came later, in 1899, in one of a series of interviews for the *Liverpool Mercury* entitled 'The poor of Liverpool and what is to be done for them'. He found that there were 'others educated who ought to know better in considering that drink was necessary'.

Adequate orchestral rehearsal time – 'not one or two but dozens of rehearsals' – was essential to Rodewald. Each member of the LOS received a membership card which clearly set forth all rehearsal and concert commitments from the beginning of the season and contained the following admonition:

Members must please notify Mr A.E. Rodewald at the Albany, Oldhall Street, in case of absence from rehearsal. It is to be hoped that nobody will absent himself except of course in the case of illness.⁷

The office for the orchestra was run by Rodewald and Co's treasurer, Mr Charles Rabus, a horn player in the LOS, at No. 50 The Albany, with the rooms forming part of the Rodewald firm which now occupied 48–54, South Corridor.⁸ The Society banked at the Liverpool Exchange branch of the Bank of Liverpool.⁹ Part of the orchestral treasurer's job was to collect orchestral subscriptions. This process is described by a current member of the Liverpool Mozart Players:

In order to encourage people to pay early, there is a reduction rate if you pay up by the first concert. Because some people are not available for every concert or not required, there is an option to pay on a per concert basis. People are always encouraged to make an additional donation as well.¹⁰

The LOS hired orchestral music, but performances were often hampered by the non-arrival of parts. For example, the oboist Charles Reynolds, principal in the Hallé and a member of the LOS, was due to perform Handel's Concerto in G minor for oboe and orchestra. When the expected band parts did not arrive, Mr Steadner Welsing accompanied him on the piano. (Welsing, born in Bavaria in 1859, was assistant conductor and accompanist to LOS and a piano teacher at Liverpool School of Music.)

6 The Liverpool Sunday Society's objective was to secure Sunday opening of Liverpool's museums, art galleries and libraries.

7 Stainton de B. Taylor, *Two Centuries of Music in Liverpool* (Rockliff Brothers Ltd, 1976).

8 'Rodewald and Co. American Merchants' was first listed in *Gores Directory* in 1883, occupying rooms 15–18 on the ground floor of the South Corridor of The Albany, Old Hall Street. Two years later Alfred Rodewald, lodging with Mrs Martha Harris at 24 Percy Street, joined his brother Ferdinand in the company, now listed as 'General Merchants'. On Saturday 5 December 1891 Ferdinand died of typhoid in Venice. The company continued as 'American merchants' until 1895, when Rodewald is called a 'Cotton Merchant'. The treasurer, Charles Rabus, was a Presbyterian at Trinity Church, Birkenhead. A member of the Oxton Rifling Range, he spent his spare time building model boats. He was also a member of Birkenhead Photographic Association.

9 By 1898 there were 32 branches of the Bank of Liverpool, with 1,926 shareholders.

10 Alan Jones, on the North West Sound Archive (NWSA).

Rodewald held a fundraising concert to enlarge the orchestral library, as a 'good set of parts, well marked and well numbered, is crucial to success'.¹¹ When during a concert Rodewald was presented with a gift from the players of a cheque for twenty guineas, he announced that he would use the money to augment the orchestra's library. The LOS shared its Librarian, the clarinettist Mr D. Johnston, with the amateur orchestra Societa Armonica, whose library was more extensive. In 1896 the leader of LOS, Mr Vasco Akeroyd, was also elected conductor of the Societa Armonica.¹²

To attend a performance by the LOS the audience could travel to the concert hall by tram cars, 'feebly lit by a pair of lamps, insufficient to radiate light the length of the car'. Alternatively, travel might be by cab. An appeal was made to provide a cart, supplying hot coffee, tea, and meat pies for the coachmen and cabmen who waited outside the Philharmonic Hall on winter evenings while concerts were in progress. The subscription for concert-goers to the LOS was one guinea. In 1900 there were 600 members and 103 performers. Once the subscription was paid, two tickets could be purchased for the Smoking Concerts (held at the City Hall, Eberle Street), and four for the Ladies' Concerts at the Philharmonic Hall.¹³ Members were asked to purchase their concert programmes, or 'Book of Words', for one shilling at the time of booking. A limited number of two-shilling tickets was available for the Smoking Concerts at the City Hall door. The Smoking Concerts were distinguished by a 'disregard for conventionality, providing a relief from the orthodox formality and constraint of high class concerts'.

A crowded, cultured and enthusiastic audience attended the Ladies' Concerts at the Philharmonic Hall. The *Liverpool Mercury* noted Mr John Finnie, Headmaster of the Liverpool School of Art, sitting in the gallery of the Philharmonic Hall, 'where I can get the balance of the instruments'.¹⁴ The gallery was decorated less richly than other parts of the hall. It was painted ivory on gold, and complaints were made of the dreadful heat and the draughts. The audience was heard to chatter on every subject from the general election to the price of coal.

Rodewald's preference for LOS concert programmes was that they should be relatively short. They might include an overture, and a concerto or symphony. Most works performed reflected Rodewald's personal musical tastes, being by composers such as Wagner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, or Parry. The principal LOS musicians had

11 Gerald Schwarz, on NWSA.

12 Established in 1847, the Societa Armonica (also a society of amateurs) gave its first concert in 1849. Until 1859 its conductor was Mr Charles Herrmann. Rehearsals were at first held at the Liverpool Institute, and later at the Caledonian School, Oldham Street. Rodewald himself conducted the society on occasion. Three of Akeroyd's brothers were in the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

13 The Smoking Concerts were later held at Liverpool Gymnasium, Myrtle Street. It was hoped special evenings would be set aside for the use of the Gymnasium facilities by policemen, volunteers and the Boy's Brigade. Women could watch from the Gallery on Thursday evenings.

14 Mary Lawson. NWSA. Mr Finnie was sent by the Board of trade in 1856 to introduce drawing into the curriculum of the Liverpool Institute.

the opportunity to appear as soloists; for example the cellist George Frederick Collinson performed pieces by Friedrich Grützmacher and David Popper.¹⁵ Singers with the LOS were often engaged through Sweetman's Musical Agency, No. 135, Chatham Street, Liverpool: 'Recommending without fear or favour only those artistes who are thoroughly fitted to perform the items set down to their name'. Harry Plunket Greene (Parry's son-in-law) performed songs at the concerts. In 1893 Rodewald accompanied Greene on an extended performance tour of America.

Between 1899 and 1903 the orchestra performed six works that were being heard in Liverpool for the first time, and six actual premieres, including Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches 1 and 2, the first March being dedicated to Rodewald and the members of the orchestra. This was performed at the Ladies' opening concert of the 1901-2 season, with Berlioz's orchestral version of Weber's *Aufforderung zum Tanze*, Glazunov's Fifth Symphony, and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, the soloist being Leonard Borwick, who later toured with Harry Plunket Greene as his recital accompanist.

The instruments owned by the rank and file of the LOS included a Stradivarius violin belonging to another professional musician, Theodore Lawson, who temporarily took over as leader from Vasco Akeroyd when he became ill with pneumonia; but a second concert was postponed.¹⁶ The instrument of another member of the orchestra was made by his father, a journalist: 'I showed a picture of it to the Leader of the Orchestra. I thought there was no point in getting it and him saying "I am not having that in my Orchestra!" He was very open and receptive'.¹⁷

15 Hallé orchestra 1884-1914, Liverpool Philharmonic 1889-1928. 'I shared the dressing room with the rest of the orchestra. They ran out of dressing rooms. They were for the conductor, the (other) soloist and the lady singer'. Conversation with percussionist Ian Wright of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. The 'other soloist' was Joshua Bell.

16 Lawson was the founder of the Theodore Lawson Quartet Concerts at St Georges Hall. The Joachim and Brodsky Quartets were among those that performed at the series. Lawson's father came to Liverpool from Whitby and studied under Hermann, and was a pupil of Molique in Stuttgart. Lawson's brother John was a pupil of Brodsky.

17 Philip Heyman, on NWSA.



Alfred Rodewald

Alfred Rodewald died of a massive stroke on Monday, 9 November 1903, aged only 41, leaving a gap in Liverpool's musical life that could not readily be filled; in addition to conducting, he was among other things indispensable on committees, wrote long articles for the *Liverpool Mercury* based on his experiences in Germany and America, and was President of the Liverpool Opera Society.¹⁸ In keeping with the beliefs of the Liverpool Cremation Society, whose annual subscription was 2s 6d, Rodewald was cremated. His ashes were placed in the grave of his American mother, Amelia, in Smithdown Road Cemetery, Liverpool. Granville Bantock replaced him as conductor in March 1904, with guest conductors including Elgar, Henry Wood and Sibelius. Six more works were heard in Liverpool for the first time. Dvořák's last symphonic poem *Heldenlied (Piseň bohatýrská, 'Hero's Song')* was performed for the first time in England, and Järnefelt's *Praeludium* received its premiere. However, Bantock's 'progressive policy may not have always commended itself to the entire body of the Society's Subscribers'.¹⁹ With his resignation in February 1909 the orchestra ceased to exist.

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18 There is an obituary by the Manchester critic Arthur Johnstone in *The Musical Times*, vol. 44 (December 1903), 794–5, with portrait, and quoting Richter's tribute to Rodewald: 'ein Lebenskünstler im besten Sinne'.

19 Report on music in Liverpool, *The Musical Times* vol. 50 no. 794 (April 1909), 264, which also includes a report of the first Liverpool performance of Elgar's First Symphony (under Richter).

Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival¹

Donald Hunt

If Elgar were designated for special study for A Level Music, a likely question might be 'Discuss the influence of Elgar on the Three Choirs Festival'. It could equally be 'Discuss the influence of the Three Choirs Festival on Elgar'. Either way, this would be a challenging question, from which it would be difficult to arrive at a satisfactory answer. Why should someone whom we now look upon as the icon of the Three Choirs Festival, when approaching the peak of his career in 1898, write so strongly to A.J. Jaeger that 'A 3-Choir Festival always upsets me – the twaddle of it, and the mutual admiration ... I should dearly like to see a clever man get up and upset the little coterie of Three Choirs hacks'.

How could the Three Choirs have offended him so much as to cause this outburst? Perhaps we should start by looking at how the young Elgar would have viewed the Festival from his home in the High Street, Worcester, which would appear to have been a dreary place in the mid-1880s, its cultural life minimal and largely confined to the homes of the wealthy or the local hostleries. And it would appear that little inspiration could emanate from the everyday musical life of the Cathedral, judged by a letter written by a visiting American priest in the year Elgar was born: after some forthright remarks on the standard of worship, he ended: 'I turned away from the white-washed cathedral, chilled, cold, sorrowful and dead at heart'. However, three very competent Precentors presided over the music of the Cathedral during the second half of the century, and there can be little doubt that the music improved, for in 1879 Dr John Stainer noted: 'Ten years previously I found the Worcester Choir in a deplorable state, but now I am much pleased with the service, and I shall even carry back some hints to St Paul's'. These three Precentors were T.L. Wheeler, Secretary of the Three Choirs Festival for many years, Edward Vine Hall, dedicatee of the song *Through the Long Days*, published in 1887 (which suggests that he and Elgar were on reasonable terms), and H.H. Woodward, another reputable musician, who took over the training of the choir for a period until the appointment of Ivor Atkins in 1897.

In charge of the music at the Cathedral was William Done, born at Worcester in 1815. A cathedral chorister and pupil-assistant to Charles Clarke, he never sought

1 This essay is based on an address given to the Elgar Society at Worcester on 17 August 2002, during the Three Choirs Festival. Hence it is presented without references. Dr Donald Hunt is, of course, the organist of Worcester Cathedral and a Vice-President of the Elgar Society [ed.].

employment away from his home city, and was appointed Organist in 1844, a post he held for the next fifty-one years, although over the last decade of his life he gradually retired from public activity. It can only be imagined what sort of impact someone with such limited experience could have had on the Festivals; it would have been a daunting task taking charge of London professional players and soloists, as well as an assortment of chorus singers from various parts of the country. Contemporary accounts suggest that Done gradually warmed to the task, although criticisms remained mixed right up to his last full Festival in 1887. Thereafter he handed over the task to Lee Williams of Gloucester, and subsequently his own assistant, Hugh Blair. Yet Done had a surprisingly wide range of musical interests, and several important novelties were introduced to the Festival repertoire during his tenure. To our ears the performances may have been uneven to say the least, more likely dire, and generally the programmes lacked inspiration. In the year of Elgar's birth, the only novelty was a selection from Costa's *Eli*.

Berrow's Worcester Journal implies that the Festivals of the time were more a social than a musical occasion:

The ball at the College Hall was one of the most brilliant assemblages ever seen in the neighbourhood: 700 persons were present and the dresses of the ladies were superb, displaying a profusion of costly jewellery. Towards midnight the company adjourned to the Chapter Room, where a most sumptuous supper was provided by the Dean and Prebendaries, after which the company returned to the Hall, where dancing was kept up until between five and six in the morning.

I have mentioned this because I feel that we should understand the nature of Elgar's musical environment. The pattern of the Festivals changed very little for the next thirty years or so. In a city like Worcester, the Festival would have been a godsend to the local and county dignitaries who frequented and financed it, for cultural and social life would have been moribund in the intervening years. And, of course, consciences would always be appeased by the charity collections for the Widows and Orphans of the clergy at the end of each concert and Service.

The Cathedral dominated the young Elgar's life, both physically and in a more limited way musically, for it was here that he absorbed the atmosphere and some of the musical offerings, poor as they may have been. The family music shop was a more exciting way of exploring musical treasures; as the Three Choirs approached the gathering anticipation would have been very evident, and presumably the shop had a stream of visitors during the Festival itself. And of course his father and his uncle Henry played in the orchestra during the week. If we are to believe Hubert Leicester's account, it seems fairly certain that the young Edward's first experience of a Festival was a rehearsal of Beethoven's Mass in C (or 'Service' as it was called), at the 1866 Worcester Festival. He was nine years old, and surely thrilled at hearing a full professional orchestra for the first time; no doubt the work being played had a measure of influence as well.

It is easy for us to understand the exhilaration of a young enthusiast on hearing real music-making for the first time. That first experience at a Three Choirs' rehearsal might well have been the catalyst for his desire to become a great composer. By the

time of his next Festival in 1869, he was receiving tuition on the piano and violin; we are told that, on hearing Handel's *Messiah* in rehearsal, he was so captivated by the violin obbligato to 'O thou that tellest' that he went home and learned to play it, and that this particular experience was responsible for his special interest in the violin.

The next two Worcester Festivals were fairly mundane, with little to appeal to the developing composer. 1872 offered even fewer 'novelties' than usual, and 1875 was a non-event – the so-called 'Mock Festival' – when the Dean and Chapter decided 'to hold a Choral Festival of the Three Cathedral Choirs only, without orchestra or solo singers, and to give a series of anthems with organ accompaniment only'. Their reasons were payment of singers, sale of tickets, and poor behaviour of the public in a sacred building. In addition the Earl of Dudley, principal benefactor of the restoration appeal – but no hater of music – demanded a termination of the 'grand style' of Festivals. Among the sparse attendance of that week was the 18-year-old Elgar, who was particularly taken with the organ playing of the great S.S. Wesley of Gloucester. He was also fascinated by Wesley's extended anthem *Let us lift up our heart*, which he orchestrated for Atkins in the 1923 Festival. There are glimpses of Wesley's influence in some of Elgar's music: among other similarities is the lovely falling tune in the middle of the anthem's bass solo ('Thou O Lord God art the thing that I long for'), which is in the same key, and has similar supporting chords, as the final aria in *The Light of Life*, and can be heard again near the end of *The Kingdom*. As an afterthought on this sad apology for a Festival, Elgar noted with some satisfaction that it rained heavily throughout the week.

Worcester Cathedral



By 1878, Wesley had died and the Festival was back on course, although the Worcester clergy would not allow a platform to be erected, thereby considerably hampering the effect of the performances. The fare on offer, apart from the usual warhorses, included such tempting morsels (but hardly notable masterpieces) as *Hezekiah* by Philip Armes and *The May Queen* by William Sterndale Bennett. The 21-year-old Elgar was now playing second violin next to his father for the princely sum of £4 for the week (approximately £210 in present-day values). He was clearly less than enamoured with much that he had to

play, for he later wrote:

We had been accustomed to perform compositions by Sir Frederick Ouseley, Dr Philip Armes and others of the organists and professors of music who furnished meritorious works for festivals, but they lacked the feeling for orchestral effect and elasticity in instrumentation so obvious in the works of their foreign counterparts.

Obviously there was little to influence the young composer, but we can safely assume that these experiences would have fired his ambition to show the festival authorities that in time he would produce something more worthy.

The three Festivals of the 1880s gave little encouragement, the only momentous event being the visit of Antonín Dvořák to conduct his *Stabat Mater* and his Symphony in D (No. 6). To play under this musician was surely rather special; Elgar clearly adored both the music and the composer's personality, although there is no reason to believe the two actually met. Dvořák was probably a greater influence over Elgar than is usually realized. It would not have gone unnoticed to the sensitive Elgar that more local prominence was given to the splendour of the Festival Ball than to the visit of this eminent musician or his music.

Before his marriage in 1889, his only association with the Festivals was to play in the Worcester orchestra (he did not play at Gloucester or Hereford), and he suffered the long list of trifles which littered the Festival programmes, weighing down the library shelves with unused material for years to come: *The Widow of Nain* by Alfred Caldicott, *The Bride* by Alexander Mackenzie, and *Ruth* by Frederick Cowen, only five years Elgar's senior and hailed as the saviour of British choral music. The Old Testament was stripped bare for new material to satisfy the appetite of British choirs. The standard works were still in demand, and there was an occasional highlight, such as Sullivan's *Golden Legend*, which created quite a stir, not just because of its quality, but also through the superb singing of the Leeds Festival Chorus. This probably taught Elgar something about choral sonorities, for he was mightily impressed, and it no doubt contributed to his grand choral design when ten years later he wrote *Caractacus* for that same choir. Of course, an observant musician with such aural awareness as Elgar would always have been absorbing elements of choral technique from the Festivals, just as much as he would be enhancing his skill in orchestration from the inside, for there is no better way of learning the trade than taking part in music-making. Even so, the choral techniques and sonorities exhibited in Elgar's scores are exceptional for someone who did not really sing. In my own early days of composition study with Herbert Sumsion, he would frequently take out an Elgar score to illustrate the best use of choral forces, drawing particular attention to his unisons and the special layering of voices in the fuller passages, such as the beautiful ending of *The Apostles*.

For someone who hoped to receive recognition from his local Festival – or indeed anywhere – Elgar had little to show that he would be capable of producing anything on a large canvas, as he was no doubt aware. So, having sent a copy to William Done of his most recent composition, *Salut d'amour*, which in contemporary parlance had 'taken off', it must have come as a great surprise when the reply came with an invitation to write an orchestral work for the 1890 Festival. A major orchestral

work was a challenging step for one who had not so far ventured into the realms of extended composition. For a concert overture it is no surprise to find that his models included Wagner; the Elgars had frequently attended performances of *Die Meistersinger* during their first sojourn in London. But *Froissart* is no less satisfying for showing this influence, as it includes much highly original material. The scoring is never less than imaginative and the thematic development is astonishing. Elgar's inspiration was the fourteenth-century French chronicler, who is quoted in Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*. The main criticism levelled at the work then and now is that it is over-long; and, to be fair, Elgar was worried about this. But I have never felt that there is any wasted material. The performance itself met with mild enthusiasm, but it hardly stood a chance in the mammoth Wednesday evening programme, which included part-songs, operatic excerpts, a cantata by Parry, various solos including an Irish ditty, the *Peer Gynt Suite*, and much else. The report of the occasion notes that 'a new overture, composed and conducted by Mr Elgar, a Worcester musician, created a favourable impression'. To play some of the other works that Elgar wrote at that time – the *Vesper Voluntaries*, *Queen Mary's Song*, *O happy eyes*, *Sonatina for Piano*, and of course *Salut d'amour* – and then to hear *Froissart* is an illuminating experience.

Unfortunately, the breakthrough anticipated from this major commission did not materialise. *Froissart* was not taken up by British orchestras (it was not heard in London for ten years), and even his home committee ignored Elgar for the 1893 Festival, despite the fact that his friend Hugh Blair was now virtually in charge, and that his cantata or choral symphony, *The Black Knight*, was arousing interest elsewhere. Any disenchantment that he already harboured against the Three Choirs authorities was intensified by their inaction on this occasion, but he did agree to play in the orchestra, as he said: 'for the sake of the fee, as I could get no recognition as a composer'.

But things were changing; the success of the cantata, written for his home Choral Society, and the emergence of other significant works, at last put Elgar's name on the lips of Festival promoters, and it came as no surprise that his friend Swinnerton Heap invited him to write a work for the lively new North Staffordshire Music Festival. Not to be outdone, and surely persuaded by Blair who had now become Cathedral organist, the committee at Worcester issued an invitation for a choral work for 1896, stipulating that it should be an oratorio. These two commissions produced *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* for Hanley and *The Light of Life* for Worcester, composed side by side. It was inevitable that there should be cross-fertilisation in textual images as well as in musical expression, and a close study of the two works reveals many interesting points of comparison. In some ways, of the two, *King Olaf* presents a clearer pointer towards *The Dream of Gerontius* than does *The Light of Life*. The latter feels more conventional, perhaps to satisfy the Festival aficionados as well as the choral singers; yet it has a distinctive style and the orchestration is wonderful, especially in the moving *Meditation*. The choral writing has something for everyone, but it is in the solo passages that we find the real Elgar emerging. He surely wrote nothing better than the wonderful final aria, although its dramatic impact was submerged by the rather conventional chorus with which he felt obliged to end the work. Christ is portrayed here as a positive character, not the

wimp that many of Elgar's contemporaries usually depicted. And what about that brilliant tune for full strings in his beloved key of E flat?

The original title of the oratorio was *Lux Christi*, but to avoid any suggestion of Roman Catholicism pressure was exerted to change it, presumably from the clergy and fiercely Protestant members of the community. Elgar agreed to the change with some hesitancy, but it was no doubt another nail in the coffin of any trust he might have had in the Anglican hierarchy. Fortunately the work was well received in a year which found the chorus in poor shape. At last a secure future beckoned, and none too soon, for he was approaching forty. From 1896 Elgar was present at all the Festivals, as composer, conductor, or in the audience, and he was always a steward at Worcester. But he retained a love-hate relationship with his fellow stewards and their committee, claiming that he could exercise no influence over them in programme planning. Although this was not strictly true, it is clear from his letters and comments that he still harboured a grudge, together with strong resentment of their continued promotion of works which he felt were damaging the reputation of British music.

* * * * *

By 1897 Hugh Blair had departed, sacked for alcoholic indiscretions, and had been replaced by Elgar's new-found friend and admirer, Ivor Atkins. Atkins formed a trio of young enthusiasts with Sinclair at Hereford and Brewer at Gloucester, and he was to guide the Festival into a new era with the now celebrated composer as a 'father-figure' to advise, assist, and no doubt complain. Sinclair had already twisted Elgar's arm for a composition for the opening service of 1897. The remarkable *Te Deum* and *Benedictus* have not achieved the recognition they deserve, perhaps because they resemble concert pieces rather than liturgical offerings, and so are difficult to programme. Although the influence seems to be Parry and the English cathedral tradition, there are enough Elgarian features and novel touches to make them worth close study. I find it incredible that the now nationally-famed composer had to suffer the indignity of playing the pieces through to the 'green' Sinclair and his even greener assistant Percy Hull to seek their acceptance; in Hull's words: '[Elgar] was as nervous as a kitten and heaved a huge sigh of relief when Sinclair said: "It is very, very modern, but I think it will do; you shall play it again after supper when Hull and I will give you our final verdict"'. How patronising!

These performances at Hereford were the first of Elgar's compositions to be given at an 'away' Festival, and, although no one could have predicted it at the time, they were the last commissions he would fulfil for a 'Three Choirs'. Only a handful of pieces were to receive first performances in the future and none were actual commissions. The excuse for this was that he was always preoccupied with major works for other occasions, but the reason is probably that Three Choirs commissions were deemed to be privileges handed out by the good grace of superior beings, and carried none of the financial rewards offered elsewhere. This obviously rankled with Elgar, and regular requests from the various organists were met with tactful excuses – or refusals anything but tactful, or even polite. In 1898 at Gloucester (Brewer's first Festival), the ambitious programme contained not a note of Elgar, the commission being offered to the Bishop's daughter, Rosalind Ellicott. However she



Hereford Cathedral from the South Bank of the river

eventually withdrew, prompting Brewer to ask Elgar for a short orchestral work. The response was immediate and terse: 'I am too busy to do so'. But he did suggest approaching the young Coleridge-Taylor, the first of many generous gestures of this sort that he made to encourage promising young composers.

In the period leading up to the First World War, the three festival conductors constantly hoped for a new work from Elgar, but he always disappointed them, even his home Festival, master-minded by one of his closest friends. Atkins must have been bitterly disappointed that there was nothing new for his first Festival in 1899, especially as expectancy had been high for the proposed *Gordon Symphony*. As late as May the committee reported that 'Mr Elgar found it impossible to carry out his promise to write a new symphony', and the committee decided instead to 'include in the programme Mr Elgar's *Light of Life*'. The oratorio had to undergo alterations following criticisms of the text, which necessitated some rewriting of the vocal lines, and it is that version which is now standard. Another work that was revised was the 'Enigma' Variations, premiered in London earlier in the year; Worcester heard the new coda for the first time, and Atkins's disappointment was offset to some extent by his being able to present two finished and refurbished masterpieces.

At the turn of the century a new style of oratorio was born, but the honour of its first performance fell to Birmingham. At that time there was little chance of so Catholic a work as *The Dream of Gerontius* being accepted at Worcester by those who had objected even to a Latin title for his earlier oratorio. The disappointment of that first performance and subsequent efforts at performing his other works by local choral societies prompted one of Elgar's most vitriolic outbursts in a letter to Jaeger: 'I am bored to death with commonplace ass-music down here – the bucolics



The West End of Gloucester Cathedral

are all right when they don't attempt more than eat, drink and sleep, but beyond these things they fail'. This broadside followed an earlier tirade against conductors: 'I find they are an inordinately ignorant lot of cheesemongering idiots ... finding my works too difficult to conduct'.

There was resentment again that Gloucester did not feature much of his music in 1901, but even so Elgar magnanimously orchestrated Brewer's new cantata *Emmaus*, when the Gloucester conductor fell ill prior to the Festival. He was to give similar help the following year to his old colleague Blair, when the cantata *The Song of Deborah and Barak* was included in the programme; he also assisted Atkins with the libretto and composition of *Hymn of Faith* in 1905. Not surprisingly Atkins was keen to include *Gerontius* in 1902, but we are all familiar with the problems over the acceptance of the text and its subsequent bowdlerisation, complete with judicious cuts in the music, noted in the *Musical Times* as a mutilation to suit Anglican tastes.

Now at the peak of his powers, Elgar was producing one magnificent work after another, and it must have been a great sadness to his supporters at the Three Choirs that none of them could boast a Festival debut. *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* were perfect fare for the Festival repertoire, but the third part of the trilogy, eagerly anticipated for twenty years and constantly requested, especially by Atkins, never materialised. The three conductors had by now probably given up hope of ever

receiving a favour from Elgar, and waited for scraps to fall from the master's table. One such came Atkins's way in 1908, after yet another rebuff ('I fear I cannot write anything new ... but I do have, as yet unheard, the second suite from *The Wand of Youth*, which I could conduct at the Concert'). Hardly an earth-shattering contribution to the history of the Three Choirs, but it was a genuine first performance.

The 1909 Festival included the First Symphony and another Elgar premiere, the chorus *Go, song of mine*, written earlier in the year on holiday in Italy as a sort of memorial to Jaeger. This, his most elaborate essay in part-song style, contains as much concentrated emotion as his major works, and gives a foretaste of the Violin Concerto, currently on the drawing-board. The following year at Gloucester came the famous run-through of the Concerto at a house party, and at Worcester in 1911 Elgar's arrangements for brass ensemble of chorales from Bach's *St Matthew Passion* were played from the cathedral tower. We are told that 'they rang out over College Green, the city, the river, and the hills – a sensational event'. To satisfy Sinclair in 1913, Elgar prepared an orchestral suite from *The Crown of India*, but it hardly constituted a first performance. In 1914 Atkins again had his hopes dashed: 'I have been wondering if I am really wanted at all, but I hesitate to withdraw entirely from the Festival although there is no inducement for me to come: you see *Gerontius* "goes" without me ... so do not announce anything conducted by me'. This seems unfriendly, but in the event the Festival was cancelled at the outbreak of war, and Elgar's vintage years were drawing to a close.

After the war, Elgar expressed grave doubts whether the Festival should be revived, at least as soon as Atkins desired. Parry and Sinclair had died, the latter to be replaced by Percy Hull, and Elgar was devastated by the loss of his wife. Yet, for the remainder of his life, Elgar was ever-present at the Festivals, where his music was regularly performed; indeed the Festivals at this time resembled Elgar Festivals. But no new works were forthcoming, except for the transcriptions that appeared in the 1920s, including Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in C minor*, Handel's *Overture in D minor*, and some anthems by Atkins, Battishill, Purcell, and Wesley. Elgar continued to give advice when asked, and sometimes when not asked. Young aspiring composers were suggested, and artists were occasionally criticised: 'the miserable yowling we now get from those who try to sing Bach', or 'do knock out that awful woman who mis-sang with the pianoforte'. He went to press to harangue a Worcester Canon who dared suggest that Wagner's music was too sensual to be associated with a sacred building, no doubt remaining bitter about the suspicion surrounding *Gerontius*, still subjected to the revised text.

In 1926, Elgar promised Atkins at least an orchestral suite based on his incidental music for *King Arthur*, but when the provisional programme was circulated, it came back from Elgar with the suite crossed out and the words 'Alas! No!' The report of that Festival in the *Annals of the Three Choirs* suggests that things had not changed in the forty years since Elgar first tried to break into the closed shop: 'It was the writer's good fortune for a few years to live within hail of Worcester and to note how three performances attracted more attention than anything else. The opening Sunday Service, the *Elijah* and the *Messiah* ... Let the authorities note these things and not scare away, by too many experiments in modern music, the love of the lowly for Handel, Mozart and Mendelssohn'. It appears that the bucolics still reigned

supreme.

A last impassioned attempt from Atkins for a new work was made for 1929. There was a hint that Elgar might oblige, being drawn to some poems by Shelley, but a negative response from the Dean, who considered the poems pagan, dampened his ardour, and the only reward for Atkins's persistence was the orchestration of Purcell's anthem *Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei*. By this time the new technology of recording had caught up with the Three Choirs, and with Atkins's refusal to allow it in Worcester, Hereford seized the opportunity. Although the results were far from satisfactory, it was a wonderful vehicle for publicity, and it declared to the world Elgar's inseparable association with the Festival. The new trifle for Hereford was the *Civic Fanfare* to precede the National Anthem, both captured on the original recording conducted by the composer; Elgar started before the civic party had arrived, and it had to be played again. Thus to Hereford fell the distinction of the first and second performances! While this was hardly an important commission, it was remarkable to obtain anything from Elgar at that time.

Herbert Sumsion had taken over the reins at Gloucester following Brewer's death prior to the Festival in 1928. His success prompted the famous remark from Elgar that 'what at the beginning of the week was an assumption is now a certainty!' The Festival at Gloucester was in safe hands, and Sumsion would become a noted interpreter of Elgar's music. A quiet, unassuming man, Sumsion never put Elgar under any pressure for compositions and, probably as a result, they became closer than many people realised. Elgar never responded well to people he called 'toadying', and 'John' Sumsion would not have fallen into that category.

The house parties at the Festivals were a feature of these years, and everyone wanted to meet Elgar, but he was not always at his best and could be extremely unsociable. Equally he could be the life and soul of the party, organising 'japes' and keeping everyone amused. On other occasions he would go for long walks alone, or with his friend Billy Reed. Frequently depressed and lonely, he would often be on the brink of refusing to conduct a performance, or waging a bitter tirade against the Festival authorities. He rarely sat in the audience, preferring to remain behind stage, or, at Gloucester, in the triforium. His conducting, never very clear or precise, became erratic; and he easily lost interest, especially if something had gone amiss. Sumsion frequently told me of occasions when he acted as a second conductor for the choir, hidden to the audience behind the Norman pillars of Gloucester. At times Elgar could be offensive to the choir (never to the orchestra), giving them little help and claiming that they did not know the work (which they probably did not); he would stalk off the stage without a word of thanks. But they still adored him. And so did the public – even the critics. It is worth reminding ourselves of the poetic description given by Samuel Langford of the *Manchester Guardian* after the 1924 Festival:

It is hardly too much to say that he who has not heard Elgar's music at these Festivals only half knows what Elgar is. Elgar is a Romantic spirit, the roots of whose being are in the past, in a way that cannot be felt everywhere as it is here. Worcester, the faithful city, is faithful enough to the association in which his music is born to give it a setting that takes the imagination back far enough to feel whence its strength has come. The

very walls cry out to us from the same romantic past that has bred his music. His music, heard within them, is redolent of England in the complete sense which in other places may fail it.

So if I had been examining the putative A level questions I outlined at the beginning, I would hope that the students would say yes, the three Choirs Festival did have some influence over Elgar, but most of this was confined to his earlier years. We could point to the childhood experiences at rehearsals of the music of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Handel and others; then there were his playing days, coming under the baton of Dvořák and others; and his absorption of orchestral and choral techniques and sonorities. Then of course it would be right to suppose that he would always have the Three Choirs scenario in mind when writing major choral works, even if they were not commissioned by the Festival; after all, he did say 'You must come to Worcester to hear my music ... the building does it'. Yet we must not forget that he almost certainly experienced better singing at Hanley and Leeds, and the ambience of those halls was no less congenial.

On the other hand, Elgar's influence on the Three Choirs Festival was immense. For over forty years he was virtually composer-in-residence, even if he wrote so little for it; he was conductor, advisor, listener, socialite and celebrity. Without his presence the Three Choirs would almost certainly have become a very different event during the course of the last century. A festival of this kind needed a figure of Elgar's stature at its heart, and none has appeared to take up his mantle, except perhaps fleetingly Vaughan Williams. Elgar is a legend, and we rightly revere him. Nowadays the Festival needs him even more; I will be bold enough to suggest that he is as important now as he has ever been in its history, as important as Mozart is to Salzburg or Wagner to Bayreuth.

There will always be the question of why he did not respond to invitations for new works. We should remember that many of the successful premieres at the Three Choirs during the twentieth century were not commissions, but works which came through the letter-box to the festival conductors, seeking a first performance. Surely as Elgar was completing his series of new works through the early part of the century he might have thought that the Three Choirs would welcome a premiere? I have mentioned the poor financial reward, but I find it difficult to believe that this could be the only reason for his reluctance to respond to numerous requests over nearly forty years, for he was paid little enough at other Festivals, and he would have received royalties from publication and later performances. Was his friendship with the conductors as close as we have always understood? Did he continue to hold a grudge against the administrators? Did he always feel uncomfortable with the hierarchy that dominated the scene, despite the fact that he was now socially on a similar level? These are unanswered questions, and I have yet to hear any convincing explanation: another enigma to keep researchers occupied for another hundred years!

At the 1933 Hereford Festival, when Elgar was clearly very ill, he took on a huge burden of work, ending with a memorable performance of *The Kingdom*. Wulstan Atkins gives a touching description of the occasion that tells of Elgar's movements on the podium, less demonstrative than they were in earlier years, when at times he

appeared to be carried away by his own music; he mentions the poignancy of Elsie Suddaby's singing of 'The sun goeth down', and the overwhelming effect of the final chorus: 'The sight of Elgar quietly putting down his stick after the last chord had faded away, will always remain in my memory'. Elgar had laid down his baton for the last time.

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An unusual view of Elgar

Arthur Marshall
Introduction and biographical note by Dominic Guyver

Occasionally an evening's reading will throw up some new angle on a much-loved figure, and some unexpected byway will open up along which we go intrigued and delightedly; so it is with the following excerpt from an essay by Arthur Marshall, in which he mused on Elgar and his favourite performers of 'light' music – and which is being reproduced here for the benefit, and amusement, of readers of the Elgar Society Journal.

From 'Christmas Crackers' in *Smile Please – Further Musings from Myrtlebank*

... however well stocked the mind, and mine is, as you see, exceptionally chock-a-block with intellectual treasures and the envy of many, one can always find a nook in it in which to harbour for future use this or that astonishing conversation-stopper, and a real stunner has recently come into my life concerning Elgar, and I do not need to add 'the composer' for all other Elgars seem to have been hiding their lights under bushels and only the one has, so far as I know, struggled gloriously to fame (said by some to have been at times *un peu difficile* but let that pass). I have garnered the fascinating Elgar fact from a far too long delayed reading of Osbert Sitwell's excellent *Noble Essences*, a series of personal recollections of such interesting and gifted people as Gosse, Firbank, Sickert, Rex Whistler and others. In his charming and adulatory piece on the noted, in two senses, harpsichordist, Violet Gordon Woodhouse, Sir Osbert relates that at a wartime gathering in the Woodhouses' flat in Mount Street, Mayfair, the eighty-seven year old Bernard Shaw, having walked all the way from Whitehall Court, announced, after a characteristic utterance of 'at my age you are either well or dead', that Elgar had liked to play, over and over again, the gramophone records made by Cecily Courtneidge and Jack Hulbert, stating that in them he found the secret of the perfect use of rhythm. Did you, once again, ever! And just to think that if only I had moved in the right social circles, I could have been relishing this item for the best part of forty years.

Detective work is necessary here, for all must want to know which particular records so especially tickled Sir Edward's ear. The choice is not, as it happens, as wide as all that, for Elgar died in 1934 and the Hulberts, though in their different

spheres already well enough known since about 1910, especially Miss Courtneidge (daughter of Robert Courtneidge, a sort of earlier C.B. Cochran), did not come into real prominence until, in 1923, the *Little Revue* at, where else, the Little Theatre, long since gone. By 1924 and another revue, the matchless *By The Way*, they were real stars, and so we have actually only ten years to cover. When did these dazzling talents first venture onto wax? Only the BBC record library could tell us, and I hardly like to thrust myself forward and make what might seem to them, with the strain of keeping Radio 3 so constantly provided with material, a trifling enquiry. So I must fall back on my own memory and resources and here I can be not unhelpful for in December 1926, the Hulberts appeared together at the Gaiety in a merry musical called *Lido Lady*.

Invited by my kind parents to name a theatrical treat for the Christmas hols, I looked no further than *Lido Lady*, where we found the Hulberts playing a brother and sister, Harry and Peggy Bassett, the former in love with Phyllis Dare, as was half the audience, and the latter happily affianced to Harold French, a delightful *jeune premier* soon to partner Gertrude Lawrence in *Oh, Kay!* and later to become (*French Without Tears*) a distinguished director. The piece was one of the earliest Rodgers and Hart hits and I still possess a recording, pressed, as we used then to say, in 1927 but as good as ever, give or take a few scratches, of a number rendered *con brio* by the Hulberts. It was called 'Try Again Tomorrow' and its lively lyric told the story of a rascally dance instructor who saw to it that his fee-paying pupils made little or no progress and remained, therefore, fee-paying. The number has a very rhythmic and pleasingly jiggy tune and the Hulberts, effortlessly enunciating and banging it out, gave it all they had, which was plenty. How astonished I would have been as I ceaselessly played this joyous record on my portable and jiggled a little bit myself, to know that Sir Edward's, I suspect, stately mahogany 'Console' model was churning out the very same sounds, for who can doubt that this was one of the Hulberts' records that he found so irresistible. Did he, when nobody was looking, jig a bit too? I do hope so.

Biographical notes:

Arthur Marshall was a much-loved writer and broadcaster. According to his highly entertaining autobiography *Life's Rich Pageant*, he spent a great deal of his time at Cambridge in the early 1930s in a star-struck state, either dreaming of hobnobbing with the likes of Noel Coward, Gertrude Lawrence and Jack Buchanan, or of being an actor. Following on from the irreverent skits he performed for his friends, about girls' school stories inspired by writers such as Angela Brazil, he found a bigger audience when he made his first radio broadcast in the Thirties on *Charlot's Hour*, a late-night revue on the Home Service, and it continued with his popular wartime radio programme *A Date with Nurse Dugdale*. He taught French and was a housemaster at Oundle, where he was affectionately known as 'Cabby'. His career as a writer began with the *New Statesman*, in which his Christmas round-up of the best books for girls was a highlight of the year and keenly awaited by those in tune with his delicious sense of humour (the essay from which the

excerpt is taken appeared in that magazine in 1981). To the latter-day public he was perhaps best known as a team captain on the BBC's *Call My Bluff*, the long-running panel game in which celebrity teams guessed obscure word definitions, on which he first appeared in 1979, and continued to do so nearly up until his death in 1989.

Jack Hulbert and Cecily Courtneidge, a husband-and-wife performing team, were true stars of their time and dominant figures in British popular culture, already well-established stage performers when they started making gramophone records of the sort that Elgar took such delight in. They performed together frequently, appearing in the 1930s in films such as *Falling for You* and *Jack's the Boy* (both with music by Vivian Ellis), and in a series of West End 'intimate revues' such as *The House That Jack Built*, which were frequently attended by members of the Royal Family. They took up other forms of entertainment, transferring their individual style of light comedy with song to the radio in the 1940s. Even in their seventies they were delighting audiences as serious actors in Dodie Smith's *Dear Octopus* at the Haymarket Theatre.

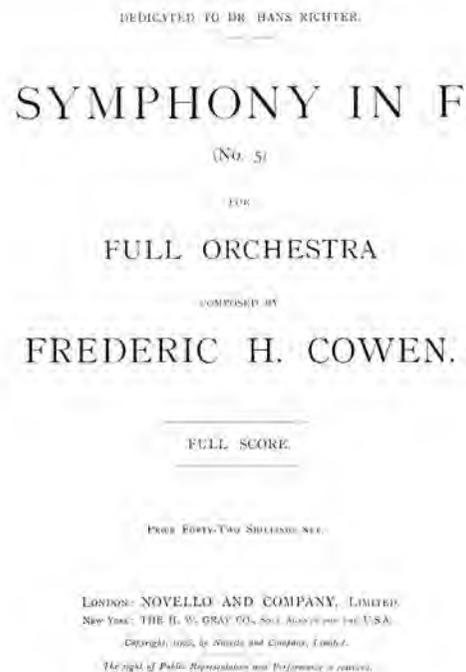
Dominic Guyver is the editor of the Elgar Society News



**Cecily Courtneidge (1893-1980)
& Jack Hulbert (1892-1978)**



Arthur Marshall



Ex. 1 (left)
F.H. Cowen, Fifth Symphony,
title-page with dedication to
Richter

Ex. 2 (below)
Cowen, Fifth Symphony,
p. 68

Elgar and Cowen's Fifth

Lewis Foreman

A couple of years ago the BBC Concert Orchestra recorded for future broadcasting a Symphony in F, the fifth of six symphonies by Frederic Hyman Cowen. I was fortunate to be at the recording session and was immediately struck by the second movement, a charming and lyrical *Allegretto quasi allegro* that takes the place of a scherzo. In Cowen's celebrated 'fairy' music style, it immediately suggested to me Elgar's orchestral textures in *The Wand of Youth*; and I wondered how familiar Elgar might have been with the music, and, indeed, whether he might have actually played it as an orchestral violinist. The Cowen is yet to be broadcast, but listening to it again on the first edit I must say the proposition that it might have suggested a sophisticated orchestral texture to Elgar is very persuasive.

The Cowen symphony was composed and first appeared in 1887 but was not published in full score until 1906 (the title page is Ex. 1). It was widely played when it first appeared. In the programme for its first performance by the [Royal] Liverpool Philharmonic (6 December 1887), the annotator described the *Allegretto* as 'one of those delicately scored picturesque pieces, say of fairy life, his fondness for which Mr Cowen has more than once proved by previous favourable examples'. Illustrated are the opening bars, given to just flutes and clarinet (Ex. 2), and two pages of full score (Ex. 3) illustrating the very Elgarian way Cowen then floats his delicious tune against this web of sound. I would be interested to know readers' reactions.

In his autobiography Cowen tells how he once conducted the Worcester Philharmonic in his own *Scandinavian Symphony* (No. 3), when Elgar was a back-desk violinist.¹ It seems likely that the Worcester Orchestra would have had ambitions to play Cowen's latest symphony, and I wonder whether Elgar ever played the violin in the Fifth Symphony at that time? If any reader has conducted research among the Worcester programmes perhaps they could confirm what Cowen Elgar actually played.

¹ Cowen, *My Art and my Friends* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), 144.

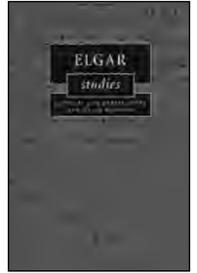
Ex. 3. Cowen, Fifth Symphony, pp. 70-71

BOOK REVIEWS

J.P.E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (eds.): *Elgar Studies*

I first encountered this handsome Cambridge volume in an Oxford bookshop, and the experience of turning its pages caused me to reflect that not once in my years in Oxford (1973–6) did the word ‘Elgar’ appear on the lecture-lists of the Faculty of Music, and that no tutor of mine ever suggested that Elgar might be an appropriate topic for next week’s essay. I believe that such indifference (or perhaps it was hostility) was then quite common in university music departments, and had been for some time: it was permissible to have an interest in Tippett and Britten, but only mavericks concerned themselves with Elgar and Vaughan Williams.¹ This attitude persisted, so that when in 1990 Scolar Press published *Elgar Studies*, only two of its contributors, Peter Dennison and Ian Parrott, were from university music departments (and Professor Parrott had retired). The others were well-known Elgarians such as Robert Anderson, Michael Kennedy, Diana McVeagh, and Percy Young. Three years later, that volume was followed by *Edward Elgar: music and literature*, and academic interest had increased (or emerged from the closet) to the extent that four of the twelve contributors (Christopher Grogan, Christopher Kent, Robert Meikle, and Brian Trowell) were full-time academics, and they were joined by Ivor Keys, who had recently retired from the Birmingham chair.² *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, published in 2004, included essays by Anderson and McVeagh, but full-time academics predominated. Now, only seventeen years after the first *Elgar Studies*, the situation has changed completely, for all the contributors to this 2007 volume are members of university music departments: three of them hold chairs, one has just vacated a chair, three are senior lecturers, and two are lecturers. None is a journalist, a freelance musician, an Egyptologist, a solicitor, or a retired engineer; but apart from Patrick McCreless, all the contributors will be familiar to delegates at recent Elgar conferences, and to those acquainted with the Elgar literature of recent years, particularly the 2004 *Companion*.

- 1 In fairness to the ancient Universities, in the 1960s I attended lectures on Elgar by Mr Radcliffe (Cambridge) and Professor Westrup (Oxford) (ed.).
- 2 Both these volumes were of course edited by Raymond Monk (ed.).



Cambridge:
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University Press,
2007
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£50.00 (US \$
95.00)

This latest volume begins with a chapter on Elgar and theories of chromaticism (McCreless) and ends with an equally wide-ranging one on Elgar's 'inflected' diatonicism (Matthew Riley). Between these impressive book-ends are chapters which focus for the most part on individual works. The respective contributions of James Hepokoski, J.P.E. Harper-Scott, and John Pickard are to do with instrumental works, viz. *Introduction and Allegro*, the Second Symphony, and the Cello Concerto. Hepokoski's reflections on the 'Welsh tune' will stir the memories of those who attended a conference at the University of Surrey some years ago: they usefully underline the fact that the New Elgarians use analysis not for its own sake but as part of their quest for the music's meaning. What indeed do those statements of the 'Welsh tune' mean? Harper-Scott asks questions of a broadly similar kind, in a chapter that recalls, and complements, the section on the First Symphony in his recently published *Edward Elgar, Modernist*. John Pickard's contribution provides respite from analysis and hermeneutics and emphasises the important role that drafts and sketches continue to play in Elgar scholarship. Vocal works are considered by Charles Edward McGuire, Aidan Thomson, and Daniel Grimley, who deal respectively with *Caractacus*, *The Music Makers*, and *The Spirit of England*; and although Christopher Mark does not confine himself to one work, his essay has much to do with *The Apostles*. Against this background of familiar, major works, Julian Rushton's chapter on the rarely heard Gilbert Parker songs (Op. 59) is especially welcome.

Where vocal works are concerned, the text to a large extent renders unnecessary the questions about meaning raised by instrumental ones. Thus Thomson considers the form of *The Music Makers*, provides a useful summary of the various quotations, and draws attention to what look like Elgar's self-allusions. McGuire devotes much of his essay to the librettist. Grimley, concentrating on 'For the Fallen', reflects upon mourning, and coins the happy phrase 'ritualistic circularity' in relation to that movement (he could have reinforced what I take to be his point by drawing attention to those frustrated V-I cadences in E minor). All the essays engage with music at a technical level. Most of them are analytical and assume not only a grasp of Schenker's theories but also the ready availability of scores (Thomson's commentary, for example, for all its helpful illustrations, cannot I think be mastered unless one is prepared to follow it bar by bar). It is a measure of the book's technical nature and its lack of biographical commentary that Worcestershire place-names do not appear in the index, though McGuire's detective work on H.A. Acworth proves that the New Elgarians can be workmanlike biographers.

In terms of book production and editing, one has nothing but praise, though the very first musical illustration (in, of all places, a chapter on chromaticism) lacks a natural sign before the second bass note of its third bar; bar 90 of the illustration on p. 158 needs a flat (sixth semiquaver); a flat sign pollutes the C major of Ex. 20 (p. 187); and Privy Councillors, not Counsellors, make up the Privy Council (p. 270). But these are small blemishes on a large and most impressive canvas. There is a very generous and helpful provision of musical illustrations and tables. Footnotes fight for supremacy over the text itself and in some cases (p. 146) win hands down.

Guardians of the sacred flame may regard as another disagreeable facet of modern life the occasional transformation into verbs of nouns such as 'access', 'impact' and 'progress' (notwithstanding the august precedents no doubt provided by the literature of earlier times). The use of 'dialectic', 'discourse', 'mediate', 'meta-narrative', 'performative' and 'trope' may perhaps be dismissed as an academic equivalent of freemasonic signals, as confirmation of a scholar's initiation into the craft; but some, perhaps many, will draw the line at 'propaedeutic' (p. 142), 'chthonic' (p. 207) and 'noumenal' (p. 231), especially those without a knowledge of Greek. Having to consult the dictionary is no bad thing, though such words tend to be included only in the larger ones, and even then the definitions sometimes leave one little wiser. No one wishes to 'dumb down' that which can only be expressed in difficult language, but there are many authorities (one thinks of law reports) for saying that complex matters can be expressed in English of lucidity and beauty, and I think that one is entitled to ask why some parts of this book are so much harder to read than others, and why the book as a whole is a tougher proposition than its predecessors. An obvious answer is that the New Elgarians are dealing with music rather than with bicycles, enigmas, topography and unrequited love, and the proper discussion of music is necessarily technical: it is hard to dispense with 'tonic' and 'dominant'. Another is the word-processor, for the finely nuanced English (and prolixity) of present-day scholars (in all faculties) would have been difficult to achieve in the days of the fountain pen and the typewriter.

And is there a third, somewhat Elgarian, answer? Elgar disliked being seen with a violin case and seems to have abandoned the instrument as soon as success came to him as a composer; but neither the composer's study nor the conductor's rostrum appears to have eradicated completely his feeling that Music was tainted by Trade, and evidence that he wanted to be thought of not as a musician but as a man of letters is afforded by such things as the straining to out-profess the other Birmingham professors;

the friendships he cultivated with literary men like Colvin and Shaw; and those faintly absurd letters to the *Times Literary Supplement*. Nowadays, artists have a tendency to regard origins in trade as a matter of pride rather than of shame, and music has become so respectable a subject that one can study it full-time at a university. Sadly, though, there are some who look on it as non-academic or alternatively as less academic than History, say, or Physics; and I wondered from time to time whether some of the contributors' abstruse English and quotations from the works of those who teach in other faculties were evidence of a discomfort comparable in some ways with that which Elgar experienced. Is the clarity of Tovey and Westrup proof that reading *Literae Humaniores* helped them not only with the technical business of writing but socially as well? Certainly, it is impossible to imagine either of them writing 'problematizes' (p. 127). If 'X problematizes Y' means 'X makes Y difficult' it is hard to see why the writer did not put that, or why the editors conspired with him to throw sand in the reader's eyes. Similarly, if one regards certain commonly occurring seventh chords, e.g. minor-key supertonic sevenths, not in those possibly somewhat prosaic terms but as versions of the chord in bar 2 of *Tristan*, one may well stand a better chance of being thought of as an intellectual. No study of Elgar would be complete without making clear his debt to Wagner, but I suggest that one does not hear that famous chord, and that Elgar did not think of himself as writing it, in the first page of the Organ Sonata (p. 10). (This observation, as well as illustrating the point being made here, underlines the need for analysts to keep Occam's Razor handy.)

What we call 'musicology' began as a pastime of amateurs with a passion for old music. Nowadays what was originally an absorbing hobby is a profession, and it is hard to imagine musicologists working completely independently of university music departments. What we call 'Elgar Studies' began as a pastime of amateurs (in the best sense of that word) with a passion for Elgar. Nowadays it is a territory occupied (but not exclusively) by professionals. One does not regret the New Elgarians' invasion, that Elgar is now studied in university music departments, or that no contributor to this volume appears to think that a Worcestershire sunset was enough to cause fifty pages of immaculate score to flow unbidden into Elgar's head. But one wonders whether volumes like this will reduce the Malvern Hills men to a truculent silence or whether there will henceforth be two streams, one musical and technical, the other largely biographical.

Actually, I suspect that the New Elgarians and the traditional ones are not as far apart as this book might suggest, for both are concerned with the meaning of Elgar's music, the former seeking

it through rigorous analysis, and by peering through hermeneutic windows, the latter seeking it by immersion in performances of the music, in the letters, in the biographies, etc. James Hepokoski's occasional use of a kind of demotic language ('No! It can't be lost to us!') suggests that all Elgarians are the same under the skin, as do this volume's many quotations from the canonical texts of the last century; and perhaps the gap will one day start to close. For that to happen, some of the New Elgarians may have to acquire the courage to express themselves simply, and some of the traditional ones may have to learn the grammar of music. Neither task should cause insuperable difficulty.

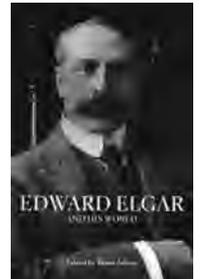
This is a scholarly milestone, but I think of it more as a milestone in Elgar's *reception*. Those who do not consider themselves to be New Elgarians should use the more accessible chapters (McGuire, Pickard, and Rushton, for example) as springboards for tackling the others, and although it is a pity that so many helpful insights are buried under the language of those others, the volume as a whole is one I warmly recommend.

Relf Clark

Byron Adams (ed.), *Edward Elgar and His World*³

The sesquicentenary of Elgar's birth in 1857 brought forth a heap of literature, some popularising (e.g. the Classic FM 'Friendly' Guide), some intensely scrutinizing the music itself (e.g. *Elgar Studies*, reviewed above). The most comprehensive parade of performances took place in the U.S.A. at the Bard Music Festival (reported in this Journal, March 2008). The volume of essays under review results from an admirable cohabitation between two kinds of interpretation (performance and critical writing) which the Bard Festival generates every year.

Byron Adams, the festival's Scholar in Residence, has edited a well-conceived blend of work by established Elgarians and scholars previously less associated with him. The essays are free-standing but organized in sections, partly by geography. Two sections are based on places: Part I is headed 'Worcester' and Part III 'London'. Part II is 'Documents' and Part IV a 'Summation' by Leon Botstein, artistic director of the Bard Festival. Questions about the composer's cultural ambiance, populism, empire, and



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³ This review was originally published in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 13 no. 1 (Spring 2008). I am most grateful to the editor, Helen Rogers, and the reviews editor, Rohan McWilliam, for permitting me to reproduce it here.

the war, recur throughout, and the essays in Parts I and III by Charles Edward McGuire and Rachel Cowgill benefit from being read together, not least because – one of several indications of responsible editing – Cowgill was evidently able to see McGuire’s paper before finalizing her own. In another revealing cross-reference, Cowgill alludes to H.G. Wells’s wartime novel *Mr Britling Sees It Through*; in Part I Matthew Riley’s ‘Elgar the Escapist’ moves on from themes he has dealt with elsewhere (notably in his recent *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, reviewed in this Journal, November 2008), by an intriguing comparison with Wells’s novel of escape, *The History of Mr Polly*. Wells, although only a few years younger than Elgar, is perhaps not the obvious literary parallel, but if anything that makes comparison the more instructive. Cowgill’s splendid exposition is concentrated on Elgar’s Binyon triptych *The Spirit of England*, a work she identifies as a ‘War Requiem’, in which Elgar embodied a national mood – ‘righteous idealism tempered by grief’ – while reengaging with essentially Catholic ‘eschatological themes familiar from *The Dream of Gerontius* ...: afterlife, purgatory, and redemption’, thus exploring ‘aspects of his own spirituality in music without disturbing Protestant sensibilities’.

Byron Adams has never been afraid to raise the hackles of the Elgar-lover who associates the composer mainly with an imagined Edwardian pastoral age of gold, and particularly with a brand of nationalism to which, in his musical practice, he made virtually no contribution. That Elgar’s music is ‘quintessentially English’ is a commonplace, but not necessarily a truism; beside Holst and Vaughan Williams, for two, he may be heard as quintessentially, and eclectically, European. Adams positions him realistically in a trenchant introduction, which also points out how this lover of the West Country ‘ached to get to London’. In his own chapter, ‘The Persistence of Memory’, Adams emphasises the apparently working-class origins of Elgar’s parents, although for the period of his upbringing the more usual ‘lower middle class’ seems right (not manually labouring, some intellectual interests, with servants), as does the discussion of Elgar’s self-education, which (and not only in music) was more important than his schooling. His mother may have been an upwardly mobile barmaid, but she loved Longfellow and from that literary influence her son never recovered. Adams also discourses brilliantly on contemporary perceptions of the musically beautiful, and on Elgar’s musical self-revelations.

Much attention has been devoted to Elgar’s religious beliefs, and even to the question – which cannot have affected his creativity – of whether he died in his mother’s Roman faith. McGuire convincingly demonstrates that however rocky his belief, Elgar

remained culturally Catholic throughout his life, an important insight given his extraordinary blend of outsider and aspirant figure of the Establishment. Another problematic aspect of Elgar for the school of gentleman-composers – the friendly Parry as much as the hostile Stanford – was Elgar’s involvement with popular culture. This is rigorously explored by Deborah Heckert and Nalini Ghuman in Part III, but Part I already contains Daniel M. Grimley’s insightful essay on populism, concentrating on his marches and exquisitely tailored miniatures, with a concluding discussion of related elements in *Falstaff*, the wonderful symphonic poem which, however, can hardly be considered ‘popular’.

In Part II Alison I. Shiel presents a correspondence about the Violin Concerto with Charles Sanford Terry, and Aidan J. Thomson contributes a lengthy collection of early reviews of *The Apostles* in British periodicals. In Part III, Thomson in ‘Elgar’s Critical Critics’ provides a timely reminder that the composer, widely perceived today as a Colossus of the English musical renaissance, was frequently and sometimes vituperatively rejected by his contemporaries – fellow musicians as well as critics. Sophie Fuller considers a private world which Elgar frequented; while he composed for the public arena (concert hall, choral festival, and theatre) his music was also heard in the feminised salon. (In an otherwise admirable account of this world, I think she misreads the incident, recounted by Elgar, where to his relief, he, as a pedestrian, was not observed by three people in a motor-car – a fact in itself hardly surprising, as presumably he refrained from waving. One of them was his friend and patron Frank Schuster, whose protégé had acquired the girl-friend Elgar alludes to as ‘a bit of fluff’. This was probably not discomfort about his own social standing, as Fuller seems to imply; the sense of shame was on behalf of Schuster, lowered by association with the couple, who eventually inherited ‘The Hut’.)

Elgar’s perceived vulgarity and ungentlemanly connection with popular culture is illuminated by Deborah Heckert’s excellent study of the history of the Coliseum, a music hall devoted to a post-Victorian assimilation of high culture. This follows, but might profitably be read before, Nalini Ghuman’s fine essay on *The Crown of India*. The masque was composed for George V’s Delhi Durbar, an event intended to shore up an Indian Empire threatened by growing nationalism; it offered London an idealized image of imperial benevolence, unencumbered by political realism, not to say violence. One question that exercises students of Elgar’s paradoxical personality is: how seriously did he (as opposed to the Indian-born Lady Elgar) take this rodomontade? Where the words, and the overall concept, are concerned Ghuman’s epithet

'embarrassing' could be polite understatement. Yet perhaps Elgar went along with it for more than the financial return. He disliked the Liberal government and was happy enough to reflect the views of the class into which he had married. However, the music itself, about which Ghuman makes some fascinating observations, could tell another story. She rightly identifies the 'March of the Moghul Emperors' as an exoticised ceremonial Polonaise (one might add that the warriors, presumably Indian, dance a waltz). Parts of *The Crown of India* resemble Sullivan's musical response to Gilbert's political satire (which like most of its kind failed to kill off its target); and the association of European dignitaries with a Minuet, a dance neither modish nor British, could suggest an inattention to detail that is itself mildly subversive. Ghuman doesn't mention that the dancing girls roused Elgar to an old-fashioned type of 'Turkish' music well known from Mozart or Weber; nor that that in the song 'Hail Immemorial Ind!' he orchestrated parts of *In Smyrna*, inspired by a much nearer East. The point is not the obvious one that Elgar's music cannot be taken seriously as an evocation of India; rather that his lack of interest in such authenticity argues a detached, even cynical, view of the business of rapidly composing the masque, in marked contrast to projects such as the symphonies that took him years to bring to fruition, and which certainly mattered more to him despite their unfortunate inability to generate income. He seems to have taken few steps to preserve the music of his masque.⁴

Following this considerable array of scholarly and musically informed commentary, Leon Botstein's lengthy concluding essay is disappointingly loose, and might have benefited from editorial intervention, and indeed authorial exposure (apparently lacking) to the rest of the book, which has already covered much of the same ground. There are some fine lines: 'Elgar managed to lend imperial conceits not only a sense of propriety but also, through affecting beauty, justification'. But too many disputable utterances are thrown out *ex cathedra*. A curious lack of historical perspective could have been corrected by reading the critics cited by Thomson; oddly, Botstein suggests that Elgar resisted 'dominant forms of modernism', as if, during most of the years of his greatest harvest (from the Variations and *Gerontius* to the First Symphony), the modernisms of Schoenberg and Stravinsky were known in Britain (in so far as they even existed in 1908). Instead he seems to measure Elgar by the modernisms that followed the two World Wars, thus confusing his creative development, unquestionably modern within his own culture and by no means conservative

4 See Anthony Payne's discussion with Geoffrey Hodgkins, this Journal 15/6 (November 2008), 9–25.

alongside his continental, never mind British, contemporaries, with later reception in an entirely different cultural environment. More detailed expositions of Arnold, Longfellow, Ruskin, and the pre-Raphaelites are certainly relevant to understanding Elgar, but merit a sharper scholarly focus; nevertheless there is a welcome emphasis on Elgar's interest, despite his social aspirations, in raising the culture of the general populace. The extent of his study around the composer does Botstein credit and no doubt helped him in preparing a cycle of outstanding Elgar performances at the Bard Festival. If these regrettably have vanished into air, at least the essays remain; none lacks interest, and several considerably advance our understanding of the man and his environs, and thus of his music as well. Anyone interested in Elgar will need to read this book, and it has much to offer readers with a more general interests in the period and its culture.

Julian Rushton

Relf Clark: *Elgar's Consecutive Fifths and Other Essays*

Professional musicologists cannot afford to ignore those who, labouring in some other sphere, are drawn by enthusiasm into scholarly investigations, even into musicological minutiae. For the individual case, the detection of error, and the – if I may be forgiven the apparent oxymoron – outsider's insight, are ignored at peril. This meditation is induced by Relf Clark's new set of essays.⁵ In his introduction, he describes them as 're-workings of lectures given at meetings of the London Branch of the Elgar Society'; its members are among those cordially thanked, along with Arthur Reynolds for some of the photographs that people the volume, and Jerrold Northrop Moore, particularly for his editions of Elgar's letters; but as a true investigator, Clark is not content to rely on the labours of others.

The four essays that constitute the bulk of the volume are not of equal novelty, so I shall work backwards. The fourth, 'Intimations of a Symphony', usefully juxtaposes information concerning 'less than a year of Elgar's life' (October 1903 to June 1904). Why did Elgar not write a symphony before 1908? Part of the answer (p. 64) is that 'Elgar seems to have been a lazy man at heart ... throughout his life, he wasted time through the pursuit of agendas that clashed with his artistic one'. I can't really accept this harsh judgement, if only because, when seized by an idea, Elgar worked

5 Obtainable from Positif Press, 130 Southfield Road, Oxford OX4 1PA.



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64 pp.

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at white heat. One doesn't consider Wagner idle because of the five-year gap between *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*. Perhaps, before 1908, the time wasn't ripe for a symphony, even though this lack led Elgar into hot water with Ernest Newman for acclaiming the symphony without a programme as the highest form of musical art, before actually writing one. Newman was both right and wrong; awe of the genre made it hard for Elgar to write a symphony, as earlier it had for Brahms. The same could be said of the string quartet, also held in awe since Beethoven, and a medium Elgar contemplated repeatedly, if his sketches are to be trusted, before finally completing one.

The third essay, 'The So-called "Elgar Organ"', takes its starting-point from a seriously misleading appeal published in the *Musical Times* in 1969 on behalf of the organ of St George's Catholic Church, Worcester. No doubt this was a good cause, but the implication that Elgar had played the instrument might be queried by the Advertising Standards Authority, as it was built in 1901. Clark carefully details organs actually used by William and Edward Elgar, on which a considerable amount of information is imparted, before reaching the 1901 instrument, 'dedicated and blessed on 8 May 1970' following the appeal. With due acknowledgement to prior work by Christopher Kent, Clark identifies the 'origins and perpetuation' of a myth, that the instrument now in place has much connection with Elgar at all. Which is a pity; but facts must be faced.

The second essay, 'Firapeel Again: further reflections on Ivor Algonon Atkins', is a delightful investigation into the origins of this close friend of Elgar (much of their correspondence is of course contained in Wulstan Atkins's book). It begins with a full account of Atkins's father, himself an organist and composer, and a telling contrast between his social position and that of the Elgar parents. We also learn something of the organ that Atkins senior played in Cardiff during his son's period of upbringing. Ivor Atkins himself, who seems to have been unexpectedly crabby at times, was not only a gifted organist and choirmaster, but also a musicologist who contributed to strengthening the Bach revival in this country. Clark details other scholarly activities, to which I can add that he is credited with arranging the English words for *The Blessed Damozel*; Atkins 'adapted to the original poem of Dante Gabriel Rossetti' the beautiful setting by Debussy of a French translation of Rossetti's poem.⁶ This is a first-rate contribution to Elgariana, and a fitting tribute to one of the great Three Choir Cathedral organists.

It is an interesting indication of Elgar's views on church music

6 Debussy's score was first published in 1892.

that he was apparently happy to write Anglican chants, the subject of the first (and title) essay, 'Elgar's Consecutive Fifths'. Here Clark shows full appreciation of the kind of musical schooling Elgar obtained largely by his own efforts, while suggesting that he must have had some tuition from his father. The rules on consecutive fifths may seem abstruse, and it is remarkable what a fuss people used to make of such grammatical lapses. For this essay the reader needs musical knowledge to read the examples, and Clark's suggested alternatives (which suggest the professorial blue pencil). One objective is to test Elgar's music against something less characteristic, thereby isolating the composer's fingerprints. Not everything is fully spelled out, and it may be a problem for readers to appreciate the effects of crossing parts, which are not apparent when the chants are played on a keyboard instrument. Clark justifiably calls the first chant he quotes 'moderate and somewhat unsatisfactory'; but the problem is not the consecutive fifths, technically venial between middle parts (Bach did as much from time to time, as did Mozart). The problem is that the chant lacks imagination, and that imagination is possible within this extremely restricted form is clear from other, finer examples. Elgar's use of a second inversion dominant seventh is rightly singled out as a fingerprint. Clark rejects one of his own speculative alternatives (p. 12, ex. 2B) because it heads off too far 'into sharp territory'; but it also changes Elgar's tune and loses a melodic fingerprint in the process. All this is an interestingly different view of these pieces from that of John Butt, who makes a comparison with Elgar's Roman Catholic Litany settings.⁷

In a brief Coda, Clark reminds us of his opening gambit, Elgar's rebuke to the Novello reader who queried the consecutive fifths in his first chant. In a letter 'not quoted by Wulstan Atkins, or apparently in any other source' (p. 16), Ivor Atkins seems to have pointed out some consecutive fifths in *For the Fallen*, which Clark helpfully identifies in the music (from fig. 19: 'They shall not grow old ...'). The 'forbidden' parallel is between alto and tenor, a procedure different from openly doubling a melody in fifths, as Elgar had done in *The Apostles*.⁸ And by this date, Vaughan Williams (in for instance *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*) was lushly exploiting such once forbidden parallelisms. Clark adds: 'one wonders whether the matter was raised in a teasing way'; he quotes Elgar's response ('what ARE we to do?'), which surely confirms that it was indeed

7 John Butt, 'Elgar's Church and Organ Music', in Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 110–1.

8 *The Apostles*, scene vi, at after fig. 203 ('Why seek ye the living among the dead?'); perhaps Elgar had heard and liked a similar procedure in the third act of Puccini's *La bohème*.

a tease. Did Elgar know that Brahms, whom he greatly admired, made a collection of consecutive fifths and octaves drawn from the work of the great masters? probably not, as it was not yet published.⁹ I am reminded of Beethoven answering a similar, and perhaps seriously intended, impertinence; informed that certain theorists forbade some grammatically risky progressions in his music, the great composer responded, definitively, 'I allow them'.

Julian Rushton



Helen Fry: *Music & Men – The Life and Loves of Harriet Cohen*

I've always had something of a soft spot for Harriet Cohen, sparked at a tender age, I'm happy to confess, by seeing a photograph of her in seductive pose and little else. Shaw rightly said of it: 'What a photograph! Men have been divorced for less!' It is faithfully reproduced, along with many others, in Helen Fry's book. I have also enjoyed Cohen's recording of the Elgar Piano Quintet for many years, and recently I was delighted to obtain, quite fortuitously, a copy of Percy Young's *Letters of Edward Elgar* inscribed 'To my dearest Elena from Elgar's "Harrietinachetta" London '65', which contains a number of Elgar's letters to Cohen. These were among some 3,000 bequeathed by her to the British Library, with strict instructions to prevent access for thirty years after her death. It is these letters, now examined in detail for the first time, that form the backbone of the book. So it was with a considerable sense of anticipation that I began to read, hoping to learn considerably more about Cohen's relationship with Elgar, as well as her life in general.

I have to declare myself sadly disappointed. For the majority of its pages the book reads like something more normally found on the top shelves of newsagents. (Having been rather tall at a tender age, I found it easy to reach the top shelf!) The fault, it must be admitted, lies as much with Harriet Cohen as with Helen Fry. She comes across as a singularly unattractive character, whatever may have been her personal charms. Two-thirds of the letters are to or from Arnold Bax, with whom she had an affair lasting nearly forty years. After a (short) while one tires of reading endless variations of 'I longed to be folded in your arms with your kisses hot on my mouth', and Bax's replies of 'I would love to cuddle your lovely and enticing body against mine tonight ... imagine my hands stroking

you next time you go to bed'. But Bax was by no means her only lover, and so there are plenty more of a similar nature, all filed by Cohen in a trunk labelled 'Great loves and adorers'.

All this would be more bearable had the book itself been better written and produced. Unfortunately the author seems to have armed herself with little more than Lewis Foreman's superb biography of Bax, Harriet Cohen's autobiography, and back numbers of the *Jewish Chronicle* as the basis for tacking it together. Her research is sadly insufficient for the task she has set herself. Moreover, Helen Fry's understanding of her material is inadequate. The only new thing about 'the great Elgar' that I learned was that 'Under his direction, she had made the first recording of his Piano Concerto with the Stratton String Quartet. Elgar had only sketched it, but he gave the short score to Harriet for the recording'. The book is littered with similar mistakes and idiocies, frankly not worth recording here. Additionally, it shows little sign of proof-reading or effective editing – for example, the numbering of footnotes goes sadly awry so that the notes themselves are ten adrift from their numbers in the text. Out of kindness I took this up with the publishers before the book was publicly available, with no tangible result.

Having just completed the transcription of around 14,000 letters to and from Elgar as background research to my work on the diaries, I can say with some feeling that there really is no substitute for thorough work. The sad thing is that a book such as this may discourage further delving into the Harriet Cohen archive at the British Library, and will certainly delay a further biography. The only positive thing from my point of view is that it led me to read again Lewis Foreman's Bax biography and Percy's Elgar Letters, both of which are prime examples of how to go about the process of research and writing.

Martin Bird

The History Press,
2008

320 pp.

ISBN-10:
0750948175

ISBN-13: 978-
0750948173

£20

9 It was published in 1933, edited by Heinrich Schenker, as *Octaven und Quinten u.a. aus dem Nachlass*; there is an English translation in *The Music Forum*, v (1980).



Tim Blanning: *The Triumph of Music: Composers, Musicians and their Audiences 1700 to the Present*

London: Allen Lane, 2008
415 pp.
ISBN 978-1846-141782

£25

What is the connection between Mozart's sore posterior and the Party at the Palace? Professor Blanning attempts to provide an answer in this wide-ranging, fascinating, but sometimes frustrating book. Blanning is Professor of Modern European History at Cambridge and the author of the highly acclaimed *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*. He sets out to show how music has become the dominant art form and an essential accompaniment to public and private events and lives. Its influence is manifest from politics to sex. In the eighteenth century, musicians were near-serfs and could, like Mozart, be literally kicked out if they displeased their masters. By 2002 a guitarist could perform the National Anthem on the roof of Buckingham Palace to an audience of millions, with the full approval of the Establishment.

The story is treated in five themes: 'Status', 'Purpose', 'Spaces', 'Technology', and 'Liberation'. The *dramatis personae* start with Lully and end with Madonna, taking in Haydn, Beethoven, Wagner, Coltrane (who is linked to *Parsifal*), Dylan, and the Beatles on the way. The work applies the key arguments of *The Culture of Power* in a wider time-frame. Music moved from being representative of autocratic culture to a 'public space' where the aristocracy and later the middle classes came to dominate. This process was caught up around 1800 with Romanticism, the worship of the creative artist, and the attribution to music of divine essence, a process which Blanning calls 'sacralisation'; the building of 'temples' such as Bayreuth is an indication. The impact of technology and social change in the twentieth century has transformed music from a mystique into a mass art-form capable of being indulged in by everyone, even as composers (if not very good ones). The text is littered with extraordinary insights and information. Blanning demolishes the myth that the great composers were poor, struggling artists, pointing out that they were mostly rich, and more would have been but for their idiosyncratic behaviour. Raised to priestly rank, composers became more self-conscious and started to reduce their output. (It may be interpolated that they may have realised that this raised the market value of their works in an increasingly commercial environment.) They became less communicative with their audiences. Popular music, jazz, and rock moved in, aided by the technological revolution. Increasingly adulation passed from the composer to the executant and from the middle-aged to the young, while 'Classical' music became no more than an easy means for asserting a cachet for those who wanted to be different.

Historically the most important section is 'Liberation'. Here

Blanning makes a major contribution in identifying, via music, the degree to which nationalism was a force before the French Revolution. If he will forgive an aphorism to summarise his arguments, he has demonstrated that the period 1640 to 1800 saw the replacement of 'L'état, c'est moi' with 'La nation, c'est nous'. He considers the political context and significance of a whole range of works from the more obvious, such as the Leuthen Chorale, 'Ça Ira', or *Die Wacht am Rhein*, to the less obvious 'Casta diva'. He shows that the music of Purcell, Arne, Weber, Mercadante, Bellini, Smetana, and Glinka, to mention only a few, is strongly impregnated with political essence. Opera is particularly identified as being quintessentially nationalist and/or libertarian, e.g. *King Arthur*, *Nabucco*, *Libuše*, *Halka*, *Der Freischütz*. European composers were often deliberately 'pressing every semiotic button' in sight. Even Mozart is shown to have expressed nationalist opinions hardly out of place in the Third Reich. At the same time, authoritarian states, desperate to keep the middle class in order, frequently used music as a means. (One is reminded of the moment in 'Yes, Minister' where Sir Humphrey points out that culture is the only way the middle class gets any return for its taxes.) Liberation is not only national but racial and sexual, and the musical contribution to these types is treated too. The author draws attention to the often ignored erotic content of many famous works from Monteverdi to Wagner. He even unearthed a superb Shaw comment on the use of music to legitimise sexual desire.

Such a wealth of information is difficult to assimilate, and this is my first main criticism of the book. Thematic treatment is fashionable, but a narrative approach would have benefited comprehension. Indeed, the author virtually admits this by adding a chronology to put events in context. He is excellent at telling us what, but it is sometimes difficult from his narrative to ascertain why. The second criticism is also revealed by the chronology: for 'serious' music it ends at 1883 with the death of Wagner. Moreover no British composer since Arne is mentioned, except in a long list of honorands, including Elgar, and a slightly shorter list of homosexuals, not including Elgar. Surely English music since 1800 would be a perfect test bed of Blanning's thesis? The third main criticism must be the almost total absence of economics, which has surely been the key factor in musical developments since 1800. Despite the title we learn little about audiences, a crucial factor.

Although there is nothing directly about Elgar, there are numerous pointers for reflection on his career and the nature of his music. He must have had more immediate concerns than rural reflections and nostalgic ruminations, and it would be a

welcome change to treat Elgar as historically and politically aware. He could not write a liberation opera because the English did not believe they needed liberating. Overrun successively by Italians, Germans, Swedes, French, Dutch, and Germans (again), they declared that these had really all been tourists who had rapidly and happily settled down to being 'English'. *Caractacus*, the only 'national' work Elgar wrote (as opposed to 'statist' ceremonial works), is clearly influenced by this attitude. The First Symphony owed much of its *éclat* to the Bosnian Crisis, invasion scares, and suffragettes. His role in turning art music into popular, via the theatre and the gramophone, is also significant. On 4 August 1914 the crowd in the Potsdamer Platz sang the Leuthen Chorale; in the Mall they sang 'Land of Hope and Glory'. Elgar certainly has his place in the Triumph of Music. Will King Charles III's coronation include a performance of the Ode by Led Zeppelin and Abba?

The publishers have not served their author well. The paper is declared to be environmentally friendly but to anyone of my age it is remarkably reminiscent of Standard War Economy product. Some of the illustrations thus obscured are curiously repeated in an art paper section. The jacket is reduced to half size, presumably in another effort to save the planet, and is made to look like an eighteenth-century printing, complete with damp spot. If this twee effort were not enough, the running titles are printed *down*, instead of across the page, resulting in almost total unintelligibility.

Carl Newton

CD REVIEWS

Violin Concerto in B minor

Gil Shaham (violin)

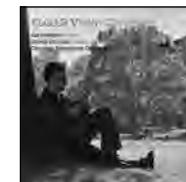
Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by David Zinman

This performance was recorded in February 2007 in Miami, and is the product of three American participants: Gil Shaham, David Zinman and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. It thus competes with the live version I reviewed recently [this Journal, March 2008, p. 39], with the Canadian James Ehnes and the Philharmonia under Andrew Davis, recorded within four months of its rival. Readers may recall I was very enthusiastic about the Ehnes disc, calling it 'irresistible'.

There is much to commend in the disc under review. The tone that Gil Shaham draws from his 'Countess Polignac' Stradivarius is beautiful throughout much of the work; the live recording is uninterrupted by the unwanted noises (except for a regrettable cough during the last movement cadenza) and unspoiled by slips; the players neither rush nor dwell on the many opportunities to do both; an original view of the work is presented that offers a freshness to the listener. The main drawback for me is that there is little magic. The emphasis in this reading is on the work's virtuosity; and even though the technical challenges are surmounted with ease, I felt much of the playing was on the surface, with little penetration to the emotional depths. One assumes the reading and its effect are deliberate, because the CSO matches Shaham throughout.

This is especially true in the second movement, where the vibrato is alarmingly wide in the solo as well as the orchestra, and the tone is forced. The consequence of this is the lack of rapturous musing from the violinist and of subtle interplay of colours between the orchestra and soloist, creating a one-dimensional effect. One only has to compare a few bars of this with the Ehnes to appreciate the difference in emotional range, dynamic and tone colour. However, in contrast to the above, the end of the movement marks the emotional high water-mark in Shaham's performance, showing what he can do, if he wants to. Interestingly, the length of each movement in these two versions is almost identical; yet the effect is very different.

Earlier, the exposition in the first movement is shaped well, and there is fine playing from the CSO; yet there is little sense of scene-setting and building anticipation for the soloist's appearance. However, the latter's introspective and thoughtful first entry made



Canary Classics
CC06

me hope that he would create an atmosphere that reflected the Elgar's emotional introspection. To me he did not succeed – if he was even trying – but that might be because my taste inclines to the subtle over the showy, and this version should not be written off because it does not accord with one reviewer's prejudices. I would imagine there are plenty of Elgarians – including me – who will happily add this to their collections, even though I do not believe it will be many people's favourite.

The last movement redeems the recording. Most of it suits the overt virtuosity of Shaham's interpretation, but he seems to relax in the more lyrical passages: the tone is unforced, the tension eases and the beauty of the movement shines through. This is reflected in the CSO's playing, and David Zinman brings out the sensitivity required, and which the Chicago players are well able to provide. The *cadenza accompagnata*, in particular, is lovely, and captures the poignant mood as it reviews the themes that have gone before. The audience clearly enjoyed the performance, but we are left wondering whether a studio recording might have enabled all the forces to penetrate to the core of the work through all three movements. Finally, however, the clincher has nothing to do with interpretation, but with generosity. This disc has only the Concerto; the Philharmonia include the *Serenade* as a filler. Surely David Zinman could have conjured a suitable coupling to the Concerto, and we could have heard the Chicago Symphony Orchestra take centre stage?

Steven Halls



Elgar: Piano Quintet
Walton: Piano Quartet

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Available online at www.chambermusicsociety.org/listen

CMS Studio
Recordings 82505

This is a wonderful performance of the Elgar Quintet. I was especially keen to hear it after reading a damning review by the American critic James Reel, a notorious anti-Elgarian, in the American record review *Fanfare*. He slated the work, however, not the performance! These players form a resident ensemble at Lincoln Centre, New York, and these musicians play as though they had taken the work to their hearts – more evidence that you do not have to be British to understand Elgar.

The first movement's basic pulse is slightly steadier than some other performances, but allows myriad details to come through clearly. The lovely slow movement is beautifully done, the strings, led by the viola, playing with real warmth and affection; and

the recording sets the piano as one of the five instruments, as Elgar intended, rather than leading, concerto-like, at the front. The finale is well paced and rises to some passionate climaxes. The spectral passage at fig. 59, with its muted and tremolando strings, is finely done, leading to a wonderfully judged return to the home key and the recapitulation. I would rank this with the best performances so far on CD. It is coupled with a committed and vigorous performance of Walton's quirky Piano Quartet in D minor, written when he was seventeen, but revised later.

Barry Collett

During his last illness, Elgar might have listened to any of his major orchestral works on the records he had made with the LSO and other London orchestras. But what he chose to hear most often was his Piano Quintet, recorded by Harriet Cohen and the Stratton Quartet. Many of his contemporaries shared Elgar's high opinion of the quintet. At its premiere in 1919, H.C. Colles wrote in *The Times* that 'the first movement ... has a breadth of view, one might almost say a manliness of expression, which has never appeared so clearly in anything he has written before'. Two years later, J.F. Porte called the quintet 'one of Elgar's most powerful works and a masterpiece of great significance'. Recent writers haven't been so sure. Some have questioned the keyboard writing, the interplay between piano and strings and even the work's structure and the quality of its musical ideas. In the May 2004 issue of *Music & Letters*, Michael Allis sought to answer these criticisms by tracing, not altogether convincingly, a programmatic connection between the quintet and E.B. Lytton's novel, *A Strange Story*.

This new recording by the Chamber Music Society of the Lincoln Center demonstrates the cogency and elegance of this music in a performance that is entirely idiomatic and fully responsive to Elgar's mercurial score. The ensemble is led by pianist Wu Han, ably partnered by Ani Kavakian and Arnaud Sussman on violins, Paul Neubauer on viola, and Fred Sherry on cello. Their playing is captured in a natural and pleasing acoustic. They give the first movement *allegro* an alert and persuasive reading. They obviously enjoy this music: note, in particular, the entrance of the second subject (2:13), the Fauré-like piano figures (5:23 and 11:55), and the tender return of the first subject (12:31). If the movement's climax here is less vehement than in the 2001 Chandos recording by Ian Brown and the Sorrel Quartet, the New Yorkers have an equally clear view of how the sudden changes in mood and tempo fit together.

The players launch the second movement *adagio* at the flowing

tempo that Elgar indicates (crotchet=54), rather than the Sorrells' more stately 46, and throughout the movement they bring out the ardour in some of the most urgently emotional music Elgar ever wrote. Tempi are again wisely judged in the final movement, which begins as an Andante but soon becomes a swinging Allegro in 3/4. This gives way to a delicate episode at 4:01, but that too quickens, leading to an emphatic dialogue between piano and strings that starts at 8:39. The ardent feeling of the adagio returns at 9:05, and the work ends in a triumphant coda.

I warmly recommend this recording. It is heartening to find North Americans playing Elgar with such sensitivity and enthusiasm. Those qualities – and their faithfulness to the score – help remind us why the quintet was one of Elgar's own favourites. Like Elgar's quintet, Walton's String Quartet was composed in 1918-19. It is an astonishing achievement for a composer who was just 17 at the time but would win swift recognition three years later with 'Façade'.

In 1925 Elgar was asked to play the piano for the quintet's first recording. He declined but recommended Ethel Hobday who recorded the work with the Spencer Dyke Quartet. That recording is now available from www.pristineclassical.com.

Frank Beck

The Kingdom

Julia Rempé (soprano), Susanne Schaeffer (contralto), Max Ciolek (tenor), Henryk Boehm (bass)
Hans Sachs Chor, Nuremberg
Nuremberger Sinfoniker conducted by Julian Christoph Toelle

This is a recording of a live performance given at the Meistersingerhalle, Nuremberg, in May last year. An all-German Kingdom is a thrilling prospect, and this recording captures in excellent detail this historic event. The work has obviously been prepared with Germanic thoroughness, and performed with loving attention to detail. The conductor, Julian Christoph Toelle, shapes the work with absolute understanding, and misses none of Elgar's myriad markings of tempo and dynamics. The orchestra is excellent, and resplendent in Elgar's luxurious orchestration of the Prelude. The work is sung in English, and the diction of soloists and choir is impeccable. The recording favours the orchestra to some degree, and just occasionally the chorus is overwhelmed by the orchestral sonorities, but they sing with fervour and rise to the great climaxes such as 'O ye Priests'. Part Three (Pentecost) is surely one of the finest movements in all Elgar, and the power

of the music has obviously caught up the performers. The choral singing, male and female both *divisi*, is most moving; the section depicting the rushing of the mighty wind is finely handled, and 'he who walketh upon the wings of the wind' marches along with an implacable tread. The soloists at times seem distantly recorded; the soprano in particular seems furthest from the microphone, so that her great aria 'The Sun Goeth Down' lacks its usual impact. The alto soloist sings with dramatic feeling, and the bass carries off his great monologue in Part Three very well. Of course this is a recording of a live performance, so the sound picture is more akin to what one hears in the concert hall, rather than soloists or instruments being spotlighted as in studio recordings. This recording doesn't dislodge the Boult and Slatkin recordings from my affections, but it is a useful adjunct to them, and proves yet again, if proof were needed, how Elgar's music is quite at home in Continental Europe when given the chance. I understand the same forces are to perform *The Apostles* in 2010.¹

Barry Collett

Vaughan Williams: 'Kissing her Hair' (20 early songs)

Sarah Fox (soprano), Andrew Staples (tenor), Roderick Williams (baritone), Iain Burnside (piano)

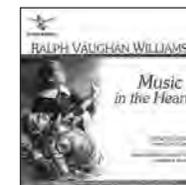
Vaughan Williams: 'Music in the Heart' (archive recordings)

The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society was founded as recently as 1994 and has gone from strength to strength. Now it has launched its own record label – Albion Records – with the intention of reviving unusual repertoire and archive material. It is a pleasure to offer a notice of two of its releases, both of which are attractively presented with full texts.

ALBCD002 is a recent recording of early songs, graced by beautiful and subtle singing. 'Kissing her Hair' is a phrase from Swinburne's *Rondel*, one of many titles that have been neglected or not recorded at all. So how did *Linden Lea* get in? It is sung, rather entertainingly, in Dorset dialect (an authorised alternative). Some of the other texts have been set many times, but all of them share here in Vaughan Williams's ear for the English language, with refined, thoughtful piano parts to support the bewitching vocal line. Vaughan Williams sets Shakespeare, Herrick, Tennyson



ALBCD002



ALBCD009

¹ The recording may be ordered from Herr Michael Langer, President Hans Sachs-Chor Nürnberg, Vorderer Rotenberg 11, 91126 Schwabach, Germany.

and the rest as a man entering upon his birthright. His settings explore a world of genteel ecstasy and idealised country life, and he even set a translation of Verlaine's poem 'Prison' as 'The sky above the roof', which came about in the following happy manner. It seems the composer, seated one day in his study, was weary and ill at ease at the appalling untidiness he saw all about him. Rather than sort it out, he set about the setting he had (without much enthusiasm) promised to a friend. 'The sky above the roof' and the rest are real art songs, with nothing of the drawing-room ballad about them, and are likely to appeal to anyone who enjoys the well known *Songs of Travel*. They readily evoke the period when they were written (1895-1907), before the war made such things seem irrelevant. Three final Whitman settings from 1925 complete the programme; a certain angularity in the music reminds us that by then Vaughan Williams had been to war and the iron had entered his soul.

'Music in the Heart' is a double CD set of archive recordings: *Serenade to Music*, *The Pilgrim's Journey*, Vaughan Williams remembering Parry and Stanford, and an excerpt from his Funeral Service in Westminster Abbey. The principal item is *The Pilgrim's Journey*. This is a cantata adapted after Vaughan Williams's death, in 1962, by Christopher Morris and Roy Douglas, whose role in deciphering Vaughan Williams's handwriting cannot be overstated! Although this is a spin-off – not an expression the composer would have recognised – from *The Pilgrim's Progress* rather than a separate work, it makes a useful introduction to the parent opera. This is a live American performance from 1965, well rehearsed and well sung. However, the orchestra is sorely missed (an organ accompanies the singers). There is also a brief extract from Vaughan Williams's funeral service in 1958 – this release commemorates the passing of 50 years since his death – and a recording, hitherto unknown, of the enchanting *Serenade to Music*. I am not a fan of the original version with sixteen singers (as used here), because distinguished soloists never blend satisfactorily, but I gladly put my feelings on one side for the chance to hear Vaughan Williams conduct. He was a great frequenter of recording sessions and he had his own table and chair supplied by Decca, when Boult was recording his symphonies. For the rest, he was a composer who sometimes conducted – his records are few, his preserved live performances fewer – but for all the crumbling sound of 1951 and the false entry of the first flute (now immortalised, I fear) of the (then) Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, there is a tension and atmosphere that only a composer can conjure up. Some of the singers took part in the first performance (1938) and were by then a bit long in the tooth, but for all that this performance is irreplaceable.

Still more interesting for Elgarians is a 28-minute talk by Vaughan Williams on his memories of Parry and Stanford. How we would love to have heard Elgar talking about them, if just for five minutes! Vaughan Williams, heard in 1955, speaks from a script before an audience. He was a shy and private man, no public speaker, but that seems to make his account of the two men all the more compelling and personal. There is much information here, too, and even a little humour. It is clear that Vaughan Williams had a great deal of time for both of them. He did not always agree with what they said, but he was not afraid of them! Strongly recommended.

Michael Plant

LETTERS

From David Cairns

Julian Rushton's fascinating remarks on vibrato [Editorial, November 2008] prompt a multitude of thoughts – far too many to put in a letter to the editor. But here is a story worth recording.

This is what the great Joachim thought about it, at least as it concerned solo playing and chamber music, and in 1907, when he was old and no doubt out of sympathy with much that was going on in the musical world. Adila Fachiri, Joachim's great-niece, described to me what the 76-year-old violinist told her on his deathbed. Adila and her sister Jelly d'Arányi (who, Adila said, was the one whose playing Joachim particularly valued) took turns to watch at the bedside. Joachim had been in a coma when, suddenly, he opened his eyes, stared fixedly at Adila, and whispered: 'Tell Jelly ... remember – not too much vibrato'. They were, she said, his last words. He turned his face to the wall and never regained consciousness.

Secondly, a minor point of history: it was surely Beecham, not Sargent, who responded to Leon Goossens's A with 'Gentlemen, you may take your choice'. Goossens was first oboe in the LPO, Beecham's orchestra; and, though Sargent conducted the orchestra from time to time, the remark has much more the stamp of Tommy.

Julian Rushton responds:

I can only agree with the last remark. Mea culpa, or perhaps the error was from my informant who was, I think, one my school teachers.

From Alan Machin

I share with Paul Adrian Rooke in his excellent reviews of the first three discs in the Naxos Stanford Symphonies series an appreciation of these works, and I find it astonishing that with few exceptions they fell into such neglect. That Stanford, with all his influence in Cambridge, London and Leeds, could achieve little more than one or two performances as 'novelties' for his symphonies makes Elgar's achievement with his first symphony all the more remarkable.

Paul did not mention in his first three reviews that, with the exception of the 'Irish', the symphonies were rescued from obscurity by a superb set of performances by Vernon Handley and the Ulster Orchestra recorded by Chandos between 1986 and 1991. These recordings are still available on seven CDs coupled with other orchestral works, or as a four-CD boxed set. The new Naxos set has the edge in price and they will hopefully, with their wider distribution, introduce Stanford to a bigger audience, but the Handley set remains a milestone achievement (to add to those mentioned in the tributes in the November News) by that sadly missed champion of British music.

100 YEARS AGO...

The New Year saw the continuing success of Elgar's Symphony. It was given on New Year's Day in Queen's Hall, and Alice reported 'Overwhelming [-] Tremendous demonstration of enthusiasm'. Walter Damrosch conducted the American premiere two days later, and wrote to say '...what an overwhelming effect the work made on [the orchestral] and on the public'. On 7 January Elgar conducted it once again at Queen's Hall in an all-Elgar concert. Alice wrote of a 'crowded & enthusiastic audience'. They went to Brighton to stay with the Littletons, and Edward conducted *The Dream of Gerontius* and *In the South* in the Dome on the 13th. Three days later he conducted the symphony at the Queen's Hall for the third time in just over a fortnight.

Yet back at Plas Gwyn on the 18th he was 'very depressed – disappointed at material prospects'. In the autumn he had negotiated a fee for the composer from every performance, but having discovered that no such fee had been charged to the Queen's Hall for the 1 January concert, he complained bitterly to Novello. Henry Clayton, the company secretary, pointed out that although Novello 'wanted to get as much as possible' for each performance, they were anxious 'not to kill the goose for the sake of the eggs of gold'. In agreeing to accept a reduced fee, Edward wrote back complaining about the 'incredible meanness' of the Queen's Hall: 'They pay *any* foreigner 4, 5, 6, 7 or even 8 times the amount given to me & lose largely over the visitor because they say its good for the art'.

On 4 February Edward decided to take the waters at Llandrindod Wells, but was really no better for his nine-day stay there. On the 17th he travelled to London to dine with the King at Marlborough House, and was in the royal party at the Queen's Hall concert. Another five days at Llandrindod Wells made little difference: Alice thought he 'did not look well' on his return, and she too was not in the best of health. Elgar's first winter in England for three years did not suit him: 'A. thought of Madeira. E. pleased with idea'. It seems that lack of money prevented them going: as he wrote to Ivor Atkins on 27 February after the latter had conducted the symphony in Worcester: 'I feel no joy in my product. I am not well & dodging wintry ailments with no success & cannot afford to go away yet'. On 5 March the Elgars' cook returned to the house drunk, and upon being dismissed made a dreadful scene which necessitated the police being called. The first half of March was cold with heavy snow, which did nothing to improve Edward's state of mind.

Then came a suggestion from Julia Worthington for the Elgars to join her in the villa near Florence she had taken for several weeks. It was settled on 23 March, and had an immediate effect: that day Edward was '... very hard at work [...] wrote fine words for March tune & arranged it all'. He left for London later in the day and spent a week there, meeting friends and visiting publishers. He returned to London on 6 April and three days later left for Paris, sending a telegram to say that he was 'safe & comfortable', and that the weather was 'lovely ... extraordinarily hot'. Alice and Carice joined him on the 17th; he was 'looking well & very fine ... E. much to tell & had been very happy in Paris & amused'. The following day (Sunday) they attended High Mass at the Madeleine: 'Music quite pleasant except Offertory wh. was most frivolous & dreadful'. Julia Worthington joined them on the Monday, and Mr Whittemore, a friend of Schuster, took them on a taxi tour of the city: they dined with him that evening at the Hotel Foyot. The train journey on 20 April was enjoyable: 'very pretty thro' the pleasant Pays de France. In evening beautiful mountains & sunset ... Went to bed early & most slept well'.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

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