

The Elgar Society

# Journal



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# The Elgar Society

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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*The Editor does not necessarily agree with the views expressed by contributors,  
nor does the Elgar Society accept responsibility for such views.*

Front Cover: *Birmingham Town Hall, c. 1900*

**Notes for Contributors.** Please adhere to these as far as possible if you deliver writing (as is much preferred) in Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format. A longer version is available in case you are prepared to do the formatting, but for the present the editor is content to do this.

*Copyright:* it is the contributor's responsibility to be reasonably sure that copyright permissions, if required, are obtained.

*Illustrations* (pictures, short music examples) are welcome, but *please ensure* they are pertinent, cued into the text, and have captions.

### **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*.

## **A message from the Documentation Officer, Elgar Birthplace Museum<sup>1</sup>**

Over the last two years the Museum has been working on digitising the material held at Broadheath. This means that high quality images of all Elgar's manuscripts and letters are now readily accessible for everyone, including those who need a good copy for continuing research at home, or who are unable to visit the Birthplace in person. It is also an excellent way to preserve the collection. An additional, unexpected, advantage is that the clarity of the images is such that portions can be enlarged and the details examined more closely, using the computer files. This has proved invaluable in deciphering some of the more illegible writing! The images are, of course, also available as prints.

## **Editorial**

An evolution in the editorial operation: Martin Bird has kindly taken over the complicated matter of reviews of recordings. Such a division of labour is common in serious journals, and the editor feels considerable relief and gratitude that this tricky matter has been taken off his hands (at, however, his own request). Anything to do with recordings should be sent to Martin, but if mailed to [journal@elgar.org](mailto:journal@elgar.org) it will be forwarded.

Part of the fun of editing this Journal – though also, it must be admitted, without dropping names, part of the difficulty – consists in checking through authors' work to see if one can find holes in it that might pre-empt letters from Pained, Cheltenham, or Indignant, Leamington Spa. This can be easy enough when contributors observe the guidelines, and provide sources for factual statements and references for the opinions and quoted words of others. It is in the nature of this Journal that some articles contain information from sources to which the editor may have no access; in that case the contributor has to be trusted. One such was Anne Crowther's article on Liverpool in the March issue this year, and another is Mike Smith's fascinating piece in the present issue, on the friends pictured in those piano rolls. We also publish articles that bring together disparate information and set it into a particular context of value in interpretation of Elgar's life's work: in the present issue, Stuart Freed's study of Elgar in Birmingham and John S. Weir's assessment of Elgar's relationship to the pianoforte. Other than Worcester and London, no city has a greater claim than Birmingham to the attention of Elgarians, although Leeds and Manchester might wish to stake a claim – all of which is an indication that Elgar's status within England at least was truly national. Further Elgar and [name of city] articles may well be appropriate.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to Martin Bird, we thank our reviewers of music and a pamphlet on the vexed 'enigma'; our correspondents; Geoff Hodgkins for continuing to remind us of what happened a century ago; and Mike Byde for setting the Journal.

Julian Rushton

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1 This message is from Sue Fairchild, with thanks.

2 On Leeds see the two-part article by Cecil Bloom, 'Leeds: the Elgar Connection', in this Journal, 9/2 (July 1995), 72–7, and 9/3 (November 1995), 126–132.

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Variation V. R.P.A.

Richard Arnold, son of  
 Matthew Arnold. A great  
 lover of ~~Music~~ <sup>music</sup>  
 more and he played <sup>(piano)</sup>  
 self taught <sup>man</sup>  
 leading difficulties by sug-  
 gesting in a mysterious way  
 to read feeling. His serious  
 conversation was continually  
 broken up by whimsical &  
 witty remarks.

The theme is ~~based on~~  
~~the bass~~ & given by the bass  
 & there is much badinage among  
 the vocal instruments.

Fig. 1 [1977.722.P6]: Variation V (R.P.A.)

# Friends Revisited: an edition of Elgar Birthplace EB722<sup>1</sup>

**Mike Smith**

Elgar Birthplace 722 (hereafter EB722) is Elgar's manuscript draft of notes for inclusion in the Aeolian Company's player-piano rolls (hereinafter PR) of the *Variations* ('Enigma') Op. 36. (See figs. 1–3.)<sup>2</sup> After Elgar's death, much of that material was published by Novello as a separate booklet, under the title *My Friends Pictured Within* (hereinafter MFPW), perhaps the best known of Elgar's literary works. What Elgar wrote is valuable first of all for the light it sheds on *Variations*, and so on Elgar as a composer; it also tells us something about him as the author of something more finished and formal than a letter: the author of the Birmingham Professorial Lectures and the *Analytical Essay on Falstaff*. Elgar the author is less interesting than Elgar the composer, but this aspect of him has more than rarity value.

Transcriptions of EB722 have been published in the Elgar Complete Edition (hereafter ECE27) edited by Robert Anderson and Jerrold Northrop Moore, and the Bärenreiter edition edited by Christopher Hogwood. Both contain significant errors, and although Hogwood points out many differences between EB722 and MFPW, both editions let pass without comment what seem to me to be interesting points of comparison. Furthermore, neither transcription includes what Brian Trowell (1993) calls 'the sometimes revealing deleted words and passages' (1993: 311, n. 176). How revealing, his discussion of one of them confirms (see Variation XIII below), and further study reveals yet more. The purpose of this article is to provide a fuller and more accurate text of EB722 than has previously been available, and to draw attention to features of interest for the light they shed on Elgar and on *Variations*. Since the material in MFPW (most of which is also in PR) has been extensively written about, I have concentrated on readings unique to EB722, on changes within it, and on differences between it and the other sources.

To understand what Elgar was doing in these notes it is necessary to know

- 
- 1 I wish to thank the Trustees of the Elgar Will for permission to transcribe and publish Birthplace no. EB722; the staff of the Elgar Birthplace Museum for making the wealth of Elgar material so easily accessible; and Ruth Smith for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this article.
  - 2 Figs 1-3 are reproduced, courtesy of the Elgar Birthplace Museum, from Elgar Birthplace 722, Elgar's manuscript draft of notes for inclusion in the player-piano rolls of the *Variations* ('Enigma') Op. 36.

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Variation X ~~for~~  
Dorabella

pendant in a daffodil

The ~~same~~ letter for Mozart

'Come per tutti' & the most

tragic & dance of the

family's happiness.

The inner sustained

flutes (Mozart first; - later flute)

should be added

Fig. 2 [1977.722.P10]: Variation X (Dorabella)

13

Variation XIII. x x x

The asterisk, ~~has been~~ ~~the~~  
~~identified~~ ~~or~~ ~~reflected~~ <sup>placit</sup> of the  
 bones of Lady Mary by 500  
 No. 100, at the time of the  
 Conquistador or a sea voyage.  
 At the ~~huddled~~ ~~down~~ suggest  
 the distinct ~~truth~~ of the ~~copies~~ of  
 a ~~bone~~, over ~~and~~ the ~~darkest~~  
 quater a ~~bone~~ ~~for~~ ~~headed~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~  
 'Colum Sea to Prosperous Voyage'

Fig. 3 [1977.722.P13]: Variation XIII (\*\*\*)

something about the set of piano rolls for which they were written. The rolls are an underused resource in Elgar scholarship. The only account I know is the excellent short study by Trevor Fenemore-Jones (1975), cited in ECE27 but otherwise absent from references and bibliographies, though apparently known to Kennedy (1987). The performance in this medium and the massive international recording project, 'The World's Music', of which it formed a part are themselves of considerable interest, especially given Elgar's enthusiasm for the pianola (Fenemore-Jones, 20). However, the accompanying apparatus is of greater interest still. What was eventually reproduced in MFPW is only part of an array of material including information by Elgar not in either EB722 or MFPW and a running commentary written with skill and sensitivity by – whom? According to the rolls of *Variations*, the 'Aeolian Library of Descriptive and Illustrated "Duo-Art" & "Pianola" Rolls' was 'edited by Percy A. Scholes in collaboration with Charles H. Farnsworth, Columbia University'; Kennedy states that Scholes 'supplied the descriptive commentaries on the music' (1987: 90). However, Fenemore-Jones (21) suggests persuasively that they may be by Elgar's friend J.A. Forsyth, 'who contributed other material in the notes both over his initials and anonymously'. To my knowledge this beguiling descriptive commentary, closely based on Elgar's notes, has never been reprinted; it is worthy of attention in itself and also as part of an enterprise in which, as Fenemore-Jones says, Elgar 'co-operated wholeheartedly', 'a strong indication that he gave the whole project his blessing'.

Further, some of Elgar's own contributions to PR, not reprinted in MFPW, have apparently been neglected by recent scholarship. Fenemore-Jones (20) points out that Basil Maine (1933: ii, 101–2) took material attributed to Elgar, but without precise reference, from PR, including the account of the genesis of the theme, cited by Maine as 'the words of Elgar himself'; Moore says 'efforts to identify the source have been fruitless' (1984: 247 n. 199). Also derived from PR, but not mentioned by Fenemore-Jones, is Maine's account of Elgar's decision to omit his planned *Variations* for Parry and Sullivan (see Rushton 1999: 10 and n.18).

It should be explained that Elgar's notes and the running commentary are printed on the rolls themselves, which may explain why the material has been so little consulted. Copies are scarce, and the rolls are both cumbersome and fragile (I timed the rewinding of one at thirteen minutes). The running commentary was designed to be read from the roll during performance (hence, presumably, the subtitle of the series: 'Audiographic Music'). It is printed bottom to top, so reading it when the roll is not operational is awkward, and transcription under these conditions invites error. In addition, not even Fenemore-Jones makes clear, though his account and one of his quotations imply it, that the rolls of *Variations* (and doubtless others in the series) were issued in two separate sets, for two different instruments. It is a convenient shorthand to refer, as several authors have done, to 'pianola rolls'; in fact the Aeolian Company published one set of rolls for the Pianola and one for the Duo-Art, or 'reproducing' pianola, which 'included a system by which 16 gradations of touch, for both melodic line and accompaniment independently, could be automatically reproduced by means of signals cut into the roll being played' (Fenemore-Jones, 18). The holding I have consulted, at the Elgar Birthplace, consists of a mixture of the two; fortunately – so far as I have been able

to see – differences are confined to the rubrics about the sets themselves. An edition of PR would be a useful and interesting project that someone with a steady hand and eye and much patience might like to undertake.

There has been disagreement about the dates of all three sources. MFPW is undated; Moore (1984) gives 1949, Fenemore-Jones and Rushton 1946. One roll of PR carries the rubric ‘8–29’, and all authors gives 1929 as the publication date, except for Moore (1990: 407), who prints correspondence from 1928 about illustrations for the rolls, but states that this refers to a projected new edition and that ‘Piano rolls ... made three years earlier had not met with much success’.<sup>3</sup> Hogwood (ix) says that EB722 is ‘dated 1899 in Elgar’s hand’, but no-one else has mentioned this and I cannot find the date there. Elgar wrote in PR that his ‘remarks’ were ‘written nearly thirty years after the composition of the music’. Fenemore-Jones (20) says ‘As the Variations were mainly composed in 1898 it is thus confirmed that the notes were written ... a little before 1928. All in all, 1927 looks the most likely year’. But as most work on the score was done in *late* 1898 and early 1899, 1928 seems more likely. I argue below that at least part of Elgar’s draft could not have been written before September 1927, and Birthplace letters 1306 and 1307 show that he was still active in the correspondence about illustrations in May 1929.

The title of *My Friends Pictured Within* suggests its specific focus: each musical ‘portrait’ is accompanied by a photograph and by the relevant incipit from Elgar’s manuscript full score. As already indicated, much matter from the commentary on the piano rolls, certainly by Elgar but not directly relevant to the ‘Friends’, is omitted, and the note on ‘Nimrod’ is altered and expanded by quotation from Elgar’s programme note for the Jaeger Memorial Concert in January 1910. Nevertheless, MFPW clearly derives from PR. An acknowledgement in MFPW (p.[2]) leaves open the possibility that it was copied from a manuscript rather than from the published text: ‘The descriptive notes were written by the composer for production with the pianola rolls, and are here reproduced by permission of The Aeolian Company, Limited’. Whichever was the case, the few differences (apart from those in ‘Nimrod’) are most easily explained as errors in printing MFPW

There are much more extensive and significant differences between EB722 and PR. Trowell (222) characterises EB722 as a ‘private draft’, and nothing is known of the process by which it reached its published form. Hogwood (ix) assumes the existence of a revised authorial version; but even if such existed, further changes may have been made by, or in collaboration with, an (unknown) editor, so PR must be treated with caution. However, Elgar’s own contributions to the notes in PR are carefully distinguished by the initials ‘E.E.’; he also supplied what Fenemore-Jones (20) calls an ‘uncompromising statement’: ‘The annotations for this roll has [sic] been personally written by me for the “Duo-Art” and “Pianola” and I hereby authorize their use with these instruments. [Signed] Edward Elgar’. So it may be presumed that Elgar passed the final copy (though not, perhaps, the proofs: there are similar confusions of singular and plural in EB722, Variations III and VIII, but both are corrected in PR, and Elgar might have picked up this printed example had he seen a proof).

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3 I do not know the source of this statement.

## ***Editorial method***

The following transcription of EB722 was made from the original at the Elgar Birthplace, and has been checked against a photocopy. Variants are marked by superscript numbers; unless otherwise stated, these refer to PR. All differences of wording between EB722 and PR have been noted. However, since MFPW is evidently derived from PR the only readings I have recorded from MFPW are those where it differs from PR.

Deletions are shown ~~struck through~~. Elgar's corrections and insertions were placed more or less haphazardly: where possible I have placed corrections where they come, but in cases of doubt, as where the replacement text comes above the line and there is no caret (^), I have placed the deleted text first. For insertions, ^ with no following space indicates an insertion with a caret actually marked by Elgar; insertions without a caret I have incorporated silently where they appear to belong. ^ followed by a space indicates a caret without inserted material, the missing text presumably intended to be supplied later, either by Elgar or by his editor. [] represents a box drawn by Elgar to indicate that a music example was to be inserted.

Elgar was not always careful or consistent about punctuation. Like ECE27, I have followed him closely, even where the result is patently eccentric, but I have ignored smudges, and what seem to be places where the pen-nib has rested, and other marks of no discernible import. Differences in capitalisation and punctuation between manuscript and printed sources have been indicated only where they seemed to me significant, and I have not specially noted the replacement of MS '&' by 'and'. I cannot reliably distinguish between Elgar's lower-case and capital 'v', but have done my best. I have adverted to differences between my reading and those of earlier editors only where a matter of importance (in my view) is at stake, or to reinforce a point of interest in what I believe to be the correct interpretation. Capital Roman numerals, e.g. XIV, indicate Variations.

## ***Edition and Commentary***

### **Enigma<sup>1</sup>**

**Theme. The alternation of the two quavers & two crotchets in the first bar & their reversal of ~~this sequence in~~<sup>2</sup> the second bar will be noticed; references to this grouping are almost continuous, ~~sometimes~~ either melodically ~~su~~ or ~~suggested~~ in the accompanying figures: [] in xxx<sup>3</sup> for example The drop of a seventh in (bar 3) & again (cellos. etc.) in bar ^ should be remembered.<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>THE THEME ... <sup>2</sup>their reversal in ...<sup>3</sup> in Variation XIII, beginning at bar 11 ... <sup>4</sup>The drop of a seventh in the Theme (bars 3 and 4) should be observed. At bar 7 (G major) appears the rising and falling passage in thirds which is much used later, e.g. Variation III, bars 10–16.

Rushton (1999: 1) considers whether the subtitle 'Enigma' applies to the Variations as a whole, to the Theme, or to the Theme's initial bars. Elgar's use of it in EB722 appears to exclude the last of these interpretations. It would permit

either the first or the second: if the first is correct, the MS means 'This is about the "Enigma" Variations, starting with the Theme'; if the second, it means 'This is about the Enigma, i.e. the Theme'. But all the notes on the Variations have their titles centrally placed, as 'Enigma' is placed here. So on balance I think EB722 favours the second interpretation: for Elgar, 'Enigma' was the Theme. PR, with *THE THEME* as title, seems decisively to support the first interpretation. But by 1929, what 'Enigma' meant to Elgar may not have been what it meant to the rest of the world. In the programme for the Jaeger Memorial Concert in 1910, the work appears as 'VARIATIONS ON AN ORIGINAL THEME (Op. 36)'. In PR, it is 'ELGAR'S 'ENIGMA' VARIATIONS'. To have called the theme 'Enigma' might have been too confusing.

On 'solutions' to the 'enigma', Rushton (67) suggests 'tentatively' that 'the "solution" should take into account the characteristic falling sevenths of bars 3–4. Elgar himself drew especial attention to these ... Observed must mean more than merely performed ... but it could be an analytical comment on what becomes of the sevenths in the variations'. Elgar's original 'remembered' perhaps supports the latter interpretation, and the other two examples in this section have the same function; moreover, the 'dropping sevenths' are alluded to frequently in the running commentary in PR. The change to 'observed' may have been to bring the wording in line with parallel instances: 'noticed' (here, and in VI and IX), 'noted' (in X). All these, unlike 'remembered', refer to the act of listening, or of reading the score. The sevenths are not in fact heard on 'cellos. etc' in this section; Elgar probably meant Variation I, 3:7–8.

#### Variation I {C. A. E}

**Caroline Alice (Lady) Elgar: there is no break between the theme & this first Variation next movement; the first Variation (C.A.E.) is really an enlargement ^ of the theme, with<sup>5</sup> romantic & delicate additions; those who knew C.A.E. will understand this personification reference to one whose whole life was a romantic & delicate inspiration**

<sup>5</sup>really a prolongation of the Theme with what I wished to be

'Enlargement' aptly describes the treatment of the Theme in this Variation, but 'prolongation' emphasises the continuity of the two. If, as seems to be generally accepted, the Theme represents 'E.E.', Elgar's meaning is plain (Rushton (34) refers to 'the wholeness of marriage').

#### Variation II H.D.S-P

**Hew David Steuart-Powell was a well known amateur pianist & a great asset in chamber music.<sup>6</sup> His characteristic preliminary ^ (diatonic) 'run over the keys' (diatonic) when settl taking his place before beginning to play is ^ here humorously travestied in the semiquaver passages suggesting a Toccata<sup>7</sup> but chromatic beyond H.D.S-P's liking**

<sup>6</sup>a great player of chamber music. He was associated with B.G.N. ('Cello) and the Composer (Violin) in Trio playing. [MFPW: this playing.] <sup>7</sup>in the semiquaver passages; these should suggest a Toccata,

### Variation III. R.B.T.

**Robert Richard Baxter Townshend whose books Tenderfoot<sup>8</sup> are now so well known & appreciated. The Variation has a reference to R.B.T's presentation of an old man in some amateur theatricals, -- the low voice flying off occasionally into a S [?]'soprano' timbre.. The**

**The presentation by the oboe is somewhat pert<sup>9</sup> & the growling<sup>10</sup> grumpiness of the bassoons are important<sup>11</sup>**

<sup>8</sup>Tenderfoot books <sup>9</sup>The oboe gives a somewhat pert version of the Theme,

<sup>10</sup>MFPW: growing <sup>11</sup>is important.

Hogwood (ix) and Maine (II, 105, following PR) give 'growling', which is undoubtedly correct. MFPW's 'growing grumpiness' has been quoted many times; the description fits the chromatically rising sequence here (10:1-6), but it is surprising that no-one else has suggested the more obvious 'growling'.

### Variation IV W.M.B.

**A country squire, gentleman & scholar; ~~this variation means nothing more than a~~ in the days of horses & carriages a ~~great deal more~~ arrangement it was more difficult than in these days of petrol to arrange the carriages for the day to suit a large number of guests. This Variation was written after the host had, with a slip of paper in his hand, forcibly read out the arrangements for the day & hurriedly left the ~~br~~ music room with an inad[ve]r[te]nt bang of the door.<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>12</sup>PR adds: In bars 15-24 are some suggestions of the teasing attitude of the guests.

### Variation IV V. R.P.A.

**Richard P Arnold, son of Matthew Arnold. A great lover of Brahms serious music which he played ^ (pianoforte)<sup>13</sup> in a self-taught sort-of-way manner -- evading difficulties but suggesting in a mysterious way the real feeling. His serious conversation was continually broken up by whimsical & witty remarks.**

**The Theme is ~~heard in the bass~~ & given by the basses & there is much badinage<sup>14</sup> among the wind instruments.**

<sup>13</sup>(on the pianoforte) <sup>14</sup>given by the basses with solemnity and in the ensuing major portion there is much light-hearted badinage

'Brahms' and 'serious' are separately struck out and were no doubt successive thoughts. Nevertheless, I think it is no coincidence that the four-note falling phrase which dominates the opening and closing sections of this Variation, in counterpoint with the Theme, appears prominently in No. 3 of Brahms's *Vier ernste gesänge*

(‘Four Serious Songs’), 1896; the song also features the falling thirds that characterise Elgar’s Theme. The text begins ‘O Tod, wie bitter bist du’, and the R.P.A. phrase is set to the word ‘bitter’. Newman noted the ‘gravity’ of the music and Tovey called it ‘gloomy’ (Rushton, 41); both words, like Elgar’s ‘solemnity’, apply equally to the Brahms. The allusion may be a tribute (on R.P.A.’s behalf?) to Brahms, who died in 1897.

Ulrik Skouenborg (1982) finds a ‘solution’ to the Enigma in the words and music of the *Vier ernste Gesänge*. The allusion in V may be thought to strengthen his case, which even with this help remains weak. Elgar’s deletions might also be taken as evidence that he had something to hide. If so, the something was not, I think, a clue to the ‘enigma’, but simply to the allusion itself. Always notably sensitive to imputations of derivativeness, he had suggested to Jaeger the omission of the Mendelssohn quotation in XIII, and had bitten Dorabella’s head off for hearing Chopin in *Gerontius*. Cecil Gray’s jibe about Elgar (1927: 91) would be often quoted: ‘when we have given to César the things which are César’s, and to Brahms the things which are Brahms’s, there is singularly little left except unimportant mannerisms and the self-consciously Tennysonian *nobilmente*’.

#### Variation VI. Ysobel

**A Malvern lady who was s learning the Viola;<sup>15</sup> it may be noticed fo that the opening bar, a phrase made use of throughout the Variation, is an ‘exercise’ for crossing the strings – a difficulty for amongst beginners: this on this is built a pensive and, for a moment, a romantic movement.**

<sup>15</sup>A Malvern lady, an amateur Viola player.

#### Variation. VII. Troyte

**A well-known architect in Malvern. The boisterous mood is merely banter. The uncouth rhythm of the drums etc<sup>16</sup> was really suggested by some maladroit ^ essays attempts to play the pianoforte, later the strong rhythm suggests the attempts of the ~~ins~~ instructor (E.E.) to make something like order out of chaos & the final despairing ‘slam’ is the effort proved to be vain.<sup>17</sup>**

<sup>16</sup>the drums and lower strings <sup>17</sup>the final despairing ‘slam’ records that the effort proved to be vain.

The original ending to this note is very Elgarian – he was fond of such sinewy Latinate constructions – and it seems a pity it was changed, presumably for the benefit of readers less lettered than the author.

#### Variation VIII. W.N.

**Really a ~~prelu~~ suggestion of an eighteenth century household;<sup>18</sup> the gracious personalities of the ladies is<sup>19</sup> sedately shown; W.N. was more connected with music than any others<sup>20</sup> of the family so her initials head the movement, to justify this position a little suggestion of a characteristic laugh is given it<sup>21</sup>**

<sup>18</sup>Really suggested by an eighteenth-century house. <sup>19</sup>are <sup>20</sup>than others <sup>21</sup>is given.

Elgar's first thought was presumably 'a prelude to Nimrod'. This aptly describes the relationship between the elegantly suppressed yearning of VIII and the direct yet dignified outpouring of IX, and the marvellous transition, by means of a held G and a tertiary modulation, from one to the other. Unfortunately, that relationship does not seem to have been integral to the movements' conception: at different times Elgar seems to have thought of following 'W.N.' with 'Troyte' and 'Dorabella' (Rushton, 58–9).

By 'an eighteenth century household' Elgar doubtless meant 'an eighteenth-century house and its later occupants'; the change in PR removes an obvious source of confusion but leaves one asking 'what ladies?' ('its ladies' would have solved the problem).

### Variation IX Nimrod

**A. J. Jaeger** The name is my variant of Jaeger. substitute for Jaeger<sup>22</sup> who was well known as a critic & friend of musicians During an one<sup>23</sup> evening walk Nimrod<sup>23</sup> discoursed eloquently on the slow movements of Beethoven & said that no one could approach B.<sup>24</sup> at his best in this field, A view in which I cordially concurred. Acute hearers It will be noticed that the opening bars are made to suggest the slow movement of the eig[h]th Sonata (pathétique)<sup>25, 26</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Jaeger\* [footnote] \*The German 'Jaeger' == hunter. – Ed.

<sup>23</sup>MFPW begins: 'The variations are not all "portraits"; some represent only a mood, while others recall an incident known only to two people. Something ardent and mercurial, in addition to the slow movement (No. IX), would have been needful to portray the character and temperament of A. J. Jaeger (Nimrod). [new paragraph] The variation bearing this name is the record of a long summer evening talk, when my friend

<sup>24</sup>Beethoven <sup>25</sup>(Pathétique). [new paragraph] Jaeger was for years the dear friend, the valued adviser and the stern critic of many musicians besides the writer; his place has been occupied but never filled. <sup>26</sup>MFPW: [note at end] \*In part from notes written by Elgar for the programme of the Jaeger Memorial Concert, 24 January 1910.

Elgar's note in the Jaeger concert programme begins 'In the dedication given above ['Dedicated to my friends pictured within'] it was my wish to include in a few words variations differing widely in scope'. It continues as in MFPW (24 above), and concludes: '[my friend] grew nobly eloquent (as only he could) on the grandeur of Beethoven and especially of his slow movements. A reference to the *Adagio* of the Pathétique Sonata is therefore seen in the opening bars of the *Nimrod* Variation'. Elgar evidently had the 1910 version in mind, or to hand, when writing EB722. Hogwood (x) is incorrect in saying that the last sentence of MFPW was taken from the concert programme: it is not there, and is the same as PR (27 above). The deleted reference to 'acute hearers' supports Rushton (46): without the composer's guidance 'this resemblance might have escaped notice'.

### Variation X ~~Dr~~ Dorabella<sup>27</sup>

**The name is taken ^ pseudonym is adopted from Mozarts 'Cosi fan tutti'.<sup>28</sup> a t**  
**The movement suggests a dance of th fairy-like lightness. The inner sustained**  
**phrases (Violas first, – later Flutes)<sup>29</sup> should be noted**

<sup>27</sup>No. X – 'DORABELLA' [new line] Intermezzo <sup>28</sup>Mozart's 'Cosi fan tutti'. [sic, as in EB722]<sup>29</sup>at first on the Viola and later on the Flute

PR has a preceding note, not signed by Elgar: 'The present Roll contains only the Intermezzo 'Dorabella', which, though it ranks as number ten of the series, is not strictly a Variation, for it has no musical connection with the main Theme'. But the 'inner sustained phrases' are clearly derived from the B section of the theme, and by drawing attention to them Elgar was surely doing (in reverse) what he was doing by highlighting rhythms and intervals in the theme: asserting the unity of the work and making sense of it for the listener. If he wasn't, the point of the comment is not obvious.

### Variation XI G.R.S.

**George Robinson Sinclair,<sup>30</sup> late organist of Hereford Cathedral. the Variation, however, has nothing to do with organs, cathedrals or, except remotely, G.R.S.<sup>31</sup> It really The first few bars merely were suggested by his great bull-dog (Da Dan, a well-known character) falling down the steep bank into the river<sup>32</sup> (bar 1), his paddling upstream<sup>33</sup> to find a landing place (bars 2 3)<sup>34</sup> & his rejoicing bark on landing – (2<sup>nd</sup> half of bar 4)<sup>35</sup> G.R.S. said, 'Set that to music' – Here it is.**

<sup>30</sup>GEORGE ROBERTSON SINCLAIR, Mus. D., <sup>31</sup>with G.R.S.

<sup>32</sup>river Wye <sup>33</sup> up stream <sup>34</sup>(bars 2 and 3) <sup>35</sup>(2nd half of bar 5).

### Variation XII. G B.G.N.

**Basil G. Nevinson; an distinguished amateur cello player of some distinction;<sup>36</sup> a most serious & devoted friend. The Variation is simply a tribute<sup>37</sup> to a very dear friend whose scientific & artistic attainments endeared & the wholehearted way they were at<sup>38</sup> the disposal of his friends particularly endeared him to the writer**

<sup>36</sup>of distinction and the associate with H.D.S-P. (pianoforte) and the writer (violin) in performance of many Trios – <sup>37</sup>is a tribute <sup>38</sup>were put at

### Variation XIII. xxx<sup>39</sup>

**The asterisks have been identified as replicing let ^ take the place of the name of Lady Mary Lygon.<sup>40</sup> who was, at the time of the Composition,<sup>41</sup> on a sea voyage. At The kettledrums drums suggest the distant throb of the engines of a liner, over which the clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn's 'Calm Sea & a Prosperous Voyage'<sup>42</sup>**

<sup>39</sup>... <sup>40</sup>take the place of the name of a lady <sup>41</sup>composition <sup>42</sup>Calm Sea and *Prosperous Voyage*.

In PR, as Elgar says there, 'only those of the 'friends pictured within' who have passed away are mentioned by name'. The use of Lady Mary's full name in the MS suggests that Elgar wrote at least this part of it after her death on 12 September 1927.

As Trowell points out, Elgar could not decide whether to acknowledge the subject of XIII; he changed his mind several times, within EB722 and between it and PR. About the beginning of the MS note Trowell (222) says: 'The first, deleted version of this sentence ... shows that he originally set out in a more cautious and roundabout way to present the whole idea [that '...' was Lady Mary and that she was on a sea voyage] impersonally as the speculation of others ... The relative clause was the reason for the identification, which was not initially presented as Elgar's own. By accident or design, after changing the beginning, he omitted to alter the end of the sentence'. But if the point was to explain the 'marine' imagery (Rushton: 75), the explanatory relative clause would have been needed in any case.

Trowell calls this clause 'the untruth which has caused so much speculation'. However, Elgar did not write 'the time of composition', as Kennedy (1987: 95) slips into saying, but in PR 'the time of the composition' and in EB722 – even more clearly – 'the time of the Composition'. That might mean any time from its genesis to its first performance, or even later – any time when the piece was 'in the air'. He does not actually say that Lady Mary, or 'a lady', was at sea when he wrote the Variation, or that this circumstance inspired it; indeed, the original deleted version casts doubt on the latter idea. But in the end he did allow the reader to infer both these things. The offending clause is not an untruth, rather a piece of misleading casuistry.

Trowell (220–23) argues persuasively, *contra* Moore, that when he wrote XIII Elgar was unaware of Lady Mary's impending voyage; that its 'marine' imagery recalled Helen Weaver's departure for New Zealand in 1885; and that it was embedded in what was nevertheless Lady Mary's Variation because 'He must have told Lady Mary about Helen Weaver, and she must have brought him comfort'. If so, then Lady Mary's journey, which suggested an alternative explanation, was a godsend when he had to deal with enquirers. It was also helpful when he came to write EB722, and I make some conjectures below about his feelings at that time.

#### Variation, XIV . E.D.U.

**Finale;**<sup>43</sup> **bold and vigorous. in general style. Written at a time when my friends**<sup>44</sup> **were very dubious and generally discouraging as to my**<sup>45</sup> **musical future, this 'variation' is merely to shew them what 'E.D.U.' (a 'paraphrase' of a fond name [deleted word which I cannot read; it begins with p] for the writer) intended to do. References are made to Var. I (C.A.E.) & to Var. IX (Nimrod), which are entirely fitting**<sup>46</sup> **to the intention mood of the piece. The whole of the work is summed up in the triumphant, broad presentation**<sup>47</sup> **of the theme in the major. []**

<sup>43</sup>FINALE: <sup>44</sup>when friends <sup>45</sup>the composer's <sup>46</sup>References made to Variation I

(C.A.E.) and to Variation IX (Nimrod), two great influences on the life and art of the composer are entirely fitting<sup>47</sup> triumphant broad presentation

The original 'shew them' amusingly confirms Kennedy's description (1987: 98) of 'E.D.U.' as 'the expression of one 'I'll show 'em' mood.'

## **Discussion**

EB722 affects our hearing and understanding of *Variations*, and hence of Elgar as a composer, in at least three ways. First, if I have interpreted correctly the deleted reference to Brahms in V, our understanding of the music is thereby enhanced: its 'solemnity' acquires a more precise meaning by the association. Kennedy (97) calls XIII 'the only tragic Variation'; perhaps it is not alone. Moreover, the movements are alike in that the darkness of each is deepened by a contrast with light. Second, to think of VIII as a 'prelude' to IX crystallises what many may have felt as the emotional relation of the two, and emphasises the seriousness and significance of IX. Third, how we listen to XIII is inevitably conditioned by what we believe about '...'; EB722 adds to the evidence.

No-one seems to have remarked on the fact that while Elgar's notes were designed to accompany a performance on the piano, a good deal of what he wrote refers to orchestral instruments. Possibly he (and his editor) had forgotten this; more likely, his comments are designed to help the listener imagine the orchestral sounds, and to bring the composition more fully to life. The change in V from '~~heard in the bass~~' to 'given by the basses' would support the latter interpretation. A more striking example is the "cellos etc' mentioned in connection with the 'drop of a seventh' in the Theme: Elgar evidently associated that feature with their timbre, so strongly that he assigned the passage to the theme rather than to 'C.A.E.' where it belongs, and chose it as specially important for the listener.

One would like to know more about the size and makeup of the audience – anticipated and actual – of 'The World's Music Series', the 'grandiose scheme' (Fenimore-Jones, 18) of which PR forms a part. Elgar allowed himself to be moderately technical ('sevenths', 'diatonic'), but 'drums' replaced '~~kettledrums~~' in XIII (was 'kettledrums' too visual?). '~~Acute hearers~~' (IX) might have been thin on the ground, or perhaps the phrase might have put the other sort off, or have seemed a trifle patronising.

Watching 'a mind of Elgar's scintillating intelligence' (Harper-Scott 2006: 182) in action is always exhilarating, even when what it is doing is relatively trivial. A few errors remained uncorrected in EB722, such as the "cellos. etc' of the theme, 'Cosi fan tutti' (X), and a wrong bar number (XI), as well as slips of grammar and punctuation. I discuss difficulties in VIII, X and XIII above. But even in this 'private draft' Elgar was on the whole characteristically vigilant and punctilious. In I, 'personification' should strictly be applied to a quality rather than a person; 'variant' in IX will not really bear the sense Elgar gives it. Both are duly changed. One tiny alteration is particularly engaging, since it shows Elgar's memory jogged by the act of writing: W.M.B. slammed the door not of the breakfast room but of the music room (IV).

Improvements, as distinct from corrections, have as much to do with tone as with clarity. In VI 'amongst beginners' is a little dismissive of 'Ysobel'; 'for beginners' less so. On the other hand in VII the 'superior' and hence sardonic 'essays' replaced the neutral 'attempts': Troyte no doubt enjoyed the result. In XII, Elgar's first thought evidently did less than justice to his feelings for 'a very dear friend', and he spelled out Nevinson's special virtue in a thirteen-word addition. In PR, additional information is supplied for II, IX and XII: all of it emphasises Elgar's relationship with the subjects.

Ever since Elgar teased his first audience about the identity of the 'friends pictured within', they have been for many listeners and perhaps most Elgarians the most interesting feature of the work; MFPW, containing only 'their' parts of PR, and adorned with their portraits, shows that Novello recognised this early on. Percy Young wrote: 'The idea behind the Enigma set was friendship ... the music ... suggests some part of the relationship known to have existed between the composer and those signified at the head of the separate variations'. This is a little difficult to reconcile with the line taken by Young in his later (1990) study, which almost ignores Elgar as a source and alleges that 'he said nothing about any of them' (91), an assertion characteristically and refreshingly provocative, but also wrong.

Elgar's contributions to PR come at the beginning of the first roll and between the Variations. Thus they did not suffer the peculiar constraints of the running commentary, each section of which had to be tailored not only to the width of the margin on which it was printed, but also to the playing time of the music it accompanied. But there are obvious physical limitations on the size of each roll; and long pauses for reading between Variations would presumably have been unwelcome. Within these constraints, such vignettes as the notes on IV, V and XII not only tell us all we need to know to understand the piece, but also bring the person magically to life. However, there is more truth in Young's preceding sentence: 'About his subjects Elgar was, on the whole, distinctly gnomic if not positively enigmatic'. There is, indeed, a reticence not wholly to be explained by restrictions of space. He seems sometimes to minimise the significance of his accounts: 'this variation means nothing more than' (IV); 'mere banter' (VII); 'the first four bars merely suggested' (XI); 'simply a tribute' (XII); 'merely to shew them' (XIV).

This restraint can also be seen in a sentence from PR quoted by Maine (II, 102), but so far as I know by no other writer: 'To me, the various personalities have been a source of inspiration, their idealisations a pleasure – and one that is intensified as years go by.' Elgar used 'idealised' of 'No 9 Variation' in a letter to Jaeger on 21 July 1906: 'you will never be more *dearly* idealised than that – better perhaps but not so sincere' (Moore, 1987, II, 650). I take the primary meaning of 'idealise' in both cases to be 'represent the essential qualities [of someone]'; Elgar clearly appreciated that a portrait is necessarily selective. (This sense is not distinguished by *OED*, though some examples there clearly imply it.) No doubt his statement is true so far as it goes, but there is something uncharacteristically suave about it, and especially about its last portion.

In fact, finding anything to say without saying too much might well have caused Elgar some difficulties. Op. 36 was famously Elgar's first big success; recalling the circumstances of its composition may have carried a considerable emotional charge.

The work was also to an almost unique degree personal: as he acknowledged in the programme note for the premiere, it had a covert meaning which was primarily a meaning for him, and it was about his friends (and, many would have realised, family). Those friends had literally made that work and that success possible. To revisit them all at once must surely have affected him to some degree. The 'suave' statement is also strikingly at odds with the much-quoted gloss on XIV: 'Written at a time when friends were dubious and generally discouraging as to the composer's musical future; this 'Variation' is merely to show what "E.D.U." ... intended to do.' EB722 shows that first thoughts were more specific and more emphatic: 'a time when my friends were very dubious ... to shew them'. It is true that in the same note in PR he also changed 'my musical future' to 'the composer's musical future'. But, *pace* Hogwood (ix), in PR Elgar did not consistently '[opt] for a more detached (third person) style' – indeed there is a first-person addition to 'C.A.E.'. I am sure that 'my friends' in XIV included some of those pictured within, and that either author or editor thought it wise to soften the dissonance in the published version. Elgar's complaint was probably unjustified, but of course it matters psychologically how Elgar actually felt' (Rushton, 74), which when he wrote EB722 was much the same as when he wrote *Variations*: 'the opening of E.D.U. plainly tells them in musical terms to go to the devil, except for Nimrod....and Alice Elgar' (Kennedy, 1970: 26). Perhaps 'idealisations' carries its usual meaning too?

Rushton (48) remarks on the dry brevity of the note on X, and records that the Elgars eventually 'dropped' Dorabella. Marriage would have ended her role as adoring female disciple, and Elgar might have seen this as defection; however, I refuse to see the hand of Freud in a deletion which might have become 'Drabella'. (Elgar's handwriting at this point seems to show signs of perturbation – or had he perhaps been fortifying himself with the 'fizzy Spanish wine' of which he was fond at this time (Reed, 1973: 81)?) Even the 'gracious' W.N. might have become the victim of Elgar's ungraciousness: to have called her Variation a 'prelude' to 'Nimrod' would have been, unmistakably, to set her lower in the scale of friendship than Jaeger.

On the one hand, old resentments may still have rankled. On the other, when Elgar wrote EB722 over half of the 'friends' were dead. Anderson (1993, 147) records that in 1920 'He marked Frank Schuster's score of the Variations with crosses against those ... who had died. He put a cross against his own 'E.D.U.' as well'. Since then, at least two more (H.D.S-P, 1924; R.B.T., 1923) had gone. But, as noted above, their number should probably include Lady Mary Lygon. The death of one whom he described as 'a most angelic person' (Trowell, 223) would surely have affected him deeply. Moreover, Helen Weaver (possibly XIII *pro parte*) also died in 1927, on 23 December. We do not know whether Elgar heard of this event, which might have moved him more deeply still – or, if he did, when: news from New Zealand took many weeks to reach England. But it is possible that he knew of it when he wrote the note on '...':

That note makes no more sense than the one on 'Dorabella'. The confused 'replicg', the agitated curlicue at the deletion of that word, and the uncorrected 'let' (probably the beginning of 'letters'), indicate uncertainty and anxiety over what he should write about Lady Mary. Moreover, if Trowell is right that the piece commemorates both her and Helen, and if by the time of EB722 he had in fact

heard that Helen had died, the deaths of these two so close together must have made the writing of the note on ‘...’ painful indeed. However, in Trowell’s words, ‘There must be a rational explanation for the fact that, after her death in 1927, Elgar contemplated restoring [Lady Mary’s] initials to the public gaze’ – that is, for his wanting to make a difficult task more difficult still. The answer may lie essentially in the fact of her death: he may well have desired to memorialise one to whom he owed much. I conjecture that the feelings recorded in EB722 and PR may have run something like this:

- (i) He wanted to acknowledge Lady Mary.
- (ii) He hesitated, for the same reason that the initials were omitted in the first place: the feelings suggested by XIII were too intense to be associated with Lady Mary (Trowell, 221, following Moore); hence his original, non-committal, form of words.
- (iii) He realised that casting doubt on Lady Mary would engender speculation about an alternative, so in EB722 he reverted to her as the lesser evil.
- (iv) However, he then felt compunction at his misleading mention of Lady Mary’s voyage: making use of this incident was making use of her, and no less than (ii) involved misrepresentation of his relationship with her (though Burley and Carruthers (1972: 126) suggest that early rumours did not concern him).
- (v) He compromised, and Lady Mary remained anonymous. The situation was in fact so complex and personal that, to quote Trowell once more, ‘there was nothing that Elgar could do to explain matters’. In the end, he may have decided that least said was soonest mended.

Probably I ought now to decide likewise, but I cannot resist one further speculation. At (ii), Elgar may actually (if fleetingly) have *wished* to acknowledge (while admitting nothing) the possibility of a different dedicatee, and so to memorialise Helen as well. If he had, such coat-trailing would have paralleled what he said (or allowed to be said) in the programme note to the first performance of *Variations*: the subtext in both cases is ‘there is a mystery here, but there’s no point in trying to guess it, but of course I want you to really, or why would I have mentioned it?’ To have exposed his feelings publicly would have been unthinkable; yet, as his letters and the accounts of his friends show, he often yearned for sympathy and – above all – understanding, and perhaps for a moment he craved them here.

The rough manuscript draft numbered Birthplace EB722 tells us something about Elgar as a composer and more about him as an author, but most about him as a person. The ‘sad soul of Edward Elgar’ (Kennedy 1987: 334) was evidently much the same ‘nearly thirty years after’ as it had been in 1898. What Elgar revealed of it in these ‘remarks’ on his friends is both telling and touching.

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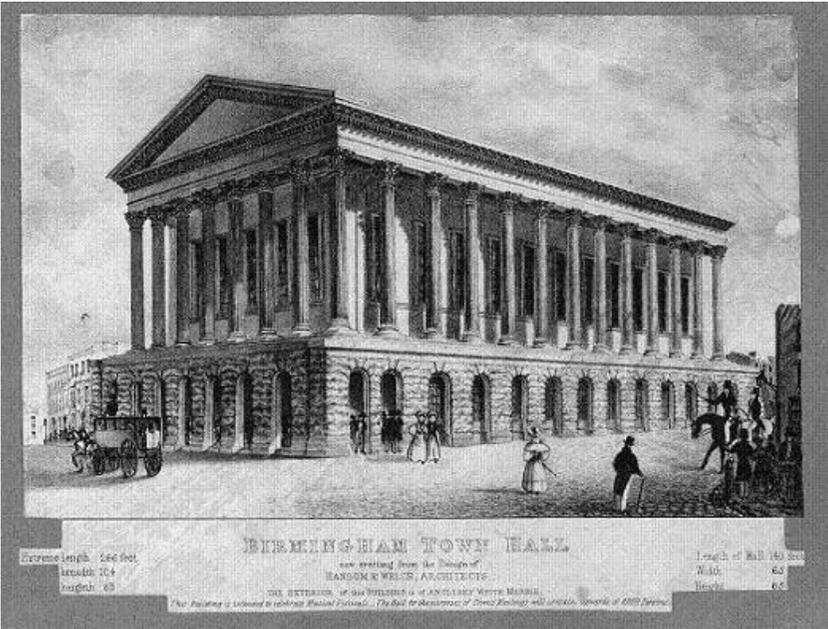
*Byrd and Elgar, and in the relationship between words and music in song. He is a member of the Elgar Society and served for some years on the Committee of the West Midlands Branch.*

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**Birmingham Town Hall, interior**



**Birmingham Town Hall in the mid-19th century**

# Elgar in Birmingham

**Stuart Freed**

Elgar's first significant contact with musical life in our 'second city' was in 1882, when he joined William Stockley's Birmingham-based orchestra (fig. 1). By this time the city had established itself as an important musical centre, despite having no permanent orchestra or purpose-built performing arena. However, as the city's industrial and commercial strength developed, so did its cultural activity.

The Birmingham Festival arose out of the need to provide the city's population with a hospital. Initially a subscription list was formulated which failed to raise the necessary funds; this in turn resulted in the proposal that a festival be held to support the project. The first festivals were irregular, but attracted enough support to enable them to be developed into a regular triennial event in 1768. In the century that followed the festival grew in scope and importance, attracting many of Europe's great musicians. Indeed, by 1837 the arrival of Mendelssohn, as conductor, composer, and organist, confirmed its position as one of England's premier musical events. The period from 1849 through to 1885 saw the festival develop under the direction of Michael Costa. He widened the scope of the music performed, introducing many of today's established composers and their works as well as encouraging performances of music by English composers.



**Fig. 1 William Stockley**

## ***The Elgar Years***

By 1885 Hans Richter had succeeded Costa as conductor of the festival. This appointment marked the start of a new era for music in the city, and the point at which the presence of Edward Elgar began to be felt in earnest. In that year he played in Stockley's orchestra, under Richter, in two new works: a cantata by the Worcester-born composer Frederick Bridge, then organist at Westminster Abbey, and a new oratorio by Stanford, five years Elgar's senior, and organist at Trinity College, Cambridge.

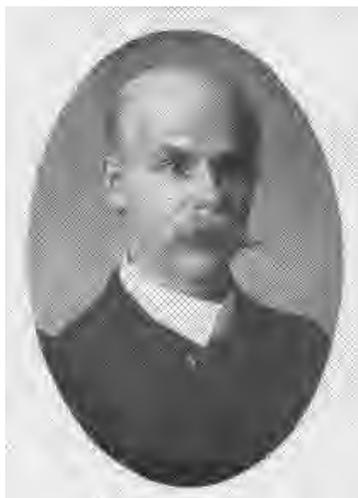
In a letter to Charles Buck, Elgar reports that he had travelled to Birmingham

to lead a private performance of a string quartet written by Herbert Wareing. Elgar's opinion of it was 'The mould is on it. But it is not bad'.<sup>1</sup> However, the fact that one of his friends had attempted a larger work had its effect on Elgar, whose letter to Dr Buck continued: 'I shall not bother with my Scottish overture. Old Stockley is afraid of it'. Clearly, such an overture would have been a major undertaking and no doubt may have been, in some small way, a response to the activities of his near contemporaries. Elgar later said:

Oh: about the Scotch overture ... I showed it to old Stockley & he candidly said he could not read the Score & it sounded to him disconnected. So I have retired into my shell & live in hopes of writing a polka someday – failing that a single chant is probably my fate.<sup>2</sup>

It would be a further fifteen years before he would hear one of his major works at a festival performance and this too would suffer from the limitations of 'Old Stockley'.

But we must look outside the festival arena to find the first extended Elgar work to be performed in Birmingham. This was in December 1895, when Charles Swinnerton Heap's Festival Choral Society performed *The Black Knight*, a work that had had its premiere in Worcester some two years earlier (fig. 2). On 6 December the following, by Robert Buckley, appeared in *The Birmingham Daily Gazette*:



**Fig. 2 Charles Swinnerton Heap**

The 'Black Knight' is no merely ingenious vamping-up of stale and worn-out platitudes. From first to last the work bears the impress of strong and original thought. There is little or none of the quality known as elegance, but in its place is a rugged power combined with a richness of imagination and a fertility of invention which remind us of Richard Wagner or Thomas Carlyle. Without being affectedly eccentric, the themes are novel and striking, their development masterly, their harmonic treatment and orchestral colouring of a great and noble type, as well as modern in the extreme sense of the term.<sup>3</sup>

Edward, together with Alice, visited Birmingham to attend rehearsals and they took the opportunity to see the Oratory at Edgbaston where John Henry Newman had written *The Dream of Gerontius*, a work certainly within Elgar's consciousness by this time, and the one that would take centre stage in the next chapter of the story of

- 1 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 113.
- 2 Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Edward Elgar. Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 15.
- 3 Cited from Moore, *Creative Life*, 201–2.

Elgar in Birmingham.

The twelve years between 1885 and 1897 were a period of innovation in breadth of music to heard at the festival. Much of what we now consider to be standard repertoire became firmly established, and music of earlier eras also started to feature more regularly. Consequently the music of the masters took a greater hold on the musical public's consciousness, and gradually began to influence the output of British composers. It may be a little harsh to suggest that their music was simply a pale imitation of European models, but it often seemed to do little more than echo what was coming in from abroad. More often than not, British music of the time was pleasant, undemanding, and well crafted. It was safe and easily understood, written in a musical language that its audience had grown to recognise and cherish. What was lacking was an authentic British voice. At the beginning of the 21st century it is difficult to imagine the effect that something like the Demons' chorus would have upon its audience; this was to be their introduction to 20th-century modernism.

During March 1898 Elgar had written to Joseph Bennett, music critic of the *Daily Telegraph* and a skilled librettist, about the possibility of producing a work using St Augustine as its subject. He received no reply, but wrote again in May after an enquiry by the Birmingham Festival Committee regarding a commission for the 1900 festival.

I do not expect a reply to this or my former enquiry as to St. Augustine: But the Birmingham people have more than hinted & I will call & see you one day.<sup>4</sup>

Although nothing came of the St Augustine idea, the fact that the festival committee was showing an interest underlined his growing importance in British music. On 7 November he met with a committee member, Charles Beale, after which he was able to report: 'we settled, verbally, that I am to have the principal place in the Birmingham Festival of 1900'.<sup>5</sup> But the problem of the subject of the new work remained. Novello, with an eye on the balance sheet, suggested a small-scale work along the lines of *The Banner of St George*, but this was rejected, together with the idea of a symphony celebrating the life of General Gordon of Khartoum. Elgar wanted to compose on a grand scale, but symphonies simply did not sell. Perhaps the long cherished and oft-discussed idea of an oratorio about the Apostles could be used.

The notion that Newman's poem might be the subject of the Birmingham commission seems first to have been discussed with Rosa Burley during 1899. She wrote:

He was afraid, however, that the strong Catholic flavour of the poem and its insistence on the doctrine of purgatory would be prejudicial to success in a Protestant community. He told me in fact that Dvořák, who had planned a setting of the work for the 1888 Festival, had been discouraged from making it for this very reason.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57.

5 Moore, *Creative Life*, 256.

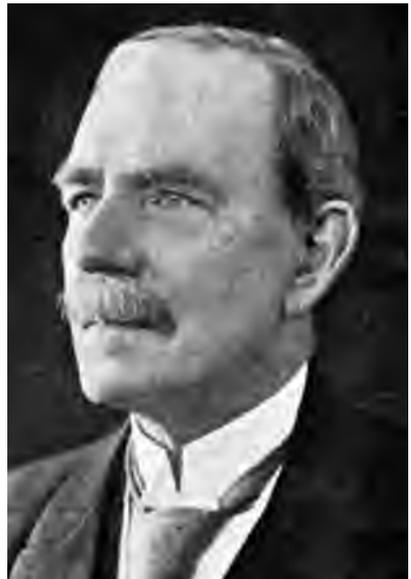
6 Rosa Burley and Frank C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar: The Record of a Friendship* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 291

There had been little objection to the presentation of religious works by Mozart, Verdi, and indeed Dvořák himself in festival programmes. Whatever Elgar's misgivings may have been, the situation seems to have been resolved on the first day of 1900, when as a result of a letter resigning the commission, Elgar was visited by George Johnson, chairman of the festival's Orchestral Sub-Committee. He persuaded the composer to withdraw his resignation and it was decided that the subject of the new work was to be *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Elgar's doubts about his ability to complete a work of the size projected had been the subject of some correspondence with Jaeger, but should not be taken too seriously. In almost every instance he voices similar qualms and in almost every case they proved to be unfounded. In any event, his enthusiasm for and long familiarity with the poem, and his stated wish to have composed 'a great work – a sort of national thing', meant that on 12 January he was visiting the Birmingham Oratory to consult about how the poem might be abridged.

The gestation any of Elgar's major works seems always to have been plagued by illness, financial obstacles, creative blocks, copying delays, printing holdups and a variety of other complications. The composition of *The Dream of Gerontius* was no exception. Indeed, such factors, combined with the untimely death of Charles Swinnerton Heap, and his replacement by Stockley, led to what was perhaps the least auspicious premiere of any major British composition. Despite some favourable pre-performance publicity, there seems to have been serious uncertainty among members of the Festival Chorus, many of whom could readily see the quality of the work, but showed some concern over the ability of 'Old Stockley' to withstand the physical strain of rehearsals or to understand, let alone sympathise with, the music. On 12 September, Elgar rehearsed the chorus himself. He had travelled to Birmingham with Alice and invited Henry Coward (fig. 3) to give his opinion of the work. However, by the end of the rehearsal Coward had become so disappointed by what he heard that, as he wrote later, he 'slipped away rather than meet [Elgar] and give him a depressing verdict. The singing reminded me of an automaton-shape and movement, but lifeless'.<sup>7</sup> And so it proved at the first performance:

A more perfunctory rendering of a new work it has never been my lot to listen to at a big festival ... the attack was rarely unanimous, and ... passages requiring the utmost delicacy often offended the ear by a grating harshness of tone and slovenliness of phrasing.<sup>8</sup>



**Fig. 3 Henry Coward**

7 Henry Coward, *Reminiscences* (London: Curwen, 1919), 152.

8 Herman Klein, in *The Sunday Times*. Citations of early reviews from Moore, *Creative*

Yet amid apparent chaos and failure, Elgar had scored a hit; the audience, despite the severe shortcomings of the performance, greeted the new work with prolonged and enthusiastic applause. The *Worcester Herald* reported:

Had it not been for a very determined effort on the part of the audience to see Mr. Elgar at the conclusion of the cantata he would not have appeared, although the applause was most enthusiastic.

Many other critics had high praise for the work, but the damage had been done and certainly at least one projected performance in London by August Manns was abandoned, to be replaced by the prelude alone. For Elgar, the failure was complete; he wrote to Jaeger of his despair, even remarking that God himself was against him and his art and that only the 'obscene and trivial' were rewarded. For the last word on the premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius* we turn to Henry Wood, in his somewhat unreliable memoir *My Life of Music*:

*Gerontius* ought to have created a far deeper impression when it was performed at the Birmingham Festival (in October, 1900), than it did. I know how anxious Richter was over it. I can see him now pacing up and down his bedroom with the score on the mantelpiece, but I shall never believe he was to blame for its failure. I do blame him, however, for not postponing its performance when it became evident that the copies would not leave the printers' hands until a few months before production. The choral idiom was so new, so strange, and so excessively difficult for a chorus brought up to the *Elijah* style of writing, that at least six months of choral preparation would not have been too much.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The First Triumph***

Thus *Gerontius* had made an impression; to such a degree that by the November of 1901 G.H. Johnson was back at Craeg Lea with a second commission. Surely Elgar must have had reservations after his experience the previous year. Whether or not these were discussed is a matter of conjecture, but we do know that Johnson was able to reassure the composer regarding the choral direction of the festival, now in the safe hands of R.H. Wilson, an experienced choral director who had given good service with choirs in and around Lancashire, and who was to remain in position until the last Birmingham Festival in 1912. Overall musical direction remained with Richter.

As before, with *Gerontius*, Johnson agreed to undertake all necessary negotiations with Novello, and one feels that he was a far better negotiator than the composer. Certainly the firm was now getting very jumpy about its position as Elgar's publisher. They knew that they had on their books a potential money-spinner, but equally that they had lost two *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches to Boosey. Clearly it was time to bring in Jaeger. In a letter to Elgar dated 16 October 1901 he wrote:

Never mind those 'pompous & circumstantial' Marches, (which I see are down for next

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*Life*, 331–4.

9 Henry J. Wood, *My Life of Music* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 324.

Tuesday. Hurrah!, won't we have some fun!)

When are you going to send us your Norwich Cantata [*Sea Pictures*]? Now, you will send *that* to us wont you? You OUGHT to anyhow, seeing what we are doing for Gerontius here & in Germany; & we shall pay you just as well as Boosey & Full Scores *wont* be any difficulty in future, I guess. I have had another long talk about you to Messrs A[lfred] & A[ugustus] L[ittleton] & you need fear no worries in future. They have had an eye-opener over the Leeds Festival [*Caractacus*] & I'm sure they'll meet you in *every way* in future. You know when they *have* taken to a man they'll do ANY MORTAL THING for him as in the case of Sullivan & Stainer. Only *understand* each other a little better & all will go like a House on fire & you *cant* deal with a better firm. Think over it & believe me, there's a dear. Our Editors(!!) won't edit *you!* never fear *that!*

Send your Irish Play music [*Grania and Diarmid*] also *please*.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of a biblical work based on this subject was not new to Elgar; it had stemmed from a remark made by his teacher Francis Reeve some thirty years earlier. Reeve's assertion that the Apostles were in many ways similar to the boys whom he was addressing, had struck a chord somewhere within Elgar's psyche. Hence he resolved to compile the text himself. As ever with Elgar, composition was not undertaken in an orderly way; it would seem that in the first instance, it was the start and the end that first fell into place. But progress was slow. By mid March 1903, he was only half-way through Part I, and it was clear that any possibility of the whole work as planned being ready for performance in that year's festival had long since disappeared. It was Alice who wrote to both Novello and Birmingham to inform them that Parts I and II would have to suffice and that 'Much of Part 3 which had been written first, you can have at any time later'. She cited Elgar's ill health as the sole reason for the change of plan, and indeed he was suffering from his recurrent eye problems and had been forbidden to work; but this had not kept him from the task of orchestrating the completed music.

There were, of course, the usual letters both to and from the publishers, they complaining that the music was not arriving quickly enough, Elgar in return lamenting the tardiness with which proofs were sent to him for correction. By the time Richter visited Malvern in January 1903, there was music to be heard. By 14 October, what we now know as *The Apostles* was given its first performance as the centrepiece of that year's Birmingham Festival.

Having obtained Richter's blessing, Elgar himself conducted the first performance. He embarked upon rehearsals with choir, soloists and orchestra who all came together on 9 October for the first combined rehearsal. No doubt to Elgar's immense relief, it was a great success. At the performance itself, the audience's reaction was explosive. But, as Michael Kennedy writes, the reaction from the critics was one of 'respect rather than enthusiasm'.<sup>11</sup> What is one to make of this from Joseph Bennett?

Having something to say in the fashion which appears to him best, he says it straight

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10 Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers. Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 304–5. (Nevertheless, *Sea Pictures*, and *Cockaigne*, went to Boosey.)

11 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 89.

out, and leaves the issue to the fates. Yet, though sturdily independent, courting nobody, he now occupies the position of a man with whom most people are determined to be pleased. There must be something in him much more than common to bring about this result.<sup>12</sup>

Or this from Alfred Kalisch:

In one respect *The Apostles*, as far as we have gone, is unique in the history of music. The first two parts deal with the Ministry, the Passion, and the Ascension, subjects which have inspired composers in all ages. But they have never treated them merely as a prelude to a later drama.<sup>13</sup>

Richter, however, thought that he had heard the greatest work since Beethoven's Mass in D. Here was the public reception that Elgar had been waiting for from Birmingham; but what followed was the opposite of what happened with *Gerontius*. Then, an initially cool reception was followed by huge success; now a resounding audience reaction was followed by, if not a withering on the vine, then at least a disappointing number of early performances. The best critics of the time were quick to recognize that *The Apostles* is an astonishingly finely crafted work, both in its musical and its literary content. The view that it was 'work in progress' was roundly set upon by Canon Gorton in *The Manchester Guardian*, a defence that made much of the fact that the source material, the gospels, are themselves incomplete

Dora Penny had her own point of view:

I think it very astonishing, when one looks at the words which are set in *The Apostles* and sees the immense skill with which they have been selected and put together, that the work was mainly done by one who was finding out the beauties of the Bible almost for the first time. Is there anything more moving, for instance, than the words, and music, of that final chorus?<sup>14</sup>

### ***The Lecture Hall***

Elgar had by now established himself as Britain's pre-eminent composer. Not only was there an increasing demand for his music, but he was also finding himself welcomed into the corridors of academia, a fact that surely could not have escaped his well-developed sense of irony. In addition to the honorary degrees conferred upon him, in 1904 he found himself present at the prize-giving of the Midlands Institute in Birmingham. After speeches by the principal of the new University of Birmingham and the Lord Mayor, Elgar himself spoke on 'The new place for music in the intellectual world'. He began:

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12 *The Daily Telegraph*, cited Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 416.

13 Bennett in *The Daily Telegraph*; Kalisch in *The World*, both cited Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 416.

14 Mrs Richard Powell, *Memories of a Variation* (fourth edition, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 54.

If we musicians are going rather a little ahead and putting a little intellectuality into our music, and trying to be considered reasonable beings, instead of merely puppets to amuse you, the lords of science and literature must not be angry with us. The sun does not chide the morning star because it ushers in the dawn.<sup>15</sup>

The head of the Institute's School of Music was Granville Bantock. At his bidding Elgar was persuaded to accept an appointment as visiting examiner. But others had different ideas about how Elgar could be brought into academic life in the city. In a letter dated 7 December 1904 and addressed to Joseph Chamberlain, Chancellor of the university, Richard Peyton (fig. 4) offered to support ten thousand pounds to establish a chair of music, provided that Elgar could be persuaded to accept the position. No doubt influenced by his earlier experience as a reluctant teacher and his innate dislike of the role, Elgar was disinclined to agree to the proposal, and it was only after much persuasion by the good and the great of Birmingham's musical glitterati and academic establishment that he was eventually convinced that he should accept. Even so, Elgar insisted that conditions be attached:

1. That I should not be expected to reside in Birmingham.
2. That I do not deliver more than six lectures or addresses in the first year.
3. That if the development of the musical activity in Birmingham should lead to the creation of a Faculty of Music, a lecturer shall be appointed for the tutorial work.
4. That a full & cordial concurrence in the above proposals comes from the donor & the officers of the University.
5. That the post be not advertised, even pro forma.



**Fig. 4 Richard Peyton**

Elgar then went to London to seek advice from Alfred Littleton. Littleton recommended acceptance with a further provision that he might resign the post after three years. Richard Peyton, however, was not satisfied and wanted full assurance that Elgar '*would not take up the work in any temporary or tentative fashion*' [original emphasis]. The matter was finally settled after a meeting between the two men, and Edward Elgar became the First Peyton Professor of Music at a salary of £400 per annum.<sup>16</sup>

The first lecture was given on 16 March 1905 and was entitled *A Future for English Music*, the title used for the lectures' posthumous publication.<sup>17</sup> After an opening section highlighting his own unsuitability for the role of lecturer, Elgar set

15 Moore, *Creative Life*, 446.

16 Moore, *Creative Life*, 447.

17 Percy M. Young (ed.), *Edward Elgar, A future for English Music and other lectures* (London: Dennis Dobson 1968). Page references are given in the text in [].

about arguing two central points: that the academic establishment was not to be trusted, and that it failed to produce composers of real quality. But his real purpose was to ruffle some feathers, not just those of academics in general, but particularly those of Stanford, whose music had often been accused of, if not copying Brahms, at least coming out of the same mould. He referred to a speech by Richard Strauss, sharpened its point, and directed it straight at Stanford:

We all knew, although we dared not say so in so many words, what he [Strauss] then told us: that Arne was somewhat less than Handel, that Sterndale Bennett was somewhat less than Mendelssohn, and that some Englishmen of later day were not quite so distinguished as Brahms.[43]

Without doubt, Elgar saw this as an opportunity to strike back at Stanford, angered by his public objection to Elgar's appointment and the 'odious' letter he had sent to Elgar. But still more barbs were heading Stanford's way, whose *Irish Rhapsodies* were among his most popular works:

Twenty, twenty-five years ago, some of the Rhapsodies of Liszt became very popular. I think every Englishman since has called some work a Rhapsody. Could anything be more inconceivably inept. To rhapsodise is one thing Englishmen *cannot* do ... This, you will say, is a trivial incident. So it is, but nevertheless it points a moral showing how the Englishman always prefers to imitate.[51-2]

Up to this point, the lecture was certainly addressing his early struggles against both artistic and social barriers. I suspect also that there was also just a tinge of mischievousness thrown into the mix. Eventually Elgar addressed his title. He could see a future for English music:

if the younger generation are true to themselves, are strong, if they cease from imitation and draw their inspiration from their own land.[53]

Understandably, reaction to his lecture was rapid; and the response of both academics and allies of Stanford was predictable. Even in the packed lecture theatre the speech resulted in a general unease. Elgar must have known that this would be the effect. Yet not everybody disagreed with him. While suggesting that his opinions might have been better kept for private consumption, *Musical Opinion* went on to suggest that there was some justification for his main point, and that professorial responsibility may well have dulled many a creative talent. The writer then pointed out that, ironically, by giving the lecture that he had, Elgar may have been digging his own grave![94-5]

'English Composers' were the subject of the second lecture. It was just as disorganized as the first, and no less frank. He repeated his assertion from the first lecture, that music had no place in the affections of the English, and that English music commanded little respect abroad. He berated the younger school of composers for their tendency to disregard form, and audiences for neglecting concerts of English music. Once again the address was to result in heated debate. This time Stanford himself joined in; in a letter to the *Times* he objected to the suggestion that English music had no audience abroad. Once again it fell to *Musical Opinion* to defend the

lecturer, agreeing that there was very little English music of real quality, and adding that only Elgar himself stood as standard bearer. The article went on to suggest that his real crime was to draw attention to the fact.

The lecture on 10 November 1905, barely a week after the previous one, took as its subject Brahms's Third Symphony, which was to be performed shortly afterwards by the London Symphony Orchestra with Elgar conducting. Surely Elgar must have thought that this time there was no possibility of controversy. He argued that the symphony was an example of 'pure music' rather than descriptive, and went on to suggest that this non-descriptive type was the superior art form. A heated disagreement with Ernest Newman ensued and droned on in the pages of the Manchester press. [105–8] When Newman was invited to argue out the point with Elgar, he found it impossible to meet the composer in spite of the latter's flexibility regarding both time and date.

*English Executants* was the title of the next lecture, on 29 November. It focused upon the lack of English singers, soloists, and conductors, arguing that the root of this problem lay in poor education. Elgar went on to suggest that there was a complete lack of 'drama' in England, citing his own play-going experiences and saying that there were barely enough good actors in England to cast one play. He further propounded that this overflowed into the performance of music, and was exemplified by a dearth of good English conductors, most of whom were composers and not specialists in interpretation. His one major exception was Henry Wood. That his criticisms were both well meant and constructive cannot be in doubt, for he went on to call for the establishment of conducting courses, a proposition new to the English musical education establishment and one not fully taken up for a further fourteen years. Once again there was a furore in the press. One article went so far as to quote 'an eminent organist' as saying that 'My opinion of such language is simply this: The statements are unworthy of a professional [sic] chair'. [147]

The lecture on 6 December was entitled *Critics* and included his views about what he very early on described as 'intelligent audiences'. He maintained that they were 'factors necessary to the working and well-being of a concrete art'. His main thrust though, was that the function of the critic, be he a professional or part of the intelligent audience, was to add 'the final polish' once the composer had learned all that he could from friends and teachers. Reaction to this latest address was somewhat less vitriolic, but the *Musical News* did go so far as to say that it thought that Sir Edward might by now be sorry that he had ever accepted the Birmingham Professorship.

The final lecture of the 1905 series was given on 13 December and bore the title *Retrospect*. In it Elgar looked back at his first year of incumbency and could not resist the opportunity to reopen old arguments: 'I still *look upon music* which exists without any poetic or literary basis as the true foundation of our art ... *No arguments I have yet read have altered this view*'. [205] He went on:

I hold that the Symphony without a programme is the highest development of art. *Views to the contrary are, we shall often find,* held by those to whom the joy of music came late in life or who would deny to musicians that peculiar gift, which is their own, a musical ear, or an *ear for music*. [207]

There was a ten-month break before the next lecture, on orchestration. The prospect of another round of lectures was the cause of deep depression for Elgar, and he threatened to withdraw on a number of occasions. Fortunately for him the date of the lecture was 1 November, the day of municipal elections in the city, and so the newspapers might be busy elsewhere! The lecture itself started by defining the term and refuting the assertion that orchestration was merely arranging. He touched on some of the technicalities of voicing and pitch before launching an attack on the way the piano was used by composers, its unsuitability as a tool for the orchestrator, and its ubiquity in the world of music. His point was that the piano simply could not replicate orchestral harmony or colour. His dismissal of the history of the orchestra from Bach to Mozart as being dull would find little favour in our own age, but seemed to create few waves in 1906. He closed the lecture with a familiar grouse, the 'pauperization' of those who sought to become composers. This may have seemed beside the main point, but Elgar could always bring any conversation, letter, essay or lecture around to matters financial.

In what was to prove his final lecture as Peyton Professor, Elgar referred back to his previous address and chose for his title *Mozart's G minor Symphony*. The lecture was given on 8 November, and took place in a room that was too small, and so unnecessarily crowded. This time the press was present; and the lecturer again gave them ammunition.

Can anyone say that Mozart would have omitted the upper note of the phrase if he had an instrument which could play it? No.

The whole question of 'improving' the orchestration of the old masters might turn on this very simple point.[275]

Elgar had said this simply to highlight the fact that technical limitations of the instruments available to Mozart precluded what, to a modern day composer, would be a natural progression for the music. The press saw it differently and reported that 'Sir Edward expressed himself in favour of a revision of the works of the old masters'. [276]

Surely he must have felt that enough was enough. After taking the chair at two more lectures at which he explained that it was only due to the condition of his eyes that he was not lecturing himself, he was never to appear as Peyton Professor again. He finally resigned his position in August 1908 and was succeeded by Granville Bantock. This did not, however, mark a complete break with the university. He continued to work towards the creation of a university music library and was keen to help establish a regular concert season in the city and by extension, the university. Nonetheless, Peyton's disappointment at the failure of his scheme was not to be denied. Elgar had taken no more pleasure from lecturing than he had done years earlier from violin teaching. Not only did he find the task of preparing the lectures a chore, but he found their delivery just as tiresome. They were also diverting his time and attention from the business of composing.

## Two-part Trilogy

The chief matter in hand was the next instalment of *The Apostles*. As early as February 1904 Elgar was contemplating changes to his original scheme. In an interview with the Birmingham journalist Robert Buckley he said 'There will, therefore, be two other oratorios'.<sup>18</sup> By July 1905 the tone had changed; clearly, the project was not progressing at the pace Elgar would have liked. Things were not much better by 26 November when Alice wrote in her diary: 'Much worried – Fate of 'Apostles' for Festival trembling in the balance'.<sup>19</sup> Once again the melancholy that always seemed to afflict him when composing took its toll on Elgar. On New Year's Eve 1905 he wrote to Walford Davies he was 'the same depressed (musically) being', but that he was 'working away & some of the themes are not bad'.<sup>20</sup> Just a few days later (4 January), though, he was back in harness and wrote to Alfred Littleton:

By this post I send the first scrap of the new work – title to be considered: it should be '*The Kingdom of God*'. This portion is only the introduction but the rest shd follow soon: this portion must of course end a page.<sup>21</sup>

Here for, the first time, comes the suggestion that the new work should be called something other than the next part of *The Apostles*. The title, however, found little favour with Littleton and the music submitted was also the subject of discussion. It had been written some three years previously and was eventually replaced by a newly composed prelude.

Throughout January Elgar was plagued by illness and as Alice's diary entries show she was very worried about his general state of health and mind. Elgar resolved to abandon the whole project, but Alice would have none of this. She visited Alfred Littleton and together they agreed to ask the Birmingham committee to accept half the new work in the hope that the final part would be completed at some future date. By the middle of February word came that the Orchestral Committee of the Festival had agreed to the arrangement suggested by Alice. 'I wd. prefer *not* [original emphasis] to do it but it seems the only way to make things pleasant for everybody & so I suppose it must be done', as Elgar wrote to Littleton on 21 February.<sup>22</sup> But the plan had worked; Elgar's health began to improve and he returned to work, albeit slowly at first and with little enthusiasm. Then an American trip interrupted progress, and by the time they were back in England just a few pages of full score could be sent to the publisher. But at least the title of the work had been settled: it was to be *The Kingdom*.

By mid-June Novello was getting anxious about getting the printed material out in time for rehearsals. Elgar wrote with assurances that he could meet the deadlines and that all would be well. Then, having dispatched the letter, he fell while walking in his garden and injured himself. Although no bones were broken, the fall upset him and, of course, work was impossible until the pain was eased by much massaging,

18 Moore, *Creative Life*, 431.

19 Moore, *Creative Life*, 477.

20 Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 169.

21 Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers*, 634.

22 Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers*, 637.

perhaps as much of ego as of the injury! Work recommenced on 30 June, and on 23 July Alice could report: 'E. really finished the composing of his beautiful work – Most thankful'.

After the usual round of rehearsals, *The Kingdom* was premiered in Birmingham Town Hall (see p. 22) on 29 September 1906 to huge acclaim. Vernon Blackburn in the *Pall Mall Gazette* was typical of many reports: 'I believe that in the history of art [*The Kingdom*] will rank definitely with the 'Matthew Passion' of Bach.<sup>23</sup> Not all of the notices were as generous. Edward Baughan, in the *Daily News*, was critical of the proportions:

The composer's intention has been to deal with the teaching of the Apostles, and therefore the oratorio could not end at what seems a natural conclusion. But having that intention Sir Edward Elgar ought surely to have planned his music on different lines.

Ernest Newman's verdict, despite praise for the choral writing, was damning, suggesting that much of the music was dull and that the composer's skill as an orchestrator and his mastery of musical effect masked a lack of real inspiration. Newman, of course, still had an axe to grind over the 'pure' or 'programmed' music debacle.

What of the final part of the intended trilogy? As a plan it remained in place for some time. As far as the Festival Committee was concerned, *The Last Judgment* was to be completed ready for performance in 1909. Whether or not the Elgar camp thought that this would happen is not recorded. The plan was not finally abandoned until the December of the following year when the composer wrote to Novello 'definitely and finally to give up the idea'. The matter, it now seemed, was closed.

### ***The Final Festival***

In June 1907 Elgar was once again in Birmingham. The first of his three engagements was to be present at the inaugural meeting of the University Musical Society. Here he made a speech welcoming the gift of a piano to the new society donated by Richard Peyton. Later that day he attended the University's Degree ceremony and that evening, together with Alice, he dined at Peyton's home. The following day, in a packed Town Hall, he was awarded an honorary MA to the boisterous delight of the assembled students.

The 1909 Birmingham Festival was the last under the direction of Richter, and there was no new work from Elgar. However, the 1912 festival, the last year in which it would be held, saw the premiere of two great works: Sibelius conducted his own Fourth Symphony, and Elgar *The Music Makers*. The idea of setting Arthur O'Shaughnessy's Ode was hinted at in an interview Elgar gave in 1904. By the time the Elgars had established themselves in Severn House, the idea had crystallized and was taking shape. In an interview entitled 'Sir Edward Elgar, O.M., at Home', Robin Legge reported that composition of *The Music Makers* was well under way, and that Muriel Foster was to be the soloist. Work was subject to the usual bouts of disruption

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23 Press reports cited from Moore, *Creative Life*, 504–6

through illness and, this time, from a commission from Sir Oswald Stoll, *The Crown of India*. Nevertheless by May 1912 formal composition on *The Music Makers* was well advanced. Elgar had already resolved to use the new piece as kind of review of his life's work, and therefore to use themes from his earlier works. The premiere was on 1 October 1912. Alice described it as both splendid and impressive, taking particular care to comment upon the performance of Muriel Foster. But the press was less kind. The newspapers largely misunderstood the work, and the harsh treatment lavished upon the music seems to have persisted through to our own time. A review of the second performance in Brighton suggested that:

Sir Edward Elgar's Birmingham Festival novelty, 'We are the Music Makers', is not a case of new wine tasting like the old; in fact, it is the nips he permits us of the latter that make the latest vintage seem lacking in flavour and bouquet.<sup>24</sup>

Some went so far as to suggest that it was 'second-rate Elgar'. They failed to understand what Michael Kennedy refers to as a composer writing his own requiem; this was his most personal music and self-quotation serves to strengthen the sense of yearning that he felt so deeply and that remained unresolved for the rest of his life.

Birmingham still had no permanent orchestra in 1912; it was brought into existence in 1920 under the baton of Appleby Matthews, with the assistance of a municipal grant of £1250. Elgar conducted its opening concert in a programme of his own music. It was to be his last significant connection with the musical life of a city that for him had witnessed both great triumphs and enormous disappointment, that provided vast opportunities but often seemed to deny him the success he undoubtedly deserved. But above all, it was a city that gave him the chance to compose large-scale music that has gone on to enrich the lives of us all.

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24 Cited in Moore, *Creative Life*, 639.

# 'I scramble through things orchestrally': did Elgar really dislike the piano?

John S. Weir

Elgar's lifetime spanned the heyday of the piano in social music-making. Almost every household with a front parlour or drawing-room had its piano. His father derived much of his income from the sale, tuning, and repair of pianos, and from the sale of sheet music, particularly the piano repertoire or songs with piano accompaniment; he was also by all accounts a more than competent pianist. This and its central role in family music make it surprising that Elgar wrote so little for the instrument. He could write effectively for it, as *Griffinesque* (1884) and *Presto* (1889) show. Short pieces of moderate difficulty would have sold well among the parlour pianists, providing a useful addition to his income.

The usual reason given is that Elgar disliked the piano. At first sight this appears straightforward, but it is an explanation that itself requires explanation – even if it is one that can neither be proved nor disproved. The idea that Elgar disliked the piano has been current for many years. After she had wheedled the *Concert Allegro* from him, Fanny Davies wrote hoping that he would 'get to like the piano better'.<sup>1</sup> On 23 December 1931 Sir Donald Tovey wrote to Elgar:

Rumour asserts that you cannot abide the pianoforte. However impertinent such rumours are they point to your having much the same view of my instrument as I have – viz. a dislike of chopsticks, and a hankering after the suggestive rather than the material range of the instrument.<sup>2</sup>

No-one except Tovey seems to have questioned Elgar's dislike, and it has taken on an almost axiomatic quality. Percy Young called the *Concert Allegro* 'a rare essay, for Elgar disliked the pianoforte'; Rosa Burley expressed surprise that he used it when directing the ensemble class at The Mount 'despite his lifelong contempt for the piano'; in his short study of 1984 Simon Mundy again took the dislike for granted; and for Jerrold Northrop Moore Elgar's 'oft-expressed aversion' is almost an article of faith.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Fanny Davies, undated letter cited by Diana McVeagh, this Journal 12/3 (November 2001), 120.

2 Tovey's letter is cited in Percy M. Young, *Elgar O.M.. A Study of a Musician* (London: White Lion Press, 1973), 237.

3 Young, *Elgar O.M.*, 97; Rosa Burley and Frank C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar: the Record*

Elgar expressed unqualified dislike of the piano on only one recorded occasion, reported by Dora Penny. Her suggestion that he had apparently quoted Chopin in *The Dream of Gerontius* elicited this reply:

I know nothing about pianoforte music. I hate the piano as an instrument and I don't care for Chopin and I never heard the piece you mention.<sup>4</sup>

This could, of course, be no more than a peevish rebuttal of an accusation of plagiarism.

While Elgar believed that what he called the 'whole shop episode' hindered his recognition as a composer, he readily acknowledged the value of growing up in a household full of music. In an interview in August 1916 he said 'A stream of music flowed through our house and the shop, and I was all the time bathing in it'.<sup>5</sup> He had happy memories of accompanying his father on his piano-tuning rounds. He told W.H. Reed that trips to country houses were 'a delightful day's outing. While the piano was being attended to he could roam about the grounds until he was taken into the house and refreshed'.<sup>6</sup> He did not mention (or Reed did not record) extemporising on the newly-tuned pianos to show off his father's workmanship. He did, however, say that the country gentry always treated his father as a gentleman and a friend. These may be rose-tinted recollections. Nevertheless, they do not suggest a dislike of the piano born of unfortunate experiences in youth.

It is likely that the rumour that he disliked the piano originated, albeit unintentionally, with Elgar himself. He took great pride in the fact that his musical ideas came to him without specific reference to any instrument, simply as music. As a corollary, he stressed that he had no time for works that showed their keyboard origin. He believed that his lack of formal musical education made the musical establishment, largely piano- or organ-trained, regard him as an outsider. This combination of pride in his own talents, dislike of academic approaches to music, and perhaps a desire for some form of revenge, lies behind many of his public and private utterances. The Birmingham lectures of 1905–6 are full of disparaging remarks about the dominance of the piano, pianists of the showy sort, and composers who work at or from the piano. He took a sideswipe at the very beginning of the inaugural lecture:

The English custom of giving the commission to a song writer or pianist to compose cantatas or symphonies or oratorios for Musical Festivals has long been in vogue ...<sup>7</sup>

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*of a Friendship* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 34; Simon Mundy, *Elgar* (London: Omnibus Press, 1984), 72; Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 168.

- 4 Mrs Richard Powell, *Edward Elgar, Memories of a Variation* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 72.
- 5 Elgar, interviewed by Percy A. Scholes in 1916, cited Moore, *Creative Life*, 168.
- 6 W.H. Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him* (London: Gollancz, 1936), 44–5.
- 7 Elgar (ed. Percy M. Young), *A Future for English Music and other lectures* (London: Dobson, 1968), 29.

The lecture on orchestration repeatedly stressed that the orchestra should not be approached through the piano. He set out and developed his belief that the dominance of the piano was

... responsible for many distorted ideas in music generally; everything is 'arranged' or arrangeable for the piano and this has given rise to the *notion that music is* in some way composed first and 'arranged' for orchestra *afterwards*.<sup>8</sup>

In interviews the language was less forceful and the sideswipes less frequent. Nevertheless those who heard the lectures or read the biographies and articles which appeared in his lifetime could well have been left with the impression that he disliked the piano. The relative scarcity of any piano works from him would have done nothing to dispel the idea.

Readers of his published letters might also be led to the same conclusion. The letters to Jaeger contain less than flattering references: 'Thanks for playing that Serenade – it's no good on the piano'; 'The average pianist is a prize Ass: I gave it [*Chanson de Nuit*] to an amateur (a poor one) & he could make nothing of this arrgt. – couldn't see the tune'; 'My music does not arrange well for the piano & consequently is of no commercial value'.<sup>9</sup>

The letters bring to light another problem which beset Elgar in seeing his compositions into print – the need to provide piano transcriptions and arrangements. Before recordings and the wireless became universal, piano arrangements were the form in which orchestral works would become known outside the concert hall. Further, publishers were in the habit of paying royalties on the sale of such arrangements, not on performances. To make money from his compositions, and in earlier days to achieve some recognition, Elgar had to spend time making arrangements, attempting to convert non-pianistic music into a form which the amateur pianist could manage. Piano reductions of orchestral accompaniments to choral works were another trial. Berthold Tours, a predecessor of Jaeger at Novello, was exacting in his requirements when dealing with the relatively unknown composer.<sup>10</sup> For all his dislike of the process, Elgar devoted time and care to making his own arrangements or to considering those made by others and sent for his approval. He frequently complained to Jaeger: 'oh, the weariness of these arrgts'; 'I'm not sure if this arrgt will do' – and to Littleton: 'I can't *arrange* it well myself & spend hours trying to make "bits" look like my scoring'.<sup>11</sup> This may be an accurate indication of Elgar's opinions. But correspondence can be misleading; a letter may reflect the writer's feelings at the time, or his attitude to the recipient. Elgar was

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8 Elgar, *Future*, 237.

9 Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 96, 287, 326 (respectively 11 November 1898, 28 April 1901, and 13 January 1902).

10 Re Tours and *The Black Knight*, see Moore *Elgar and his Publishers*, 13, and *Creative Life*, 166; on *King Olaf*, *Creative Life*, 212.

11 *Elgar and his Publishers*, 572, 574, 634 (respectively 26 July and 6 August 1904; 16 December 1905).

'not given to minimizing his misfortunes and frustrations', and his words cannot always be taken at face value; as Michael Kennedy remarks, 'in Jaeger he found a sympathetic outlet for repressed frustrations, and this tempted him very often, I suspect, to dramatize himself in his letters'.<sup>12</sup>

The piano was very much part of Elgar's life. His first music lessons were piano-based; he continued to play even though he soon transferred his formal studies to the violin. His recollections of family music-making referred affectionately to it, and it featured in his earliest compositions. Wherever he lived, there was a piano. If one were not immediately available, arrangements were soon made to obtain one. A fortnight after he and Alice moved into Avonmore Road, one was sent from Worcester. Even for a short stay a piano was a necessity. Rosa Burley tells of the intricate negotiations to hire one for the family's stay in Alassio in 1903.<sup>13</sup>

From the very first, it was a tool of his trade. At nineteen, he was accompanist to the Worcester Glee Club. Thereafter, when directing choral societies, school ensembles, or the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society, he used the piano at rehearsals. Many remembered his skill as an accompanist and his ability to fill in missing parts. As late as 1912, when he attended the daily rehearsals for *The Crown of India*, he played 'his own score at the piano, accompanying chorus and solos with extreme care and wonderful patience'.<sup>14</sup> He played the piano while giving violin lessons; some pupils complained that he played all the time, without apparent reference to what they were doing.

Elgar was prepared to act as accompanist at private and public performances of his own works. Shortly after their first performance, he accompanied Clara Butt in four of the *Sea Pictures* at St James's Hall. The first semi-public performance of the Violin Concerto is well documented, as is his involvement in early performances of the Violin Sonata and Piano Quintet. In later years he rarely played or accompanied the works of other composers in public, even on social occasions. His diary for September 1905 records:

... then to dine with the Ambassador [in Istanbul]. Lady M[aud Warrender] sang many songs & Frank [Schuster] accompanied beautifully – then we had 'In Haven' & 'Where corals lie' which Lady M. sang well & I accompanied.<sup>15</sup>

There are varying views as to what use Elgar made of the piano in the process of composition. What is certain is that it was essential. His workroom was never without one. His skill in improvisation was undoubtedly valuable in developing his ideas. W.H. Reed said that the piano was there 'in case he wanted to try anything he had written and give his hand a rest'. Moore amplified this: 'Having assembled a number of ideas, he could use the piano to weave them speculatively into webs of possible structure'.<sup>16</sup> The revision and proof-reading processes also involved him in

12 Michael Kennedy, *A Portrait of Elgar* (Third edition, Oxford University Press, 1987), 65.

13 Burley and Carruthers, *Edward Elgar*, 166.

14 *The Standard*, 1 March 1912, cited Moore, *Creative Life*, 629.

15 Elgar's diary, cited Moore, *Creative Life*, 467.

16 Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him*, 156; Moore, *Creative Life*, 149.

playing the piano.

In private he found the piano a source of relaxation, entertainment, and solace. While it may never have attracted the eager enthusiasm he showed for golf or bicycling, playing the piano for pleasure was 'always there'. In earlier years he played the violin in ensembles with Dr Buck, as with his Malvern friends. There was, however, always a piano involved; no-one mentions him playing string quartets. He enjoyed playing piano duets, usually arrangements of orchestral works. His partners included friends and acquaintances as well as professional colleagues. Percy Hull recalled an occasion when he, G.R. Sinclair, and Elgar took turns in playing a duet arrangement of Chaikovsky's *Pathétique*. The bass part of the 5/4 movement proved Elgar's undoing: 'The violin is my instrument, not the piano. I can read any old or new rhythmic patterns on the fiddle'.<sup>17</sup>

Many of his friends played the piano, and his acquaintance included several professional pianists. Of the amateurs, two may have coloured his opinion of the instrument. In October 1886 Miss Roberts of Redmarley had her first lesson in pianoforte accompaniment. It hardly needs to be said that the outcome was supremely important to Elgar. Interestingly, there is no indication that Alice played the piano after their marriage. The 'other Alice', Stuart-Wortley, was an accomplished pianist, and the piano featured largely in her intense friendship with Elgar. She played for him – he admired the lyrical quality of her playing – and they played duets. He played her extracts from work in progress. She was his duet partner in César Franck's Symphony which he was studying, prior to conducting it in 1912. His letters to 'Windflower' carry references to pianos, piano music, and pianists.

After his wife's death the piano, along with the billiard table and the microscopes, helped keep the sense of loss and loneliness at bay. He went back to Bach's '48', telling Eugene Goossens that he could 'no longer be original, and so depend[ed] on people like John Sebastian for inspiration'. When W.H. Reed visited, they played works Elgar had known in his youth: 'some Spohr concertos, and lesser-known sonatas like the Rubinstein in G major, a suite for violin and piano by Ries'.<sup>18</sup>

On three occasions Elgar was given a piano. These were not public presentations, but private gestures of friendship or admiration. In 1904 S.S. Sanford of Yale University, 'a fine pianist, a man of culture and wealth', gave him a new Steinway upright.<sup>19</sup> It was this piano that Elgar had removed from store and brought to Brinkwells in August 1918. In December 1908 he received a small piano for 'The Ark', his workroom at Plas Gwyn. Believing it to come from the Schusters, he wrote to Miss Schuster acknowledging the gift in graceful, punning terms. Among friends Elgar made through the Stuart-Wortleys was Sir Claude Phillips, art critic and first keeper of the Wallace Collection. When he died in 1924, his executors suggested that his piano be given to Elgar, who wrote to 'Windflower': 'I have had dear Claude's piano ... sent down to Worcestershire, where it will end its days with respect and affection'.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Cited Moore, *Creative Life*, 223.

18 Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him*, 72.

19 Moore, *Creative Life*, 443.

20 Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Elgar. The Windflower Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

Whatever skill Elgar possessed as a pianist must have been the result of natural ability reinforced by hard experience. It is clear from the observations of those who heard him that his style was, even in relation to the playing styles of the day, idiosyncratic to say the least. G.B. Shaw wrote to him in March 1918 concerning unusual effects in the Quintet:

I have my doubts whether any regular shop pianist will produce them: they require a touch which is peculiar to yourself, and which struck me the first time I ever heard you larking about with a piano.<sup>21</sup>

‘Dorabella’ had heard a number of good pianists, but never ‘anything quite like this’:

He didn’t play like a pianist, he almost seemed to play like a whole orchestra. It sounded full without being loud and he contrived to make you hear other instruments joining in.<sup>22</sup>

Carice also said that her father had ‘a gift of making a piano sound as though a whole orchestra was there’.<sup>23</sup>

Two professional musicians were more guarded. W.H. Reed combined loyalty with a degree of detachment:

Elgar played the piano and gave a very good account of the pianoforte part in his own works; but he had a certain technique of his own to which his piano writings had perforce to accommodate themselves.<sup>24</sup>

Arthur Bliss turned the pages when Elgar and Reed played the Violin Sonata at Severn House in March 1919. Bliss confessed himself disappointed, though uncertain whether the cause was the ‘far from brilliant’ performance, or the musical substance of the work.<sup>25</sup>

The five improvisations recorded in November 1929 afford a tantalising glimpse of Elgar as pianist. They last about twenty minutes, which is very little for even the most discerning to arrive at an objective opinion of his playing. The first thing which strikes the listener is its orchestral quality; it is tempting to suggest that it rarely sounds pianistic. His skill in improvisation is evident; perhaps there was a measure of rehearsal, although for a few moments here and there he seems to get stuck, repeating the same phrase as though looking for what comes next.<sup>26</sup> It is

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1989), 298.

21 Cited in Kennedy, *Portrait*, 279.

22 Powell, *Memories of a Variation*, 12.

23 Cited Percy M. Young, *Alice Elgar. The Enigma of a Victorian Lady* (London: Dobson, 1978), 164.

24 Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him*, 149.

25 Arthur Bliss, *As I Remember*, cited Moore, *Creative Life*, 738.

26 It is known that some of the material – by Rossini and Elgar – existed before the improvisations were recorded; see the notes to Iain Farrington’s transcriptions (Novello,

difficult to understand why the improvisations came to be recorded at all. Opinions differ as to whether the scheme originated with Elgar or with Fred Gaisberg of HMV. If Gaisberg were the instigator, one can only wonder what were his motives. There were already several recordings of Elgar conducting his own works. Did Gaisberg sense a historical rather than commercial value in what to the uninitiated could sound like ramblings about the piano? If the idea were Elgar's own, then there is some sense in the suggestion that he welcomed the chance to hear the results of what was part of his composition process, though it seems expensive and hardly necessary.

Elgar's expressed views of his own playing are generally deprecatory. In October 1932 he wrote to Keith Prowse, whose staff had arranged his sketches and submitted them for approval: 'Here is the M.S. [of the piano *Serenade*] which I shd. think will do very well – I do not play the piano'.<sup>27</sup> Asked if he would record his own Piano Quintet, Elgar replied to Compton Mackenzie: '... I never play the pianoforte. I scramble through things orchestrally in a way that would madden with envy all existing pianists. I never did play really. I must not begin now'.<sup>28</sup> In 1910 he wrote to 'Windflower' 'I am trying to write a piano piece called *Violettes* – but I do not understand the piano well enough, I fear'. Moore adds a note: 'the final sentence is mischievous. All his pianist friends, including Alice Stuart-Wortley, constantly urged him to write for the piano, in instrument he generally disliked'.<sup>29</sup> As Moore suggests, friends may have had a better idea of Elgar's abilities than he had himself. It is equally likely that, in a letter to his 'dearest Windflower', he would say what he believed to be true.

It would be wrong to attach too much importance to three isolated remarks. Nevertheless, what we know of Elgar's development as a composer does suggest that lack of understanding, whether real or perceived, may have proved one deterrent from composing more for piano. His training in the craft of composition was predominantly practical. His apprenticeship could hardly have been bettered – playing in orchestras, scoring or arranging for unusual instrumental forces, directing rehearsals, and conducting concerts. Such breadth of experience, helped by his natural abilities, gave him a clear idea of the capacity and sound quality of orchestral instruments. With the piano it was a different matter. From the outset, his experience was of the use of the piano as a substitute for something else, be it missing instruments or a whole orchestra. Even the duets he played were transcriptions or arrangements rather than original works for piano duet. This may be why he felt his understanding of the piano was incomplete.

It is impossible to reach any firm conclusion as to why Elgar wrote so little for the piano when finance and friendship would have encouraged him to write more.

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2006), reviewed in this Journal, 15/3 (July 2007), 61–3; and to David Owen Norris's recording, EECD 002 [ed.].

27 *Elgar and his Publishers*, 900.

28 Letter of 17 November 1925, as published by Compton Mackenzie, *My Life and Times*, Octava Six (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), 83. We are indebted to Jerrold Northrop Moore for this reference (ed.).

29 *Windflower Letters*, 36.

Every clue is capable of more than one interpretation. His habit of disguising his true feelings, and of claiming ignorance of matters on which he was well informed, does not help. What seems most likely is that he was deterred by a number of factors, of which real or perceived lack of understanding may have been one. He may, for instance, have found the piano's monochrome inhibiting. The difficulty he experienced in adapting his ideas for piano may also have had a bearing. Perhaps the pleasure and profit he derived from playing were not enough to dispel some lingering resentment at the trials and troubles of his early years, with which the piano was in some way concerned.

Whatever conclusion we reach, we must never allow it to influence our assessment of the music.

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# REVIEWS OF MUSIC

## **Elgar, Music for Powick Asylum**

Elgar Society edition vol. 22, ed. Andrew Lyle (Rickmansworth: Elgar works, 2008).

ISBN 978-1-904856-22-1. 340 pp + xxv.

Powick, the lowest crossing on the River Teme before its outflow into the Severn south of Worcester, was the site of a pioneering hydro-electricity scheme, and also the location of the Worcester County and City Pauper Lunatic Asylum, which first opened its doors in August 1857. Later renamed 'Powick Mental Hospital' after the institution was transferred into the National Health Service, the fine buildings were largely demolished in the 1990s to make way for a housing estate; the asylum had long since fallen under a cloud, not least because of the controversial use of LSD on patients in the 1950s. Therapeutic practices and regimes of care had been less controversial in the nineteenth-century, when music was an integral part of the asylum's curriculum. As the institution's second superintendent, James Sherlock, wrote of music making at the hospital: 'no other means of recreation have been observed capable of realising a similar curative influence and their value is enhanced by the large proportion of the Patients who can participate in them'. Far from being a simple distraction or means of entertainment, music appears to have occupied a central role in the asylum's programme of activities – a routine in which the young Edward Elgar, at least for a time, also played an active part.<sup>1</sup>

This passage from Sherlock's 1857 report is quoted by Andrew Lyle in the editorial foreword to his excellent new edition of Elgar's music for the institution, and it provides a salient reminder of the context in which the works were written and, more importantly, performed. As Lyle notes (pp. vii-viii), Elgar was formally employed as Bandmaster at the institution between 1879 and 1884, for which he was paid an average annual salary of £33 4s 10d (rather than the £32 quoted frequently in the biographical literature). His responsibilities included arranging and directing performances, as well as composing works specifically for use in the asylum. The surviving musical materials consist of a series of part books held at the Birthplace Museum at Broadheath, often incomplete and in hands other than the composer's, as well as some sketches in the British Library. Lyle's painstaking detective work has assembled a series of eleven complete works. The earliest is a Menuetto dated 21 December 1878 (which therefore narrowly pre-dates the beginning of Elgar's formal employment), and the latest is a Polka bearing the disconcertingly Mahlerian subtitle 'Blumine', dated 22 May 1884. The majority of the works comprise four multiple sets of quadrilles (moderately paced contredanses which conventionally fall into five sections), a similar set of five lancers (march-like dances in duple time), and five polkas. The strong possibility that more music may have been composed than has survived is suggested by the existence of a single clarinet part for a set of five untitled quadrilles at the Birthplace Museum. A further undated sketch for

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1 See Andrew Lyle's article, this Journal 15/3 (November 2007), 13–28 and the subsequent correspondence in 15/5 (July 2008).

a 'Singing Quadrille' (five dances, in fact, and scored for band) is one of the most intriguing items in the volume – Elgar weaves a series of popular songs and nursery rhymes into the texture, so that the works suddenly assume a disconcerting air of familiarity. Whether this was merely a musical joke, a composition exercise, or a strategy intended to promote audience participation is unclear, but it already points to the inventive nature of the composer's mind and his willingness to embrace diverse musical materials and styles.

As Lyle explains, the forces available to Elgar at the institution constituted what he later described (in an interview in the *Musical Times*, 1 October 1900) as an 'eccentric orchestra' – a term that signals Elgar's pragmatic approach to scoring and realisation, and also suggests that he positively conceived of the group as an ensemble. At its largest, the orchestra consisted of single woodwind (piccolo, flute, clarinet), a brass group including two cornets (the first sometimes doubling a second clarinet), euphonium, and (deliciously) a bombardon (bass tuba) or bass trombone, plus a string band consisting of up to eight violins, an 'occasional viola' (p. ix), cello and bass, with piano to provide extra weight. As Lyle emphasises, the piano part was more than merely a short score – it allowed Elgar the flexibility to experiment with varying instrumental combinations as the situation demanded, and compensate for missing parts when other players were unavailable. This evidently didn't deter Elgar from exploiting particular instrumental effects, such as the delicate imitative scoring in the early 'Menuetto' (bars 17-24), the poetic clarinet solo at the start of *L'Assomoir* [sic] (Quadrille 3) and the paired cornets (suggesting Berlioz or Bizet) in Quadrille 4 (bars 9-24), or the exciting *chasse* that launches the polka *Maud* with an almost operatic sense of excitement. Such moments suggest that some of the ensemble players were reasonably proficient, and they point also to Elgar's keen sense of instrumental colour, a quality which was to become a defining feature of his later music.

Work titles, as Lyle suggests, are often colourful or evocative. *Die junge Kokette* (a set of quadrilles or 'Caledonians'), for example, was dedicated to the daughter of the Asylum engineer, who played piano for the Friday entertainment. It is nevertheless difficult to concur with Moore's assumption, on the basis of the dedication alone, that there was any genuine romantic attachment involved. A later polka, entitled *La Blonde* (dated October 1882), was dedicated to Helen Weaver, Elgar's some-time fiancée, who was studying in Leipzig. At the end of that year, Elgar travelled to Germany to join her, a visit which also allowed him to immerse himself in contemporary European music. Strangely, an earlier polka, titled *Nelly* (Elgar's pet-name for Helen), bears no such dedication, and neither piece provides much musical ground for amorous speculation – the lyrical theme in *Nelly's* trio, for example, is rather unattractively lugubrious. More fascinating is *L'Assomoir*, named after Émile Zola's realist novel, first published in 1877. As Lyle notes (p. viii), 'the young Catholic Elgar seems to have read a copy soon after publication; later (1898) all of Zola's novels were on the Vatican's list of Forbidden Books'. Clearly, for Elgar, the often conflicting demands of music, modernist literature, and religion was an intoxicating mix from the very start of his professional career.

It is natural to try and seek hints of Elgar's later work in the dances. Elgar re-used a complete dance, *L'Assomoir* (Quadrille 5), as 'The Wild Bears' in his second *Wand*

of *Youth* suite (1908), and Lyle further draws attention (p. xi) to a chord sequence at the end of the penultimate polka, *Helcia* (vi–iii<sup>6</sup>-V<sup>4/2</sup>-vi<sup>6/4</sup>-ii<sup>7</sup>-V<sup>7</sup>-I, bars 79–83, a passage that models what Matthew Riley has described as a ‘lower tritone event’ in Elgar’s music;<sup>2</sup> it corresponds to the opening bars of ‘Sabbath Morning’ from *Sea Pictures* (1899). Attention might also be directed to passages such as the descending chromatic sequence in *Die Junge Kokette* (Quadrille 2, bars 5–7), which later became a favourite Elgarian cadential device (as Lyle notes, the alternative version of this passage in the British Library source is even more spicy), and the lyrically expansive string melody in *L’Assomoir* (Quadrille 1, bars 25–33), which suggested to me the mode of long-breathed cantabile that Elgar later developed in the first movement of his *Serenade for Strings* (1892).

Such retrospective listening, however, ultimately becomes rather too circular and self-fulfilling to be truly rewarding. It is better, perhaps, to take the dances at face value, and admire the young Elgar’s eclectic range of musical expression and flexible approach to problems of scoring and musical realisation. Better still to try and remember the asylum patients, otherwise long forgotten, who danced to Elgar’s music at the Friday entertainments which clearly prompted some of his earliest sources of creative inspiration. Andrew Lyle’s splendid new edition does more than merely bring to light a neglected corner of Elgar’s oeuvre: it opens the door once more on an institution where musical performance, for a while, animated a spirit of community and personal freedom.

Daniel M. Grimley

### **Empire March: The British Empire March from Pageant of Empire**

Ledbury: Acuta Music, 2008<sup>3</sup>

Based in Herefordshire, Acuta Music (Esther and Robert Kay) is one of a number of small-scale publishing operations that have done a great service to professionals and amateurs alike in bringing English music to print. With respect to Stanford, for example, Phylloscopus Publications in Lancaster (Rachel Malloch) published the score and parts of his *Serenade* (Nonet, Op. 95), while his two late fantasies for clarinet quintet appeared from SJ Music in Cambridge. Elgar left less unpublished than the prolific Stanford, but publication of several late works, once regular contracts with Novello and others had been terminated, remains patchy. In due course – vagaries of copyright law permitting – the Complete Edition should offer fully researched editions of everything, but in the meantime our libraries can only benefit from the issue of scores not otherwise readily, if at all, available.

I am glad to own four scores from Acuta Music, the most substantial of which is the orchestral version of *The Severn Suite*. The other orchestral works are the

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2 Matthew Riley, ‘Heroic Melancholy: Elgar’s Inflected Diatonicism’, in *Elgar Studies*, ed. J.P.E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 284–307, cited 288.

3 First published 1993. I am grateful to the publishers for the copy of the 2008 edition. Acuta Music, Hambrook, Ledbury HR8 2PX; performance material from Goodmusic Publishing Ltd., PO Box 100, Tewkesbury, GL20 7YQ.

*Empire March* and the *Civic Fanfare* (for Hereford, 1927); all three are published in limited editions of 300 copies.<sup>4</sup> The fourth work is *Soliloquy* for oboe and piano (1930), a version based partly on Gordon Jacob's completion, generously supplied with alternative parts for clarinet in B flat and clarinet in A – to be chosen, the undersigned clarinettist supposes, according to one's fingering preferences. The edition rightly includes a fierce notice about copyright; never having been performed in Elgar's lifetime, copyright holds until 2038, and 2055 'in respect of the elements contributed by Gordon Jacob'. As this means permission is required to perform it, even in a village hall, the exposure of this short slow movement is not likely to be extensive; but at least its existence in published form contributes to our knowledge of Elgar's stylistic range (tinged with exoticism and fantasy, like *In Smyrna* or the slow movement of the Violin sonata).

The *Empire March* is one of those occasional pieces – it formed part of *A Pageant of Empire* – for which, surprising as it may seem where so important a composer is concerned, source materials have disappeared. The present edition is based on a set of orchestral parts (including a 'short score' for use by conductors), formerly the property of the Herefordshire Orchestral Society. The parts were rediscovered in the 1990s, and 'appear to constitute the first proofs' although the set was never published; some corrections may be in Elgar's hand. Otherwise the editors claim only to have rationalized dynamics and corrected obvious errors; one or two more have been reported by me to the publishers, and are not detailed here, as thanks to digital technology, copies ordered now should be correct.

An interesting note in the edition of the *Civic Fanfare* suggests that the *Empire March* requires the largest orchestra Elgar used – banishing thoughts of post-war economy, as Robert Anderson remarks.<sup>5</sup> The wind forces are standard, but as well as strings, organ, and two harps, there is an extensive percussion section. I am not sure that this actually exceeds the orchestral forces for *The Apostles*, with shofar added to the wind. Moreover some of the *Empire March* scoring is essentially for show. Elgar's harp parts are often inaudible; here some upbeat glissandos may come through, in a not too resonant acoustic, so long as other instruments observe their rests. The organ is dynamic reinforcement, or textural glue (at fig. 25 it is marked 'Swell, *p*', while the most powerful brass play *fff*). Its part has little continuity until the *nobilmente* reprise of the trio at fig. 20. Orchestral societies should note that the piece makes sense without organ, or even harp; the percussion, however, is indispensable. As an example of Elgar's instrumental thinking, this piece remains as exuberant as ever. Consider the sudden high trumpet notes in bar 8; the timpani ostinato from fig. 13 – surely hard sticks should be used, but Elgar might have taken them for granted – and the trombone hocket that joins this throbbing texture in the third bar of fig. 13. The trombone parts are glamorous throughout, especially from fig. 3 (repeated fig. 16). And Elgar's notation is as scrupulous as ever; note the cello bowing at fig. 3 (bar 11), and nearly at the end (third bar of fig. 28), the double dotting on the last beat, following single dots everywhere else; the double dot is surely intended to ensure sharpness despite the *allargando*. Sets of parts are available. Julian Rushton

4 For the record, my copies are 189 (*Severn Suite*), 193 (*Civic Fanfare*), and 29 (*Empire March*).

5 Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (The Master Musicians, London: Dent, 1993), 301.

# REVIEWS OF BOOKS

## **John M. Rollett: *New Light on Elgar's Enigma***

32 pp. with CD<sup>1</sup>

After a stressful day at work, many people unwind in the evening with a crossword or Sudoku puzzle. Some of us even enjoy constructing them. On 21 October 1898, Elgar famously lit up a cigar and started doodling at the keyboard; the end result was the 'Enigma' Variations, and a puzzle which continues to baffle would-be solvers. Having recently published a solution myself, I am all too aware of the pleasures and pitfalls of this endlessly fascinating exercise.<sup>2</sup> I have never claimed to have discovered *the* solution, and it would be unwise to do so without conclusive documentary evidence. Since this is unlikely to be forthcoming, the field remains open for anyone to have a crack at it, and new ideas continue to appear.

John Rollett's offering is not entirely new, as it is a revision of an article written twelve years ago for this Journal, with some additional material that provides further context for his ideas.<sup>3</sup> It is attractively presented in a glossy A4 pamphlet with a CD of music examples in support. Rollett's chosen theme is a melody from the 'Meditation' which introduces *The Light of Life*. This is the only solution I have come across which suggests a theme by the composer himself. Since Elgar said the hidden theme was 'popular', it has been assumed that it must be by someone else. Rollett successfully demonstrates that the Meditation was very popular among orchestral societies during Elgar's lifetime, and can therefore be taken seriously.

This is just one of several obstacles that have to be overcome when proposing a solution. Julian Rushton has established five criteria in his monograph on the *Enigma Variations*:<sup>4</sup>

1. The solution must unveil a 'dark saying' (although the composer said it 'must be left unguessed');
2. The solution must find 'another and larger theme' which goes over the whole set;
3. The solution involves well-known music, or at least something well-known;
4. It must be clear why Dora Penny 'of all people' should guess it;
5. The 'solution' should take into account the characteristic falling sevenths of bars 3-4

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1 The booklet is available via bookshops or directly from the author 9jmrollett@btinternet.com, price £9.50 (includes postage and packing).

2 Clive McClelland, 'Shadows of the evening: New light on Elgar's 'dark saying'', *The Musical Times* 148 (no. 1901, Winter 2007), 43–8.

3 *Elgar Society Journal* 10 (no. 3, November 1997), 106–22.

4 Julian Rushton, *Elgar: 'Enigma' Variations* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 66–7.

Rushton demonstrates that most well-known theories meet no more than one or two of these criteria. Rollett has decided to account for them all in a new appendix, and he does so with some degree of success. Elgar's reference to a 'dark saying' is, he suggests, a typical bit of his wordplay, alluding to the 'light motif' in the 'Meditation', itself associated with the image of sight being restored to a blind man. The 'larger theme which goes over the whole set' might then be the idea of the Light of Life (*Lux Christi*), which is certainly plausible given Elgar's strength of faith at the time, but is by no means readily discernible. Elgar's supposed use of the word 'elucidation' in reference to finding a solution does lend some support to these two arguments. The revelation that Dora Penny heard both pieces on the same day (13 September 1899) is an intriguing coincidence, but does not constitute evidence that they are thematically related. The final criterion concerning the falling sevenths is dismissed as having been only 'tentatively' suggested by Rushton, with Elgar merely wishing 'to draw attention to the prevalence of falling sevenths throughout the Variations'. By addressing these issues directly, Rollett demonstrates that he has continued to give the problem some thought since his article was originally published.

In my own article I have proposed two additional criteria:<sup>5</sup>

6. There is no need for the solution to fit in real time with the theme (this does not, however, preclude the appearance of a 'workable counterpoint');
7. All 24 pitches from the theme must be accounted for. Any source melody must somehow fit from the first note to the last.

The unusual phrase structure of the theme gives rise to (6), because Elgar's six-bar phrase is achieved by the characteristic four-note grouping, repeated six times with its reversible rhythm of two quavers and two crotchets. The organisation of the notes into this pattern appears contrived, and not naturally musical, suggesting some sort of mathematical or cryptographic procedure, and any solution needs to address this point. The fact that Elgar worked out the theme while improvising at the piano (rather than using pen and paper) also suggests that the key to solving it is essentially a musical one.<sup>6</sup> The second additional criterion (7) seems to me the most obvious of all: Elgar's theme must be considered in its entirety, otherwise it does not make sense as a puzzle; it would be like having an anagram with some letters left over. This is the principal weakness in Rollett's 'solution' (and in many others). It certainly starts out convincingly, but why does it not fit through to the end? It is inconceivable that Elgar would create a puzzle without accounting for all of the notes. Of course, finding melodies that are the right length is no easy matter. Two comparatively recent examples – *Twinkle, twinkle little star* and *Ein feste Burg* –

5 McClelland, 'Shadows of the evening', 44.

6 Rushton writes: 'I suggest that the 'right' solution, if it exists, while fulfilling the criteria, must be multivalent, must deal with musical as well as cryptographic issues, must produce workable counterpoint within Elgar's stylistic range, and must at the same time seem obvious (and not just to its begetter)' (*Elgar: 'Enigma' Variations*, 77). David Owen Norris has suggested that the compositional procedure outlined in my solution is exactly the method that a gifted improviser like Elgar would have adopted (personal communication).

fit the bill in this respect, but contain far too many dissonances to be regarded as plausible.<sup>7</sup>

Rollett's publication is a welcome addition to the canon of *Enigma* solutions. It is well-researched, with an extensive bibliography, and it brings a wealth of useful background information. But ultimately the proposed solution fails on purely musical grounds. While it is true that the *Light of Life* fits some of the theme, there are also dissonances that cannot easily be accommodated within the parameters of traditional counterpoint.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, only the first fourteen notes of the theme are accounted for, with no satisfactory explanation for the remaining ten. Such loose ends would not be acceptable to a dedicated puzzle fanatic like Elgar. So, if I might be forgiven for employing a currently fashionable epithet (which would no doubt have met with the great man's approval), it's close, but no cigar.

Clive McClelland

### **Simon Boswell: *The Elgar Enigmas. A Musical Mystery***

Finnish Evolutionary Enterprises in association with BookLocker.com, Inc., 2009  
ISBN 978-1-60145-786-8

It is with gratitude that I record that Simon Boswell's new novel makes no attempt to solve 'the' enigma of the Variations. And if Elgar is again the subject of a novelist's interest, he cannot be excluded from responsibility through having thrown down so many gauntlets: the Variations (including (\*\*\*)), the Violin Concerto (five dots), and elsewhere, including the quite probably meaningless jape of the Dorabella cipher. By not supplying us with a diary of his trip up the Amazon, Elgar opened the door for James Hamilton-Paterson's finely meditative *Gerontius*. Our review of Meinhard Saremba's 2007 novel *Fortunas Narren* suggested that it should be enjoyed in the spirit in which it is intended, as a mystery story (the plot-line 'filled with titllating details'), and not as a historical novel.<sup>9</sup> The same must be said of *The Elgar Enigmas*, with the difference that Boswell, unlike the other novelists, doesn't tamper with known events. That he *seems* to do precisely that means only that his characters are doing so.

Boswell's techniques include switching viewpoints (sometimes of the same events), and entertaining features such as pastiche newspaper articles and e-mail

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7 Patrick Turner: *Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations – a centenary celebration* (London 1999); Robert W. Padgett: 'Elgar's Enigma Exposed' <http://enigmathemeunmasked.blogspot.com/2009/02/elgars-enigma-theme-revealed.html> (accessed 24.4.09), with an alternative 'solution' based on Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*. Both his 'solutions' require some manipulation of the source melody and not a little tone deafness from the listener, and much of the supporting 'evidence' is risible.

8 Rushton shows the themes in parallel with dissonances highlighted: *Elgar: 'Enigma' Variations*, 91.

9 This Journal 15/4 (March 2008), 36–7.

spam. The novel is structured as an introduction headed 'Enigma', fourteen 'Variations', and a careful Afterword.<sup>10</sup> The 'variations' are just chapters – if there are ingenious connections with W.M.B., G.R.S., Dorabella, et al., I missed them. But (\*\*\*) figures strongly in the ostensible mystery, as do several other women of whom Elgar was fond, including his wife.<sup>11</sup> Names – Ysobel, Winifred – are used, but the characters are not their Op. 36 namesakes; one is a medium, one a popular novelist, and their activities are crucial to the story. Through the reactions of other characters, and short accounts of séances, Boswell maintains a balance between scepticism and belief – even once the electronic whizz-kids have taken over, to engage in a kind of remote arm-wrestling. The central character, however, plays no part in all the scheming, for she, the theme, is autistic, and mute; she is also a musical 'savant', a self-taught pianist with a prodigious musical memory who can repeat what she has heard and retain it, to play it again; the plot takes off when she seems to be playing a new, improved version of Elgar's Third Symphony. Her development towards interaction with others through music is the most heartening strain in a complex novel which also allows at least one bit of love to run in a true course. The usual disclaimer concerning resemblance to 'real persons, living or dead' may not stop readers trying to find a prototype at least for the conductor, 'Sir David' (definitely not Willcocks) who improbably finds time to write a simple life of Elgar on his website (experienced Elgarians may pass swiftly over these pages, but they are probably needed by other readers, and are tolerably accurate). Given that the story concerns the faint hope that music is being dictated from beyond the grave, I found surprising the absence of any mention of the late Rosemary Brown (she whose fingers were guided by Liszt ... allegedly); that might have lent credibility to one character's credulity ... but I mustn't give away the plot. I should also say that once well launched into reading, I didn't find it easy to put down.

Julian Rushton

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10 Simon Boswell's earlier novel, *The Seven Symphonies* takes its structure from Sibelius; but it is a murder mystery.

11 I hope the author may emend the references to her as 'Lady Alice'.

# REVIEWS OF RECORDINGS

## DVD REVIEW

**Elgar: Violin Concerto in B minor**

**Prokofiev: Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19**

**Saint-Saëns: Introduction et Rondo capriccioso, Op. 28**

Itzhak Perlman (violin); BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky (Elgar, Prokofiev); Sadler's Wells Orchestra conducted by Charles Mackerras (Saint-Saëns)<sup>1</sup>



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To listen to music is to connect the inner worlds of performer and listener. When the music is unfamiliar or the performance a new one, the listener's curiosity is directed predominantly outwards. What can be discovered, one wonders, about the piece, or the artist, or the composer? Is there a freshness of interpretation or a technical accomplishment to be admired? But with a 'historic' or 'archive' performance of a well-known work by an established, even legendary, performer, something surprising happens. One's attention is instead turned inwards, towards one's own personal responses. Perhaps what makes a great classic performance is the range and unexpectedness of the thoughts one finds oneself entertaining.

And when, as with a DVD, one can see as well as hear, the occasion is to be savoured at least as much as the performance. The armchair critic's latent churlishness yields to the elation of (very nearly) being there. Nevertheless, when a Russian conductor and an Israeli violinist join the BBC Symphony Orchestra for the Elgar violin concerto, recorded live in the Royal Albert Hall at a 1981 Prom, the English soul is on red alert.

Itzhak Perlman contracted polio as a child and therefore plays sitting down. Perhaps for this reason, his approach to even the largest-scale works is that of the chamber musician he at heart remains. Rozhdestvensky sets off at a cracking pace; no self-indulgence in store tonight, it would appear. But with his first entry Perlman reins in the brisk and asserts the contemplative. 'Let's see,' he seems to be saying, like the first violin in a late Beethoven quartet, 'what more is to be found in this.' We quickly

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1 Elgar: Sunday Prom, Royal Albert Hall, 9 August 1981; Prokofiev, BBC Symphony Orchestra 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary concert, 22 October 1980; Saint-Saëns, BBC Gala performance, London Coliseum, 25 October 1970.

forget such so-called definitive performances as the youthful Menuhin's. Perlman in his throat-lumpening playing of the second subject shows us that heart-on-sleeve *portamenti* are not the only way to convey mature emotion.

Perlman's *andante*, too, does not depend on easy Englishness to be effective. He can do 'hushed', and 'pastoral' and *nobilmente* with the best of them. But he can do 'private' and 'inspirational' as well. I'm a violinist myself, and I know what British orchestral players look like when they are truly moved: their jaws tense ever so slightly and they blink fractionally more slowly than usual. If you know what to look for, you can tell the BBC troops here are ecstatic. Their upper lips may be regulation stiff, but they are playing their adoring hearts out.

One cannot but think, moreover, that Rozhdestvensky was in a Gethsemane of his own. As Rostropovich discovered when in August 1968, tears flowing, he played the Dvořák concerto on the very night the Russians moved into Czechoslovakia, the Promenaders have the power to make the expression of anti-establishment emotions safe. Rozhdestvensky clearly trusts his players completely. As the piece unfolds, his gestures evolve from the workmanlike to the heroic. Several times during the last movement he puts his hand to his mouth, as if stifling dangerous words like 'love', 'hope' and 'freedom'. When the audience's ovation erupts at the end, one wonders what it is they – we – are applauding, Elgar of course. Virtuosity for sure. But more. The overcoming of physical challenge. The expression of the inexpressible. The unfashionable pride of the English in giving the world something worth having, and the world's gratitude for it.

The DVD also includes Prokofiev's haunting first violin concerto and Saint-Saëns' show-piece *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso*. One does not, of course, want the machinery of a performance to intrude upon one's enjoyment of it. But when the performance is as assured as Perlman's, it's a treat to be able to see in close-up his consummate technique and the intense rapport he has with the conductor, often with a dozen bars of eye contact at a time. Rozhdestvensky, too, does fascinating things with stick and left hand, and, one suspects, knows every player by name.

I have a few minor quibbles. Programme notes are noticeable by their absence. And there is an irritating momentary pause during the last movement of the Elgar when the DVD 'groove' (or whatever it is) shifts layers. I'm sure the engineers could have arranged for this to occur between movements. But my recommendation? A delighted 'Get it got!'

Roger Neighbour

## CD REVIEWS

### **The Dream of Gerontius, Op. 36**

Paul Groves, Alice Coote, Bryn Terfel

Hallé Choir, Hallé Youth Choir

Hallé Orchestra conducted by Sir Mark Elder



Hallé CD  
HLD 7520

In 2009 we cannot avoid the collective re-assessment of the music of Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Purcell and others, and in listening once more, after many years, to *Elijah* I find myself wondering how such a work dominated the choral life of Britain in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the extent that few other new choral pieces seemed to stand a chance. Then in 1900 along came *Gerontius*: astonishingly original, seamless in its construction; a visionary exploration of the hereafter to orchestration of extraordinary originality, colour and finesse.

I recall a story told to me by my mother who was taken to a semi-dramatic performance of *Elijah* in the Royal Albert Hall in the 1920s. Her abiding memory was of the hapless Elijah ascending to heaven in his chariot only to become stuck half-way: '*lo! There came a fiery chariot with fiery horses; and he went by a whirl-wind to heaven...*' (or, rather he didn't)! Although I cannot guarantee it, we must be relieved that no one has yet attempted a dramatisation of Elgar's religious choral works, although I have heard the wish expressed that the tenor cover his eyes with his forearm at 'Take me away!' All this came to mind as I attended the performance and some of the recording sessions relating to this dramatic and heartfelt performance which has claims to be one of the most important Elgar recordings in recent years.

Beginning at the beginning, I was struck immediately by the beautiful balance between woodwind and the rich Hallé violas – *Lento, mistico*, which launches the enterprise with a sense of forward movement that never flags and which propels the performance to its end.<sup>2</sup> This is the point; it is a performance, not just a recording, even if most of what we hear was recorded without an audience. We are lead into the fevered atmosphere surrounding the dying Gerontius and Paul Groves's compelling interpretation of the role. Groves may not have the most beautiful of voices when compared, say, to Richard Lewis or Heddle Nash, but he more than compensates by his experience and commitment. It is a role that he learnt from his father when growing up in Louisiana and his identification with Gerontius was evident on

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2 Elder takes 94 minutes, a little quicker than Boult at 96 minutes, while Oramo's recording lasts 86 minutes.

stage as it was from the recording sessions. All this, combined with Groves's intelligence, means that he must be considered one of the leading performers of *The Dream of Gerontius* on record and in the concert halls of today.

As an example of why I think Groves is outstanding listen to the dialogue between Gerontius and the Angel in part two (Cues 11-29) until the unwelcome arrival of the demons. This has a great sweep and at the same time the intimacy imagined by Newman and supported by Elgar. I have rarely been moved so much by this vital part of the work. Obviously much of the success of this is due to Coote and Elder, but Groves is at one with Coote and the result is magical. Note, too, the feeling of surprise Groves injects into his voice in part two (3 bars after Cue 9) at 'another marvel...'

Bryn Terfel is a different case entirely. He sounds magnificent as the Angel of the Agony and few would doubt the authority of his intercession. However, I feel Terfel is more uncertain or hesitant as the Priest at the conclusion of part one. As with anything Terfel does he throws himself into the experience, but he is more at home in part two and for no more than 10 minutes of singing I feel I wanted more differentiation and colour. I am probably being churlish for I know most listeners will be thrilled with Terfel's contribution. Alice Coote, like Janet Baker, has the ability to hold an audience in the palm of her hand, conveying the meaning of her words with clarity and, by her intelligence and beauty of voice, creating a momentary certainty that there is no alternative to her interpretation. Inevitably, as this is the first Hallé *Gerontius* since the recording under Barbirolli from 1965, comparisons will be made between Coote and Baker, the great 'Angel' of my time. My task, I feel, is to avoid such an enterprise and consider Coote entirely on her own merits. I have already used the adjective 'magical' in respect of Coote's initial meeting with Gerontius and she carries her personal and intimate performance through to the end. Coote avoids an operatic interpretation, for she is both ethereal and forceful as the Soul of Gerontius is carried to its destiny with an extraordinary blend of realism and spirituality. If I have a criticism it is that Coote sometimes leaves syllables and consonants un-enunciated: heavEN and GoD for example.

The Hallé Orchestra sounds, to me, a better body than in 1965 – more united as a band with greater string tone and few (if any) errors. Sir Mark Elder leads his forces in a journey which is never hurried but avoids sentimentality and has a wonderful sense of inevitability. There are moments that stop the heart, such as the sense of stillness at the beginning of part 2 (Cue 3) and the beautifully judged rest just before Cue 22. The excellent Hallé choirs give us their all with splendid diction and colour. Although I feel the Demons are rather too polite (no Barbirolli snarl here)

they are soon overtaken by the semi-chorus who really do sound the 'least and most childlike of the sons of God'.

Although based around two public performances, this is a 'studio' recording that makes the most of the Bridgewater Hall acoustic which engineers Stuart Eadon and Will Brown and producer Andrew Keener now understand as well as anyone. There is an ideal blend of organ (with deep pedal notes) and orchestra, and the choirs and soloists are balanced well, although I could have done with a little more power in 'Praise to the holiest'.

As this is the first purpose-recorded *Gerontius* in many years we have to ask whether it can take its place alongside Barbirolli, Boult, Handley, Hickox and Sargent. I am certain the answer is an emphatic 'yes'. It is easy to quibble over details, but this is a major contribution by all concerned, particularly by Sir Mark Elder, whose leadership of the enterprise cannot be under-stated and whose work in Manchester is now recognised as being of national importance. I would expect this recording to be in the catalogue as long as its famous predecessor. In fact it should never leave it!

Andrew Neill

**Elgar: Symphony No. 1**

**Weber: Overture, Der Freischütz**

**Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 82**

Clifford Curzon (piano)

Hallé Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli<sup>3</sup>



The Barbirolli Society  
The Barbirolli Edition  
SJB 1033-34 (2)

This set of two CDs for the price of one is more likely to be bought by those wanting a record of an historic event than by those seeking quality performances in quality sound of the musical repertoire it contains. But members of the Elgar Society should loom large among those in the former category, and I would urge them to acquire this splendid pair of discs. We have our Vice-President, Michael Kennedy, to thank for the fact that it is being reviewed for the Elgar Society rather than the Berlioz Society, for it was he who suggested that the symphony should be Elgar's!

The concert was televised, and broadcast, and it is from a tape of the radio broadcast in the collection of the late Derek Davenport that this issue derives. Michael Kennedy provides an essay in the accompanying booklet on the planning of the centenary season, and, given the nature of the event, I can think of no-one better

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<sup>3</sup> Also included: Introduction by Sir Malcolm Sargent; The Hallé and its Conductor – a conversation with Sir John Barbirolli, Leonard Behrens and Kenneth Crickmore, chaired by Alec Robertson.

qualified to write about the performance itself.

The centenary concert itself, so long and eagerly anticipated, proved to be the true crown of the season which had been hoped for ... with all the high expectation and the blaze of publicity, this concert still managed to retain the authentic Hallé atmosphere. This was evident enough from the roar of welcome which greeted Sir John Barbirolli's arrival on the platform, when the whole audience rose to greet the man in whom the tradition of a century's music-making was on that evening centred.

The orchestra's playing was miraculously unaffected by nerves but heightened by the sense of occasion. No more moving moment was experienced than the opening bars of *Freischütz*, when the mind went back 100 years to a world so different and so removed ... [Hallé's] prowess as a pianist was commemorated by the B flat pianoforte concerto of Brahms, which he had played in 1882, when it was new and its difficulties immense. The soloist now was Clifford Curzon, who had been the first soloist to play with Barbirolli's Hallé. Finally, in Elgar's symphony, the spirit of Richter lived again, and this mighty music, tranquil in beauty and triumphant in peroration, matched perfectly the character and mood of the concert. Every phrase, every nuance, was movingly and devoutly re-created. In their finest hour, the Hallé and its conductor found the best in each other to do honour to their own tradition. So it ended; and the audience dispersed, some to their homes, others to the civic reception at the Town Hall.<sup>4</sup>

The performances as a whole have tremendous vitality and drive, especially the Brahms, where listeners who have long loved Curzon's recording of the first Concerto with George Szell will at last have found a worthy companion. But when I say that the most stunning performance of all is of the National Anthem, this has a lot to do with the fact that I was taken back instantly to when, at the age of 12 or 13, I first heard Barbirolli 'in the flesh' – I cannot imagine that anyone who has experienced a 'live' Barbirolli performance of our Anthem can think it anything but a great work! The performance of the Symphony will come as a revelation to those who presume Barbirolli Elgar performances to err on the side of luxuriance – but not to those who know his recording for Pye made a little over a year earlier. The sound, given its origin, is excellent: full-bodied and well balanced. There are slight shifts in perspective from movement to movement, and an extraordinary change in quality for the last five bars which is unfortunate, but no more.

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4 Michael Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition, a century of music*, The University Press, Manchester, 1960, pp. 384-385.

The two additional tracks are marvellous period pieces. Sir Malcolm Sargent speaks lovingly of the orchestra; and the conversation between Alec Robertson, Barbirolli, and 'two officers of the Hallé Concerts Society' is utter bliss on a number of levels. Above all there is Sir John himself, telling oft told tales of the orchestra, but none the less welcome for that. Secondly, there is Leonard Behrens, who provides a direct link with Elgar and the Hallé. His father was Gustav Behrens, Chairman of the orchestra from 1913 to 1922; his uncle Harry Behrens, with whom the Elgar stayed when conducting the Hallé in Bradford in 1915 and 1916; and his aunt Wilhemina Behrens, who lived with Harry. Alice's diary of 5 May 1916 says it all!

At the Behrens - Motored there after lunch from Leeds - Very kind, entirely obsessed by Bradford - even said have you good Drs. in London! this was Miss Behrens -

Last, but by no means least, there is the joy of hearing a conversation between people who, to misquote a familiar musical knight, would seem to hail from 'Somewhere further South' than Manchester. In particular, Leonard Behrens sounds just like 'George Parr' of the John Fortune and John Bird sketches - but, no matter, it all adds to the charm of what must be an essential issue for all lovers of Elgar, the Hallé, and Sir John Barbirolli.

Martin Bird

### ***Special offer to Elgar Society members***

The Barbirolli Society has kindly offered to make this set available to Elgar Society Members at the special price of £10 (plus postage). It also offers the *Barbirolli Elgar Album* (CDSJB 1017) and the *Barbirolli English Music Album* (CDSJB1022) at £9 each (plus postage). CDSJB 1017 contains the performance of the Symphony mentioned above, plus the *Variations*, two performances each of *Introduction and Allegro* and *Elegy*, and the second *Bavarian Dance*. CDSJB1022 contains yet other recordings of the *Variations* and the *Bavarian Dance*, together with music by Bax, Butterworth, Ireland, Purcell, and Vaughan Williams. Contact Paul Brooks at [p.brooks@ntlworld.com](mailto:p.brooks@ntlworld.com) or 11 Cranbrook Drive, Kennington, OX1 5RR.



Dutton Epoch  
CDLX 7220

**Elgar/Rooke: Three Movements for Piano Trio**  
**Maddison: Piano Quintet (1916)**  
**Frank Bridge: Piano Quartet in C minor (1902)**  
The Fibonacci Sequence

Kathron Sturrock (piano); Elgar and Bridge, Benjamin Nabarro (violin), Yuko Inoue (viola), Benjamin Hughes (cello); Maddison, Jack Liebeck and Helen Paterson (violins), Louise Williams (viola), Benjamin Hughes (cello)

In 1969, Cyril Scott wrote: 'I do not hold with the policy of raking up and performing early and unrepresentative works of composers, works written perhaps long before they had developed their respective styles. Such a policy is neither fair to the deceased or maybe still living composers, and is boring for the public.'<sup>5</sup> Scott's stricture would apply to the Elgar and Bridge works on this disc, but I suggest you ignore it. At this juncture, I have to declare (in professional parlance) a 'prejudicial interest' in the Elgar trios, since the violinist Jayne Walker, the pianist David Oliver, and I gave the first performances of these realisations by Paul Adrian Rooke in Rickmansworth in June 2007; and I also gave the second performance with different players a few days later in Bingham. I enjoyed the fruits of Paul's labours then and I enjoy them now that they have been released, expertly played by the various members of the Fibonacci Sequence.

For the full story of how these works were completed, I urge you to buy the disc. However, the music is the thing, and here I can argue against Cyril Scott. The first trio is an unfinished work from either 1886, or 1920, or both. In his sleeve notes, John Norris speculates that Elgar reviewed his 1886 sketch with a view to adding a trio to his Brinkwells chamber music, but that the death of Lady Elgar in 1920 caused him to lay the project aside. I am less persuaded by this, although Elgar would of course have revised it for publication. In conception this is obviously a sonata-form movement with slow introduction, but it is certainly the least complete of the works, tantalisingly so. However, Rooke has made a fine job of turning it into a seven-minute introduction to a three-movement, sixteen-minute 'suite'. The second subject is a splendid tune, although whether the 1920s Elgar would have retained such long passages of unison violin and cello is a matter for conjecture.

The second trio is well documented. Elgar wrote it for Dr Buck and his pianist mother to play when the composer stayed with them in Giggleswick in 1882. In this form it is a minuet and trio.

5 Cyril Scott, *Bone of Contention: Life Story and Confessions* (1969), 139.

Elgar recast the trio theme as a piano work, *Douce pensée* ('Gentle thought') and later, in 1913 and at the request of the publisher W.W. Elkin, he arranged it for orchestra as a companion piece to *Salut d'amour* and *Carissima*, naming it *Rosemary* (with the subtitle 'That's for Remembrance'), the name by which the tune is now most familiar. Personally, I prefer the Giggleswick version to *Rosemary*, as the minuet sets it off better. The last movement is a piano trio arrangement of the *Empire March* and entitled *March for the Grafton Family*. It's fun and beautifully played, but it cries out for its orchestral colouring. Its biggest difficulty, of strings versus piano balance, is easily solved by the sympathetic positioning of the microphones.

I think Elgarians would like this disc and I recommend it. Ann Vernau deserves our thanks for her generosity in enabling the Elgar/Rooke recordings to go ahead. Branch secretaries might also consider inviting Paul Adrian Rooke to talk on his work on them, illustrated by the splendid performances on this disc.

The other works on the recording were completely unknown to me. In defiance of Cyril Scott, Dutton has included a delightful 1902 Piano Quartet from the 23-year-old Frank Bridge, before he had found his later style, which is full of delightful melodies and good writing. Cast in four movements, it is a substantial work lasting half an hour, but the quality is consistent and it is a mystery why the work lapsed between its premiere in early 1903, when it was well reviewed in the *Musical Times*, and its performance at the Royal College of Music in October 2006. Apparently Bridge himself suppressed it – a Scott acolyte, clearly! – along with a piano trio, string quartet and string quintet, but I for one am pleased that it has been resurrected. The performance is again terrifically persuasive.

The final composer featured on the disc, Adela Maddison, was entirely unknown to me. Living between about 1862 and 1929, she sounded a splendid lady, born into the upper classes and married at twenty to a musical but older husband, with whom she became a devotee of Fauré. Her serious life as a composer started, however, when she left her husband to live in Paris and mixed with Fauré, Ravel, Debussy and Delius. Later she moved to Berlin, where she had an opera produced, but the First World War curtailed her stay and her international career. She wrote this Piano Quintet in 1916 and it was first performed in public in 1920 and privately published five years later. The enterprising Kathron Sturrock and her colleagues revived it in 2007 and it is worth hearing. Lasting about half an hour, it is influenced more by her French than her German experience and requires a few hearings as it is episodic in nature and difficult to grasp immediately. Nevertheless, there are many fine passages and the

biggest tribute one can pay is that it doesn't betray any slavish influence. Maddison (and Bridge, and Elgar) could not have asked for finer or more musical advocates than the Fibonacci Sequence and all involved – players, engineers and beneficent trusts alike – are to be congratulated on bringing out this thoroughly enjoyable disc of world premiere recordings.

Steven Halls



Avi-music  
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**Elgar Piano Quintet**  
**Schumann Piano Quintet**

Lars Vogt (piano), Antje Weithaas and Radoslaw Szulc (violins),  
Tatjana Masurenko (viola), Claudio Bohorquez (cello).

The coupling of Schumann's Quintet with Elgar's is fairly obvious, and I'm surprised it hasn't been done before, as Schumann was one of Elgar's musical idols. Is Schumann's the first Piano Quintet (piano and string quartet) in existence? Mozart, Weber and Mendelssohn wrote Piano Quartets, but I'm not aware of Quintets prior to Schumann other than those with wind instruments. The genre was enriched thereafter by Brahms, Dvořák, Saint-Saëns and Franck. Elgar's only example appeared in 1919 and can stand beside the others in richness, technique and depth of emotion. Musicians from overseas are not only playing it, but recording it too; only in the last Journal I reviewed a splendid performance by musicians of New York's Lincoln Center. I was not quite so taken by this version, although it has many fine features. The performance was recorded live at the 2007 Spannungen Festival in Heimbach, Germany, before an impressively quiet audience. The acoustic sounds quite spacious, and the recording is soft focus, so blunting the impact of the first movement's more dramatic moments, and obscuring some of the inner details. The pianist, Lars Vogt, is a distinguished and well-regarded concert pianist, so accuracy from him is only to be expected, but he remembers that in this work the piano is one of five instruments, and not first among equals, as in the Schumann; he accompanies the string melodies most beautifully.

The magic of the slow movement is finely captured. Here, I feel, the music comes alive, and all the strings play with deep intensity and glowing tone. The emotion of this lovely movement has obviously moved them, and the Finale maintains this same high level. The basic speed is finely judged, allowing proper articulation of the many tricky passages. Detail seems clearer too, although I would have liked more viola tremolo at the spectral passage beginning at fig. 59. Judging by the ecstatic and

vociferous applause that erupts at the end, the audience enjoyed it enormously. So did I, but I would return to New York's Lincoln Centre ensemble for my top choice.

Barry Collett

### **Nursery Suite**

Royal College of Music Junior Department Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Mark Elder.

London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Elgar

### **National Anthem (arr. Elgar)**

London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonic Choir, conducted by Elgar



Elgar Editions  
EECD 008

I first reviewed this disc in July 1997, when it was paired with a CD of popular light music played by the Band of the Welsh Guards. It has now been issued separately, and very welcome it is, especially at bargain price. Elgar's own performance of the *Nursery Suite* needs little comment, except to say how well the sound quality comes up in this new transfer. Elgar, as usual, moves briskly, and brusquely, through his music as though he were in danger of missing the last train back to Worcester. He is quicker than Elder (and everyone else on record) in all the movements except 'The Wagon Passes', where their timings are identical. And yet the playing is affectionate and idiomatic; the essence of the music's feeling is all there.

The real revelation was Mark Elder's performance with his astonishing young orchestra, whose ages range from 13 to 18. I think this is one of the best performances I have ever heard, and certainly the best recording. The 'Aubade' has a fresh, early morning feel; the solo flute in 'The Serious Doll' is exquisite, and what artistry is displayed by the principal oboe, clarinet and bassoon in the middle section of the same movement; just listen to the virtuosity displayed by these young musicians in 'Busyness'. The string playing in the final movement is also a joy, as is the leader's violin cadenza. The recording, under the expert eye of the admirable Andrew Keener, is full but very clear, allowing all the wonderful orchestral effects to make their mark. Is it not now time people stopped calling Elgar's Cello Concerto his last major work? The *Nursery Suite* does not have the Concerto's earth-shaking gravitas, but it is not a miniature either.

The CD is completed by Elgar conducting a live performance in 1928 of that splendid mini-cantata which is his setting of the National Anthem.

Barry Collett



Naxos Historical  
8.111256

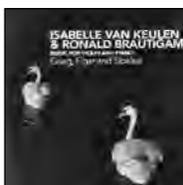
**Symphony No 1** (recorded 1930)  
**Falstaff** (recorded 1931/1932)  
London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Elgar

This is another Naxos issue which mirrors precisely one of EMI's original discs in the first volume of their Elgar Edition from 1992. These remain two of the most important of Elgar's recordings: Elgar's orchestra responding eloquently and intuitively to his baton. There is therefore little need of musical advocacy from me and this short review needs only to concentrate on the sound Naxos has produced.

Unlike the EMI issue there is an immediate and obvious difference between the acoustics of both works – the *Symphony* being recorded in the Kingsway Hall and *Falstaff* after the opening of Abbey Road studios. For the *Symphony* EMI produces more warmth than Mark Obert-Thorn who used two sets of British pressings as templates. The result is slightly rougher with instruments seemingly highlighted at random. This is not a reason to avoid the Naxos disc; it is rather that I prefer the EMI sound. For *Falstaff* I feel inclined to prefer the Naxos disc (again marginally), but the impression of a wider perspective is attractive allowing a more objective view of the work to be taken.

It is never easy to know whether a record like this is available from EMI, who seem to withdraw and re-release recordings at random.<sup>6</sup> Should a member not have this important recording in their collection I can recommend with confidence the purchase of this disc – it costs little and its contents are priceless.

Andrew Neill



Challenge Classics  
CC72171

**Elgar: Violin Sonata**  
**Elgar: Sospiri**  
**Grieg: Violin Sonata No. 1**  
**Sibelius: Three Humoresques**  
Isabelle van Keulen (violin)  
Ronald Brautigam (piano)

2007 marked not only Elgar's 150th anniversary, but also the centenary of Grieg's death and the fiftieth anniversary of Sibelius's death. This CD is a tribute to the three composers, and very welcome it is too. Grieg's first Sonata is a lovely, fresh work, and makes a charming contrast to the intensity of Elgar's version for violin and piano of *Sospiri*. The notes talk of the piece's

<sup>6</sup> It seems to be unavailable at present (Ed.).

Mahlerian depth of emotion. It is unlikely that Elgar knew any Mahler in 1914, but in any case Elgarian depth of emotion can be just as harrowing. This piece is beautifully played, as is the Violin Sonata. These two Dutch musicians follow in a long line of overseas interpreters of this Sonata on record, including Max Rostal, Menuhin, Midori, Lydia Mordkovitch, Maxim Vengerov, Marat Bisengaliev, Tuncay Yilmaz, and Simone Lamsma. All of these have something vital to say about the work, and van Keulen and Brautigam come out with the best. The first movement is played with great panache, but relaxing at the crucial moments when that is necessary. Van Keulen's tone and intonation is rock solid, and the immense difficulties of some of the writing holds no terrors for her. The slow movement is magically done, poised between remote mystery and rich lyrical warmth, and, praise be, these artists observe Elgar's instructions in the last bar, letting the violin's long-held C sharp disappear into the ether without the piano's chord hanging on too. The finale is taken at a quicker speed than is sometimes the case, but the technique of both players is never in doubt, and Elgar's instructions are faithfully met. The final epilogue and coda are splendidly achieved, and the whole work emerges as a true masterpiece. Highly recommended.

Barry Collett

**John Ireland: Trios: Phantasie Trio in A minor, Piano Trio No. 2 in E, Piano Trio No. 3 in E**

**Ireland: music for violin and piano: Berceuse, Cavatina, Bagatelle, The Holy Boy**

Gould Piano Trio: Lucy Gould, violin; Alice Neary, cello; Benjamin Frith, piano



Naxos 8.570507

The appearance of this disc at a similar time to Dutton's disc of English piano trios made me want to see how Ireland's Piano Trios (of 1908, 1917 and 1938) compared, and I have to say they come out of the comparison extremely well. The 1908 trio, especially, is a magnificent work, and when one considers that it was written, like the incomplete Elgar movements, when the composer was in his twenties, one can appreciate the benefit to a young composer of having Stanford as a teacher. The lighter pieces for violin and piano, too, lose nothing in comparison with Elgar's salon music. Coincidentally, Ireland attended the first semi-public performances of Elgar's Quartet and Quintet at Frank Schuster's house in 1919.

When his three chamber works were first performed, at the house of his friend Frank Schuster, I was among those invited. During the playing of these Elgar walked up and down, smoking a pipe. At the subsequent supper party I found myself sitting on his right. When presently he turned to me, I ventured to ask him if he smoked when he was working. 'Working? working?' he exclaimed, 'I'm afraid I don't understand you, Mr. Ireland'.<sup>7</sup>

The performances by the Gould Piano Trio are consistently splendid; as is the recorded sound. Perhaps the greatest compliment I can pay to both the music and to Naxos is to say that my immediate reaction on hearing this disc was to buy the two earlier volumes in their series of Ireland's chamber music.

Martin Bird

**Note:**

The following recordings are available now from the Elgar Birthplace Museum:

Hallé/Elder Gerontius; Perlman Violin Concerto (DVD); Elgar/Rooke Piano Trios; R.C.M./Elgar Nursery Suite; Symphony No. 1/Falstaff (Elgar/Naxos).

N.B.: buying from the Birthplace is a way of contributing directly towards its finances at this difficult economic time.

Their on-line shopping pages can be found at:  
[www.elgarmuseum.org/trolleyed](http://www.elgarmuseum.org/trolleyed).

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<sup>7</sup> *The Musical Times*, 1 June 1957.,

# LETTERS

## **From Ernie Kay**

I was very glad to see in the current Journal the printing of the address given by Dr Hunt in 2002. A couple of points of detail, however:

The talk was not given *to* the Elgar Society; rather it was a Festival event put on *by* the Society for the general public and most of the audience would not have been Society members. The event was organised by my late wife and myself as West Midlands Branch officers as the Society contribution to the Festival (I have organised similar events each year at Worcester and Hereford Festivals and am doing so again this year).

The note on pages 15 and 26 record Dr Hunt as organist of Worcester Cathedral; this was for many years his post but he retired from it in 1996.

## **From Edmund M. Green**

In the March 2009 Journal (editorial), there is a brief discussion of Maurice Maeterlinck's plays, *The Intruder* and *The Seven Princesses*, cited in the programme notes to the first performance of the 'Enigma' *Variations* as plays in which 'the chief character is never on the stage'. These notes have been the subject of endless discussion and interpretation, and it is amusing to note that there is even a difference of opinion about the identity of the chief characters in question.

One possibility is that, as Jerrold Northrop Moore writes, 'The chief character who was never on the stage in both the Maeterlinck plays was Death'.<sup>1</sup> But there are deaths in most tragedies; the mere fact of death in a play does not mean that the principal character of the play is Death. Surely, no one would argue that the chief character in *Medea* or *Hamlet* is Death, despite the number of bodies that litter the stage. However a reasonable argument can be made for *The Intruder* because the intruder is Death: the stage directions say 'all at once the sound of the sharpening of a scythe is heard outside'. Inasmuch as it is past ten o'clock at night, it probably isn't the gardener preparing to mow the grass. However, no such argument can be made in the case of *The Seven Princesses*. Although Princess Ursula is dead by the end of the play, the person of Death is nowhere apparent in the text.

The March editorial suggests that the principal character of *The Intruder* is the wife (she is not listed in the cast of characters, and the stage instructions state that she is in a room to the left of the stage for the entire length of the play), and that the chief character of *The Seven Princesses* is Princess Ursula. My own school of thought (I may be its only member) agrees that the chief character of *The Intruder* is the wife. I also agree that the chief character of *The Seven Princesses* is Ursula, but I disagree that she is never on stage. In fact, she is on stage throughout the play. The seven princesses are listed in the cast of characters. Persons listed in the cast of characters always appear on the stage, even if briefly and (as here) with no speaking

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1 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, A Creative Life*, 270.

lines. Further, the stage instructions in *The Seven Princesses* begin 'A spacious hall of marble ... A flight of seven white marble steps divides the whole hall lengthwise, and seven princesses, in white gowns and with bare arms, lie sleeping on these steps ...'. Towards the end of the play, the stage instructions state 'The Prince, unheeding of the noises outside, approaches in silence the one who has not risen'.

Given these instructions, I do not understand how there could have been a production of this play in which the seven princesses do not appear on the stage. It is possible that Elgar believed that Death was the chief character who never appears on the stage, and that might explain his reference to Maeterlinck's plays in the programme notes. It is also possible that there are other versions of the plays. My copy, which includes Maeterlinck's *The Blind* and *The Death of Tintagiles*, was published in a translation by the poet Richard Hovey (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1920).

*Julian Rushton writes:* I am grateful for this correction. When I wrote 'Ursula ... is the principal character whom we never see' I was responding to a radio interpretation which strongly suggested a staging in which the princesses are invisible. Stage directors frequently disregard such directions and a theatrical interpretation which economized on silent cast members seems plausible; but more to the point, there is no reason to suppose that actually Elgar *saw* these plays enacted, and it is even conceivable that he hadn't read them.

## 100 YEARS AGO...

The Elgars and Julia Worthington arrived at the Villa Silli at Careggi, near Florence, on 21 April. They were delighted with the place, and Alice wrote to Alice Stuart Wortley of 'the *glorious* weather, the world bathed in sunshine, the air scented with flowers & resounding with nightingales'. The pleasant surroundings and weather had an immediate impact on Elgar: the following day 'E wrote some beautiful new music'. Carice later wrote: 'My father was thoroughly happy here & wrote music which always seems to me to be in a particular vein of its own [the part-songs *Go Song of Mine* and *Angelus*]. Elgar had written a number of part-songs on his previous Italian holiday eighteen months earlier, but now he was also working on several new projects: a violin concerto for Kreisler which had first been mooted four years earlier; a second symphony, following the success of the first; and an opera.

Frank Schuster arrived on the 26th – as did Rosa Burley, who was staying nearby – and they were joined three days later by Mr Whittemore. There were many walks and longer excursions which they all enjoyed: Alice wrote again to Mrs Stuart Wortley: 'We have been having the most *lovely* time here, E. is quite devoted to Careggi & we must come here always we feel!'. The Elgars celebrated their twentieth wedding anniversary on 8 May, and Edward bought Alice a 'charming book on Florence'; but the sad news of Jaeger's death reached them on 21 May. Edward wrote to his widow: 'I cannot realise that the end is come & I am overwhelmed with sorrow for the loss of my dearest & truest friend'. On 15 May Alfred Littleton – also recently widowed – arrived in Florence with his daughter.

When the lease on the villa came to an end on 28 May, everyone was 'very sorry to leave'. The Elgars went to Pisa, with which they were 'much impressed ... at once'. Edward was 'quite carried away' with the Campo Santo, the famous burial ground with its important 14th- & 15th-century frescoes. The next day they moved on to Bologna, but it was hot on the train, where 'E. revived a Frenchman with the Spray'. On the 30th they moved on to Venice, where they stayed for the next eight days at the Hotel Regina. Alice told Mrs Stuart Wortley: 'This is *very* wonderful & interesting; just *at first* too much like living in a postcard! but gondola life in these lovely moonlight nights *is* perfect'. Two of the impressions Elgar had in the Piazza San Marco were later incorporated into the Second Symphony.

On 7 June they took the train to Verona, moving on to Innsbruck the next day, and then taking a carriage to Lermoos on the 9th. The journey through the Alpine countryside was a '*lovely* drive': the flowers were 'unbelievable'. Next day a carriage took them to Garmisch, which was 'so grown & like a town': their previous visit had been twelve years earlier. On the 11th they visited Richard Strauss and his wife who were 'very friendly'. Two days later they returned to Innsbruck, from where they took the train for home, stopping off once again in Paris. They arrived in London on 16 June, where they employed a young Frenchman named Arsène Jaulnay as a valet for Edward. Elgar went off to The Hut at Bray, while Alice returned to Hereford to 're-settle' Plas Gwyn. Elgar and Jaulnay returned on 22 June, and two days later Edward sent his *Elegy for Strings* to Novello: 'no pretension to be anything but quiet, somewhat sad & soothing', he wrote to Littleton. The effect of some 'not nice weather' on Edward is clear to see: he was 'raser porsley' and 'not vesy well'. However, by the beginning of July he was 'getting ready for cycle excursions & looking up sketches'. But he fled once more to The Hut on 9 July while redecorating was taking place at Plas Gwyn.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

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