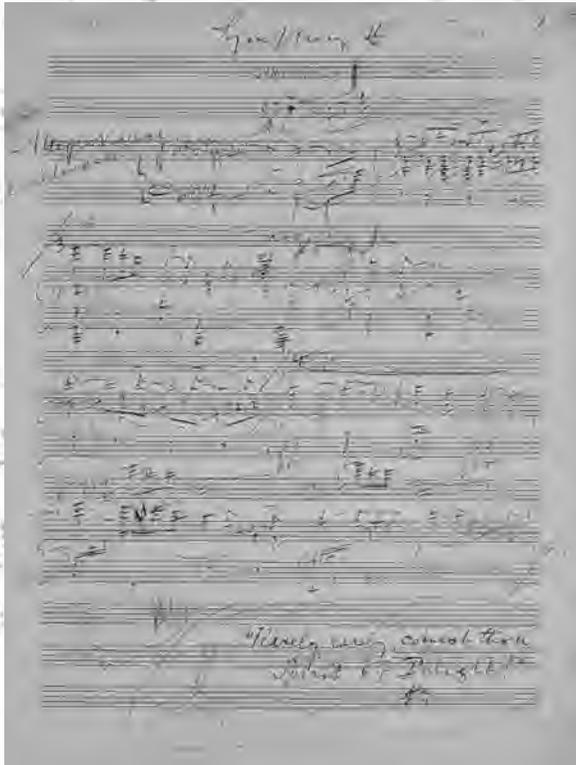


The Society

*Cigar*



# JOURNAL



August 2011 Vol.17, No. 2

1951-2011



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# The Elgar Society Journal

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August 2011 Vol. 17, No. 2

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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: Sketch for the opening of the Second Symphony, 5/6 January 1911*

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**Presentation of written text:**

**Subheadings:** longer articles benefit from judicious use of these.

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

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**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*.

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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.

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## Editorial

This issue celebrates anniversaries: specifically, those of the centenary of the Second Symphony and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Elgar Society. In true Elgarian fashion I have taken care to phrase it thus: the great man was always adamant, for example, that 2 June 1927 was not his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday but his 71<sup>st</sup> - not unreasonably counting the day of his birth as his first.

It is hard to believe that so many years have passed so quickly. It seems only yesterday (but it must have been in 1962) that I first heard the Second Symphony in Barbirolli's first recording with the Hallé, and it is strange to think that the symphony was then as 'new' as the *War Requiem* is today.

I am delighted that Andrew Neill and Julian Ruston have contributed essays on the symphony, and that the Birthplace has provided a photograph of its opening in an early piano sketch<sup>1</sup> to grace the cover. The sketch is dated 5/6 January 1911. Charles Sanford Terry happened to be staying at Plâs Gwyn and jotted down his memories of the time: 'On January 4 and 5 he spent the greater part of each morning in playing over his sketches, and it was interesting to follow the process on which he worked. In every movement its form, and above all its climax, were very clearly in his mind ... but withal there was a great mass of fluctuating material which *might* fit into the work as it developed in his mind to finality - for it had been created in the same 'oven' which had cast them all. Nothing satisfied him until itself and its context seemed, as he said, inevitable. In that particular I remember how he satisfied himself as to the sequence of the second upon the first subject in the first movement.'<sup>2</sup>

The Society's half century was celebrated ten years ago by the publication of Michael Trott's comprehensive booklet.<sup>3</sup> It is still available, and members will find details of how to obtain a copy elsewhere in this issue. For the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary I have contented myself with a quick look at the early issues of the predecessor of the *Journal*, and remain hopeful that before too long all past issues will be put online: there is so much invaluable information contained therein that should be freely and widely available.

As a further piece of self-indulgence I have included an essay, 'Newman and *The Dream of Gerontius*', written for me some years ago by Newman's biographer, Father Ian Ker. As it happens, that, too, celebrated a hundredth birthday, when a friend and I chose to celebrate our joint birthdays (I was 45, she wasn't) by performing that masterpiece.

Finally, I am most grateful to an old colleague, Richard Wiley, for providing an initial reaction to Volume 24 of the Complete Edition at very short notice.

Read on and enjoy.

Martin Bird

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1 Lovers of piano transcriptions please note.

2 MS notes at the Athenaeum Club.

3 *Half-Century, The Elgar Society, 1951-2001* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001).

# Elgar and the man who punched tickets at Worcester Railway Station: The Elgar Society, 1951-2011

## Martin Bird

In March 1934, Elgar's biographer, Basil Maine, suggested the formation of an Elgar Society. It was not until after the Second World War, however, that the suggestion took concrete form following a number of Elgar Festivals at Malvern. The first formal meeting was held on 29 January 1951.

The story of its first 50 years was well told in Michael Trott's *Half-Century, The Elgar Society, 1951-2001*<sup>1</sup>, and it is not necessary to repeat that story here. But it was not until 1973 that Wulstan Atkins started to produce a Society Newsletter, with the intention 'to gradually expand the contents of the NEWSLETTER to include articles and contributions from Members and others on subjects

**Fig. 1. Miss Kathleen Pearn, A.T. Shaw and J.V.H. Tompkins at the public meeting in Malvern on 5 December 1950 at which Miss Pearn proposed the formation of an Elgar Society. (courtesy of the *Malvern Gazette*)**



1 Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions 2001. Members may obtain copies from Tom Kelly, 69 Trinity Road, Edinburgh, EH5 3HS, for no more than the cost of postage. Send Tom your address with two first class stamps (or stamps to the value of 92p) .

of interest to Elgarians.<sup>2</sup> Well, thanks to the efforts of my predecessors, over the years we have done Wulstan proud, so much so that since 1997 it has been necessary to produce two separate publications, the *Elgar Society News* and the *Elgar Society Journal*.

That first issue included reports of much Society business, record and book reviews, and letters. Hugh Bean's recording of the Violin Concerto was particularly praised.

The versions of Sammons (HLM7011 - 1929) and Menuhin (ALP1456 - 1932), well recorded by the standards of their day, particularly Menuhin, now sound very dated and cannot be recommended to anyone demanding even reasonably good sound. Naturally students of Elgar cherish the early recordings by Menuhin and Sammons for historical as well as sentimental reasons, but for the ordinary music lover I think this very good version by Hugh Bean might well be a first choice, perhaps with Heifetz or Menuhin (1966) as an alternative for those days when one's whim is to be exhilarated rather than beguiled.<sup>3</sup>

Rosa Burley's splendid and forthright *Edward Elgar, the record of a friendship*<sup>4</sup> had recently been published, and was the subject of a less than sympathetic review which provoked a letter 'From our President, Sir Adrian Boult.'

Sir, -

May I loudly applaud Mr. Trevor Fenemore-Jones' article in your fine new Newsletter? I have no intention of reading Miss Burley's book - one or two of the reviews have been enough to keep me from doing so. As a young musician who might have been beneath Elgar's notice (and Lady Elgar's) may I testify to their great kindness on a number of occasions, and friendship over a long number of years. Of course he had his whims and peculiarities but what great creator has not.<sup>5</sup>

It is the personal recollections of Sir Edward that have most excited me over the years. It is now, sadly, almost too late to add to them, but the Elgarian world would be far poorer had the *Newsletter* not existed as a vessel for such memories. Within the first six issues contributions had been received from Alan Webb ...

I believe the first time I ever set eyes on Elgar was at a Three Choirs Festival rehearsal in Worcester Cathedral, before the first War. A great-uncle of mine had taken me, and as we sat, a tall, military figure with an iron-grey moustache passed us, and walked rapidly up to the conductor's rostrum, where he gesticulated to Sir Ivor Atkins. My great-uncle turned to me saying: 'Do you know who that is?' And instinctively I did. Much later, during Elgar's last five years, one would encounter him at Shrub Hill Station, on his way to catch the train for Paddington, or smiling mischievously on the doorstep of Sir Ivor Atkins's house at a Festival, or walking along High Street with slow and stately stride - apparently oblivious of the world about him, but in reality contemplating a sudden descent on Woolworths. I can remember seeing his car parked in the street, a rather high, old-fashioned limousine, with the initials 'E.E.' painted on the door.<sup>6</sup>

2 Wulstan Atkins, *Elgar Society Newsletter*, Issue N.1 (September 1973).

3 J.B., *ibid.*, 14.

4 Rosa Burley and Frank C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar, the record of a friendship* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972).

5 *ESN*, Issue N.2 (January 1974), 24.

6 *ESN*, Issue N.3 (May 1974), 21.

... and from Molly Hull.

Elgar walked on to the platform and took up the baton without even looking at the chorus, much less giving them any sort of greeting. He announced the number at which he wanted us to start in such a quiet voice that no one could hear him, and there was an embarrassed silence. He repeated the number but no louder and no one had the courage to ask him to 'speak up' as his whole manner was forbidding in the extreme. I did my utmost to help as, being much nearer to him I could just hear what he said but by this time the chorus was thoroughly jittery, their entries were tentative and, in addition to this, they began to sing flat. One encouraging lift of that wonderful left hand of his would perhaps have saved the situation but none came and he walked off saying 'You don't appear to know anything of the work'. I could have wept with rage, knowing the hours of loving work which we had all put into it and when 'P.C.' insisted that I should 'Come along and meet Sir Edward' it was the very last thing I wanted to do.<sup>7</sup>

But what of 'the man who punched tickets at Worcester Railway Station'? Geoffrey Hodgkins recalls a correspondent suggesting many years ago that, sooner or later, Elgarian research would be exhausted, and we would be reduced to publishing articles on such subjects. Well, there happens to be sufficient material available on the Elgars' relationship with the railways of Europe and America to spawn a book rather than a mere article. Great Western buffs may appreciate the fact that Alice recorded actual departure times of trains between Malvern and Worcester over many years which may be compared with the published times ...

Before I find myself shunted into a siding by men in white coats, let me share with you the following exchange, which took place just 100 years ago, during the railway strike of August 1911 (a strike which saw two railwaymen shot by troops).

Plas Gwyn: Saturday

Would the Station Master kindly inform Sir Edward Elgar whether passengers will be able to reach Stoke Works Station via Worcester this afternoon without delay or hindrance.<sup>8</sup>

Cannot guarantee beyond Worcester & that not without delay

William Lambert<sup>9</sup>

A happy anniversary to all our readers!

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7 *ESN*, Issue N.6 (May 1975), 8.

8 Letter to William Lambert, Hereford Station Master, 19 August 1911, Elgar Birthplace Museum scrap-books.

9 Reply from William Lambert, 19 August 1911, *ibid.*

## 'An Infinite Variety of Things' Elgar's Second Symphony: Disappointment and Triumph A Listener's Celebration

**Andrew Neill**

One of Elgar's earliest biographers John Fielder Porte wrote in 1921: 'The second symphony is a complete psychological contrast to the first. In place of contrasting emotions and their struggles, we have a gorgeous wealth of almost unbounded joy.'<sup>1</sup> Accepted opinion, a century later, would suggest that Porte is partially right for the contrast between the two Symphonies is substantial. However, to claim the E flat is '[music] of unbounded joy' seems extraordinary and I am forced to wonder if Porte had studied or even heard the Symphony when he wrote these comments. Surviving correspondence (largely one-sided: Porte to Elgar) suggests he was a less than perceptive biographer.

It is more rewarding to read that wise critic Ernest Newman, who understood Elgar's new Symphony immediately. In particular he perceived its complexity: 'Elgar is always saying something fresh. Because an actor has only one voice it does not follow that he can play only one part ... So it is, it seems to me, with Elgar. There is not a page either of the symphonies or of the violin concerto that does not reveal him like a photograph; but within this apparently restricted circle of style he manages to say an infinite variety of things, or, if you will have it so, to give an infinite number of fine shades to the highly personal things he has been saying all his life. To me the Second Symphony is full of new shades of this kind. And that he is less the slave than the master of his very pronounced style is shown precisely in the way he handles these sequences of his, the largeness of outline he can draw with them, the distance he can see through them in the direction of his goal.'<sup>2</sup>

Those of us who love Elgar's music will instinctively agree with Newman, as I believe I did when the Symphony became the catalyst for what became a love affair. It has been a long forty-seven year one-sided affair and I was only seventeen when it began on Monday, 20 January 1964. That evening I joined a coach party of boys from my school near Bath for a trip to the Colston Hall in Bristol. The BBC Symphony Orchestra was to be conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent and I went because I wanted to hear live, for the first time, Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture and Ida Haendel performing the Mendelssohn Concerto. I was, though, unprepared for the second half of the concert: Elgar's Symphony in E flat. This, for me, turned out to be a Damascene moment, for the affair began as I became entangled in and beguiled by this extraordinary music. I could not get

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1 John Fielder Porte, *Sir Edward Elgar* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1921), 133.

2 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 616.

enough of it and, neglecting my A level studies, returned time and time again to the school record library to hear a recording of the work - Barbirolli and the Hallé. It would be some time before I got around to the First Symphony.

What follows is not just about Elgar's Symphony but is also about the environment into which it was born. Composed following the death of a beloved monarch, the Symphony emerged upon a country coming out of mourning and a nation excited by a Coronation. It had the misfortune to be performed in the first month of what would be one of the hottest and most prolonged summers on record, the heat wave beginning in early May. In putting the Symphony in context I also look at the cultural, political and social background to its composition and first performance.

Alice Elgar's diary entry for 24 May 1911 reads: '... 1<sup>st</sup> performance of wonderful Symphony. Very good performance but dull indiscriminating audience.' Francis Toye in *The Bystander* of 7 June wrote: 'So keen was the interest, indeed, that the more expensive seats at the Queen's Hall at the first production were respectably filled, while not more than one half of the balcony stood empty.' Although the report in *The Referee* conveyed a different opinion: 'at the close the applause was long and loud', Alice Elgar and Francis Toye sum up the lasting impression we have of that first performance.

This is reinforced by W.H. Reed who confirms that: 'For some unknown reason it was not very well attended, although one would have thought that the new work would draw a full house, especially after the great success of the Violin Concerto ... The audience seemed unmoved and not a little puzzled. That the composer noticed the coolness of its reception at this performance was very clear. He was called up to the platform several times, but missed that unmistakable note perceived when the audience, even an English audience, is thoroughly roused and worked up, as it was after the Violin Concerto or the first Symphony. He said pathetically: "What is the matter with them, Billy? They sit there like a lot of stuffed pigs."<sup>3</sup> Another observer, Sir Henry Wood, wrote that: 'Elgar was very much upset and disappointed because the public did not receive his second Symphony with more warmth. He received three or four recalls, but I shall never forget his face when I opened the curtains at the side of the platform. "Henry," he said disconsolately, "they don't like it. They don't like it!"<sup>4</sup> The concert ended with a work by Granville Bantock, his *Dante and Beatrice*, a twenty-five minute tone poem. It was well received by a less than discerning audience, the members of which must have been grateful for a work that has nothing of the complexity of Elgar's Symphony. The atmosphere of *Dante and Beatrice* at the close is, ironically, similar to that of the Symphony.

Indifference to the Symphony continued, for there were few in the audience in Birmingham when Thomas Beecham conducted it on 22 November. It seems the performance was little short of a disaster: 'In the *Post*, Ernest Newman thought it best to draw a veil over the occasion: "What the cause of the thorough badness of the performance may have been we can only conjecture; it may have been due to insufficient rehearsal, or due to a lack of sympathy with the work on Mr. Beecham's part, or to the two combined."<sup>5</sup>

In setting out to celebrate this astonishing work I wanted to attempt to provide possible answers to two questions, one of which was asked of me by Sir Colin Davis only last year. Sir Colin wondered why 'they stayed away' from the first performance; 'they' being the audience. Secondly, I

3 W. H. Reed, *Elgar*, (London: Dent, 1939), 105.

4 Henry J. Wood, *My life of Music* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 250-251.

5 John Lucas, *Thomas Beecham An Obsession with Music* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), 84.



Fig. 1. King Edward VII and the future King George V.

wanted to explore the reasons the first performance of the Symphony was so coolly received, even though some of this will be going over 'old ground'. It is not possible to answer either question absolutely but I do feel we can establish enough clues to be reasonably certain of any conclusion. W.H. Reed raises an important point when he compares the audience response to the new Symphony with that of its predecessor and the Violin Concerto of November 1910. If the Concerto had been first performed five months earlier, in June 1910, immediately after the death of King Edward would, I wonder, the ending have reflected the public mood? Contrarily, might not the new Symphony have found its moment a year earlier if, by some miracle, Elgar could have composed, orchestrated and produced it in the time?

Last December Michael Kennedy wrote the following: 'Was there a golden age of English music a hundred years ago? From today's vantage point there probably was. The years 1910 and 1911 still excite the imagination as one contemplates the extraordinary richness of the new works that were being introduced to audiences in London and at festivals

at that period. If you believed in the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, there was plenty to support you. The spirit was changing – 'Rarely, rarely comest thou, spirit of delight' was the ambiguous line by Shelley that Edward Elgar inscribed on the score of his Second Symphony. If a single work of art could be said to epitomise the years from 1900 to 1914, this great symphony must be a leading candidate.'<sup>6</sup> Kennedy's paragraph tells us of the importance that this work has for us in this country and why we should be celebrating its centenary. Like any great work of art, it has to be considered

6 Michael Kennedy, 'A Golden Age', *The Spectator* (18/25 December 2010).

on many different levels for what Elgar said in his music then and still says to us today remains relevant, particularly now that we know so much more about the Symphony and its times.

### **Two Kings**

Elgar completed the Symphony on 28 February 1911 and, as we know, the score bears the following inscription:

*Dedicated  
To the Memory of  
His late Majesty  
King Edward VII*

Elgar added:

*This Symphony designed early in 1910 to be a loyal tribute bears its present dedication with the gracious approval of His Majesty the King.*

*March 16<sup>th</sup> 1911.*

Arthur Reynolds, in his article for this Journal threw valuable light on the relationship between Elgar, King Edward and his son King George V.<sup>7</sup> Inevitably I cover some of the same ground as Mr. Reynolds but, happily, I feel I can add something to this earlier research.

King Edward VII died at 11.45pm on 6 May 1910. It is difficult or even impossible for anyone living today to appreciate the grief felt across the land when the news of his death became known. The shock was the greater because the true state of the King's health was only revealed in a bulletin on 5 May. For the funeral, London filled with the great and the good from around the world, the East End emptied as Londoners attempted to get a glimpse of the cortege and, later, Royal Ascot mourned its greatest patron as the race-goers, dressed in black, watched in a kind of solidarity for the man whose horse, *Minoru*, had won the Derby in 1909. It would be remembered as 'Black Ascot'.

Even republics were not immune: the major stock exchanges in America closed for the day and the lower house in Congress passed a resolution of sympathy and closed for business. On Broadway 'God save the King' was played and flags flew at half-mast across New York.

Margot Asquith, the wife of the Prime Minister, wrote of King Edward: 'Royal persons are necessarily divorced from the true opinions of people that count and are always obliged to take safe and commonplace views. To them clever men are "prigs", clever women "too advanced"; Liberals are "socialists"; the uninteresting "pleasant"; the interesting "intriguers"; and the dreamer "mad". But, when all this is said, our King devotes what time he does not spend on sport and pleasure ungrudgingly to duty. He subscribes to his cripples, rewards his sailors, reviews his soldiers, and opens bridges, bazaars, hospitals and railway tunnels with enviable sweetness. He is loyal to all his ... friends ... and adds to fine manners, rare prestige, courage and simplicity.'<sup>8</sup>

At home a sense of loss permeated everywhere. Lord Hardinge, taken to see the King wrote: 'I was deeply moved at seeing there, lying on a simple bed, the dead man who had been so good to

7 Arthur Reynolds, 'The King and the Troubadour: Edward VII & Edward Elgar', *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 5 (July 2010), 7.

8 Margot Asquith, *An Autobiography*, Vol. III (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1922), 163.



**Fig. 2. Black Ascot.**

me and whom I really loved.' Lord Carrington 'felt that he had lost the "truest friend" that he had ever had' and Frederick Ponsonby recalled the 'lovable, wayward and human' man his master was and, unlike Queen Victoria who rarely considered the feelings of her Household, 'he would often, without being asked, suggest to some married man that he should go away and spend the week with his family.' Although the King could be terrifying ('his angry bellow, once heard, could never be forgotten'), it is clear that he was genuinely loved by those who were close to him and it is obvious that this love, through a kind of osmosis, was transferred to his people. He could 'make innocents feel that he really wanted to see them.' He made people want to serve him and those that did gained 'pleasure ... derived from performing some service which made him momentarily happy and brought forth that characteristic murmur of "yes, yes, yes" like the purring of a contented cat.'<sup>9</sup>

For Alice and Edward Elgar, as with others, it would seem the notorious public private life of the King mattered not a jot, for Edward VII became, to them, what a King should be. Lord Fisher of Kilverstone wrote: 'How *human* he was! He could sin, "as it were with a cart-rope", and yet could

9 Christopher Hibbert, *Edward VII: The Last Victorian King* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1976), 298.

be loved the more for it! What a splendour he was in the world!’<sup>10</sup> Francis Toye felt, waspishly, that ‘by the public at large he was not only trusted implicitly but also credited with almost superhuman sagacity’.<sup>11</sup> A popular ditty of the day summed up the common view:

There’ll be no war as long as we’ve a king  
like good King Edward.  
There’ll be no war, for he hates that sort of thing.  
Mothers, don’t worry as long as we’ve a king  
like good King Edward.  
Peace with Honour is his motto all the time –  
So God save the King!

It is clear that the Elgars fell under King Edward’s spell: his courtesy, charm and genuine interest in others - that ability to make those in conversation feel they were the most important person in the world to their interlocutor, in this case the King. The nervous, insecure composer would have been made to feel welcome and appreciated by the highest in the land. At a concert in 1903 organised by Lady Maud Warrender to raise funds for the Union Jack Club: ‘... E. was presented to the King who spoke to him quite a long time & very touchingly told him how he liked his music & in his illness used to have some of his favourite pieces played to him once & sometimes more than once a day - & how it soothed him very much ...’.<sup>12</sup> Then there was occasion in 1904 when Elgar dined with the King at Marlborough House. Parry and Mackenzie were there: nevertheless ‘the King talked much to E. & took him out 1<sup>st</sup> after dinner.’<sup>13</sup>

We can see, through these vignettes, how Elgar came to revere his monarch, who knighted the forty-seven year old composer on 5 July 1904. The faithful Alice recorded the occasion: ‘Then Frank [Schuster] arrived and drove to Buckingham Palace with E ... The King smiled charmingly & said “Very pleased to see you here Sir Edward”.’ Elgar repaid this attention in full with the Symphony’s dedication. Few composers have honoured their monarch more significantly than Elgar with this Symphony, even if the slow movement was originally about the loss of his great friend Alfred Rodewald in 1903. During 1910 it was the King whom Elgar mourned – and I think this mourning was genuine and very deep: indeed it could be said that the movement later became the accompaniment to the gun carriage as it began its journey to Windsor.

Perhaps Elgar, unwittingly, came closest to showing his feelings for the monarchy in the *Coronation Ode* from 1902, written in advance of his first meeting the King. The *Ode* is another example of the subtlety he could bring to Occasional Music, as is exemplified at the end of the first section (Crown the King). Here is love and respect in equal measure mingled with ‘melancholy, not triumph’ as Michael Kennedy puts it.<sup>14</sup>

The new King, George V, expressed his feelings on the death of his father in his diary: ‘... beloved papa passed peacefully away & I have lost my best friend & the best of fathers. I never had a[n angry] word with him in his life. I am heartbroken & overwhelmed with grief, but God

will help me in my great responsibilities & darling May [Queen Mary] will be my comfort as she always has been.’<sup>15</sup> Immediately there was a change of atmosphere and the young King and Queen came to represent something entirely different as Arthur Reynolds has pointed out: ‘A diminutive, red-faced King George V and his unsmiling Queen Mary, together with their dour inner court, represented a sombre contrast to the glittering exuberance of Edward VII, Queen Alexandra and their courtiers.’<sup>16</sup> Harold Nicolson broadens the portraits: ‘As a stamp-collector, he was the equal of any of the world’s philatelists. As a yachtsman, he knew as much about sailing as the most veteran of the Cowes specialists, and he was recognised as one of the best shots in England.’<sup>17</sup>

There is more to this as Churchill stressed when reviewing the formidable situation which faced the new monarch. ‘The Great Council which at St James’s Palace recognized and acclaimed George V as King, saw before them a man humble in the presence of the responsibilities which the hereditary lawful succession of a thousand years cast upon him. Yet at that moment no one could foresee the terrible shattering catastrophes towards which Europe and the whole world were hurrying. The fortunes even of our own land were loaded with difficulty and quarrel. The parties raged against each other. All men were agog about the veto of the Lords, about Home Rule for Ireland, about the rise of Socialism. Little did they dream that Armageddon was upon them.’<sup>18</sup>

By the spring of 1911 court mourning was at last being abandoned in advance of the Coronation and Royal Ascot would return to normal again. Shortly after the old King’s death, Dora Penny (Dorabella) recalled the mood of the country, too. She travelled to Italy in April 1910 and was staying in Florence on 8 May when: ‘the nice elderly waiter who had taken charge of me ... made his way over to my table obviously much concerned about something. “Signorina.” He said, in a very low voice, “il vostro Re è morto!” ... The few other English people and I looked our grief and concern at one another and waited for further news. Next day I left for England and found myself a conspicuous object, in colours, when I landed; but I arrived home that evening decently clad.’<sup>19</sup>

Even though King George bestowed the Order of Merit on Elgar and raised his rank within his order of chivalry twice, it appears that, for both Elgars, King George and Queen Mary were not their ideal as monarchs. In 1916 Alice recorded the following remarks in her diary whilst at a concert in the Royal Albert Hall on 10 May: ‘King & Queen present. King seemed fidgety and un-King like in demeanour ... The King *was* said to be much affected by ‘For the Fallen’ but Gerontius was evidently too much for him. They seemed to have no music &c. So different to King Edward.’

Before this, early on in the new King’s reign, *The Crown of India* of 1912 contains, perhaps surprisingly, music of far greater subtlety than might be imagined and gave Elgar the opportunity to paint a musical portrait or two. Despite the turgid and sycophantic words of Henry Hamilton, Elgar’s music which accompanies the homage of India to the Imperial pair is affectionate and is certainly not imperial. The section also includes a charming tribute to Queen Mary, who was known as May to her family.

Arthur Reynolds did much to explain Elgar’s reasons for suddenly declining to attend the Coronation on 22 June and another clue to his feelings may be contained in one of the works he composed for the service, the recessional *Coronation March*. I have written elsewhere how

10 Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, *Memories*, quoted by Hibbert, *ibid.*, 304.

11 Francis Toye, *For What We Have Received* (London: Heinemann, 1950), 87.

12 Alice Elgar diary 25 June 1903.

13 Alice Elgar diary 3 February 1904.

14 Michael Kennedy, *Elgar the Edwardian* in Raymond Monk (ed.), *Elgar Studies* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 108.

15 Hibbert, *ibid.*

16 Arthur Reynolds, *ibid.*

17 Harold Nicolson, *King George The Fifth* (London: Constable, 1953), 142.

18 Winston Churchill, *Great Contemporaries* (London: Odhams Press, 1947), 250.

19 Mrs. Richard Powell, *Edward Elgar, Memories of a Variation* (London: Methuen, 1947), 89-90.



Fig. 3. John Singer Sargent's Vaslav Nijinsky in *Le Pavillon d'Armide*.

'it is hardly a celebration of either monarchy or the 1911 Coronation, for Elgar seems to be mourning the passing of the old King rather than cheering the accession of King George V. ... The march is a magnificent example of Elgar's mastery of orchestration and structure, its brown colour sustained to the end. The successive markings *Molto maestoso - Nobilmente - Grandioso* are as much a reminder of the responsibilities of monarchy as of anything else, the music an echo of Kipling's *Recessional* as the reign of King Edward became a memory.'<sup>20</sup>

#### The cultural scene

So what of the wider cultural and political environment into which the Symphony was born? Virtually unknown and, therefore unmourned in England, Gustav Mahler died on 18 May, his 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Symphonies echoing Elgar's world: 'all those dying closes' as Michael Kennedy reminds us. On 3 April 1911 the first performances

of Sibelius's 4<sup>th</sup> Symphony took place before a 'baffled audience'. Sibelius's biographer goes on to make the point that 'it was not only in Helsinki that it bewildered the public; it was denounced as "ultra modern" in Sweden which was receptive to [Sibelius's] art, while in Gothenburg when Stenhammer conducted it in January 1913, it was actually hissed.'<sup>21</sup> Elgar would not have known it but he was not on his own! 1911 was also the centenary year of Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* and Debussy's *Le martyre de Saint-Sébastien* and, posthumously, Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* was first performed in Vienna that autumn. However, perhaps most strikingly, the year began with the premiere of *Der Rosenkavalier* in Dresden on 26 January. Unconcerned with court mourning or the forthcoming coronation Strauss conjures up a bittersweet world in tune with the time.

1911 was the year of Bridge's *The Sea*, Butterworth's *Two English Idylls*, Delius's *Summer Night on the River* and Holst's *Second Suite for Military Band*. Carl Nielsen completed his Violin Concerto and Granados his *Goyescas*. In France the composers Joseph-Guy Ropartz and Albéric

20 Andrew Neill, *The Crown of India* (Notes to the Chandos recording, 2009).

21 Robert Layton, *Sibelius* (London: J. M. Dent, 1992), 44.

Magnard were doing much to keep the symphony alive and Paris secured one of the 'plums' of the year with the premiere of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. In Britain, as Michael Kennedy has suggested, the years 1910 and 1911 were a golden age for English music: how extraordinary it must have been to have lived through 12 months when it would have been possible to hear, for the first time, Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* and *Tallis Fantasia*, Elgar's Violin Concerto and Second Symphony, Stanford's *Songs of the Fleet*, Holst conducting the first modern performance at Morley College of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* and even Ethel Smyth's *March of the Women!*

As part of the coronation celebrations one of the major cultural events was the first visit to Britain of the Russian Imperial Ballet, which took up residence at Covent Garden. The principal dancers were Tamar Karsavina and Vaslav Nijinsky, who 'by their remarkable graces, outshone the rest.'<sup>22</sup> More significantly for Elgar and his Symphony, audiences were changing. The building of the Queen's Hall in Langham Place which was opened in 1893: 'was one of the principal drivers of the enormous expansion of musical activity in the fifteen years before the First World War ... and by focusing on a charismatic young Londoner in Henry Wood, Robert Newman, the lessee of the Hall, built a new audience.'<sup>23</sup> Better, cheaper, communications in London and the increase in the number of students at London's musical colleges all contributed to the change: 'A nucleus of a new type of concert-going public - unfashionable, intellectual, middle-class, and largely masculine - grew up to be familiar with much music and capable of appreciating it seriously.'<sup>24</sup> It was this part of Elgar's audience which stayed away or responded with less than the expected enthusiasm to his Symphony when they heard it for the first time.

In 1911 London was home to the first large-scale exhibition of French post-impressionist paintings. Inevitably this divided opinion, with John Singer Sargent, the dominant portrait painter of the time, unimpressed: 'The fact is that I am absolutely sceptical as to their having any claim whatever to being works of art, with the exception of the pictures by Gauguin that strike me as admirable in colour - and in colour only.'<sup>25</sup>

Hardy, Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy and Conrad led the literary world, and in 1911 John Masefield published his narrative poem *The Everlasting Mercy* which complemented Hardy's *The Dynasts* of three years earlier. On the stage a revolution in Shakespeare production was underway for, at last, what Shakespeare had written was becoming accepted as the norm - his structure unaltered and characters no longer given pre-eminence at the whim of an actor-manager. In the theatre Shaw, Galsworthy and Barrie were the most prolific authors, their plays being translated and performed across the continent. It was a fascinating time for, on the stage, issues such as imperialism, the trade unions, feminism, divorce and Salvationism were discussed openly only to be put on ice for the duration of the war, but emerging again once hostilities ceased.

#### The political scene

1911 was a year of political stalemate and industrial unrest at home, with the continuation of the suffragette movement and the increasing uneasy and fractious relationship with Germany. In

22 Lewis Foreman, *Music in England 1885-1920 as recounted in Hazell's Annual* (London: Thames Publishing, 1994), 86.

23 Lewis Foreman and Susan Foreman, *London A Musical Gazetteer* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 39.

24 Sir Robert Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 327.

25 Letter from John Singer Sargent to the Editor of the *Nation*, 7 January 1911.

December 1910, in the second general election of the year, the Conservatives led by Arthur Balfour won the most votes but Herbert Asquith, the Liberal leader, continued to govern with support from the Irish Nationalists. It was the last British election to be held over several days and the last to be held prior to the First World War.

From Germany Kaiser Wilhelm II wrote to his cousin, King George: 'You are perfectly right in alluding to my devotion and reverence for my beloved grandmother, with whom I was on such excellent terms ... Never in my life shall I forget the solemn hours in Osborne near her deathbed when she breathed her last in my arms!'<sup>26</sup> On the surface all seemed well, with the German Kaiser visiting London for the last time to attend the unveiling of the memorial to Queen Victoria in front of Buckingham Palace on 16 May. He did not stay for the Coronation; the Crown Prince came instead. The harmony did not last for, little over a month afterwards, on 1 July, the German gunboat Panther arrived in the port of Agadir on the southern coast of Morocco. This action was ostensibly to look after German interests following the French action in sending troops to Morocco in response to a local rebellion. The German government demanded that the French cede the French Congo to Germany in compensation for the increasing French involvement in North Africa. The British Government, appalled by this threat to France and challenge to their naval supremacy, responded bluntly which, eventually, led to a German climb down after drawn out negotiations over the late summer and autumn.

King George, on his accession, was confronted by the constitutional crisis resulting from the rejection by the House of Lords of the Asquith Government's Budget. Having appealed to the country and formed an adequate majority in the House of Commons the Government threatened to create several hundred new peers to achieve the necessary majority in the upper house to allow the Finance Bill to be passed. The King was torn both ways: "'For me the most difficult [time] was the Constitutional crisis. In the war we were all united, we should sink or swim together. But then, in my first year, half the nation was one way and half the other.'" The General Election followed. The House of Lords prepared to resist stubbornly, and the King, at a certain moment, allowed it to be stated in debate that he would consent to the overwhelming creation. Upon this intimation the Lords gave way, and the Parliament Act received the Royal assent.<sup>27</sup> This took place on 18 August, the new House of Commons passing the Bill by a majority of 150.

26 Miranda Carter, *The Three Emperors* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 392.

27 Winston Churchill, *ibid.*, 252.

Fig. 4. King George V and Queen Mary.



The Britain of 1911 was a country where life expectancy was 54 years for women and 50 years for men. Diet was generally poor and wages inadequate in many industrial sectors. This was a world where most people 'knew their place' with vast numbers 'in service'. Although the standard of living rose during the Edwardian period there remained substantial poverty: 'between 1906 and 1914 the wages of men on the lowest rates for unskilled labourers rose from 19s 6d (97.5p) to 21s (£1.05) a week.'<sup>28</sup> Low wages remained a feature and in 1911 provided fuel to the summer of industrial unrest that was an uncomfortable counterpoint to Elgar's *Symphony*. The unrest was most obvious in Liverpool where the Transport Workers Federation held a demonstration on 31 May that led to a general strike of seamen and port-workers by mid-June. The shipping companies quickly gave in, thereby inspiring the Dockers who were then supported by the recently victorious seamen. Strikes would continue into the summer in the London docks and elsewhere. Although the passing of the Insurance Act provided insurance for sickness and unemployment the difficult labour relations would continue until the outbreak of war and then emerge again before the end of hostilities.

It is, of course, with the benefit of hindsight, easy to perceive Europe riding headlong to the disaster of August 1914. Politically and internationally matters were neither comfortable nor settled, but it is no easier to predict now what will happen in August 2014 than it was a century ago to suggest the events which might occur three years later. There are some disturbing parallels, which can be observed in passing, but which to my mind do not prove the world was aware of what awaited it around the metaphorical corner. The 1911 Scott expedition to the South Pole was to end in failure the following year; Edwardian psychology promoting Scott into a doomed, magnificent, hero whose reputation, in this country, dwarfs that of Amundsen who got there first! Does this mean that artists like Elgar instinctively have a feel for what was in the air? Does all this manifest itself in the *Larghetto* or *Rondo* of his *Symphony* and did Edvard Munch perceive the horrors to come in his *The Scream* of 1893? Did Richard Strauss foresee the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Hohenzollern regime in Germany when, at the end of Act I of *Der Rosenkavalier*, the ticking clock mocks the Marschallin as she looks at her fading youth in the mirror?: 'Time is a strange thing. While one is living one's life away, it is absolutely nothing ... At times I get up in the middle of the night and stop all the clocks, all of them.'<sup>29</sup> I doubt it, but we can perhaps agree there was 'something in the wind' which hindsight affirms!

#### *A Symphony for its Time*

So it was against the backdrop of an increasingly uneasy industrial environment, a fractious relationship with Germany, a long hot summer and a nation ready for a Coronation that Elgar's *Symphony* was revealed to the world. Fresh from the success of the Violin Concerto Elgar had begun serious work on his new symphony early in December 1910. He worked hard and fast for, hanging over his head, was a long trip to North America in March 1911, with the premiere of the *Symphony* confirmed for May. 'I have worked at fever heat' he wrote and the first movement was with Novello by the end of January and the *Larghetto* and *Rondo* were dispatched by mid-February. Elgar took the last movement to Novello himself on 3 March. So, in two months the mighty work had been composed and scored with sufficient confidence that Elgar could leave for New York where he arrived on 1 April.

28 Roy Hattersley, *The Edwardians* (London: Abacus, 2006), 75.

29 English translation by members of the Decca Publicity Dept., 1954.

During this time the Elgars had also found what would become a new home in London (Severn House) and Elgar had also accepted the appointment as principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and conducted concerts in England and Belgium. There was no time for feeling unwell (except between Christmas and the New Year 1910) and any post-creative depression seems to have been vented on America and the Americans!: 'I sympathise with the "good-feeling" U.S. man & woman but they are wholly swamped by the blatant vulgarity of the mediocre crowd. America is getting worse - I see it in four years: it is a curious study - the "Union" system makes wholly for mediocrity ...'<sup>30</sup>

Arriving back in Liverpool on 9 May he travelled home to Hereford before going to London to begin rehearsals with the Queen's Hall Orchestra and to orchestrate his *Coronation March*. The Symphony's premiere was an important event by the leading British composer at the height of his powers. Sir Henry Hadow in 1931 caught the essence of Elgar's importance in his book *English Music*: 'He has remodelled the musical language of England: he has enlarged its style and enriched its vocabulary, and the monument of his work is not only a landmark in our present advance but a beacon of guidance for its future.'<sup>31</sup> Elgar's Symphony has, of course, an importance far beyond its structural confines through its originality, power and sheer scale. As we look back we might have imagined that the places to be in 1911 were Dresden for *Rosenkavalier* Paris for *Petrushka* and Vienna for *Das Lied von der Erde*. We can now see that London joins that exclusive list and can hold its head high as the midwife to a great, lasting, work on that hot May night 100 years ago.

The Symphony was first performed by the Queen's Hall Orchestra as part of the London Musical Festival. Within a month it had been performed three more times by the London Symphony Orchestra, the audiences becoming smaller and smaller, for as Michael Kennedy puts it: 'The Elgar boom was over.'<sup>32</sup> Although Elgar's music was, at times, received ecstatically during the Great War, the reception of *The Music Makers*, *Falstaff* and the Cello Concerto all attest to a waning star. That his music was performed more than we appreciate between 1920 and 1960 is neither here nor there: 'the boom [- in Elgar's lifetime -] was [definitely] over'.

Elgar's use of the words from Shelley's *Song* is the enigmatic counter-theme to the Symphony, its ambiguity undermining the directness of the music. In a letter from New York dated 13 April Elgar wrote to Alfred Littleton of Novello and gave, inter alia, advice to Rosa Newmarch who would write the note for the programme for the Symphony's premiere. He began: 'To get the mood of the symphony the whole of Shelley's poem must be read, but the music does not illustrate the whole of the poem, neither does the poem entirely elucidate the music.'<sup>33</sup>

Reading Shelley's words assists the listener in obtaining a greater understanding of Elgar's Symphony, even though the poem remains a distant relation to the extraordinary range of emotions explored by Elgar. It is clear to me that, if Elgar had the poem in mind at all whilst he composed, the words only came to mind as part of a response rather than as part of any programme. If anything they may be at the most some sort of guide or rather a suggestion - nothing more.

30 Letter to Ernest Newman, 17 May 1911, Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 9897.

31 Sir W H Hadow, *English Music* (London: Longmans Green, 1931), 159.

32 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129.

33 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers, Vol. II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 741.

### **Song.**

#### **Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)**

Rarely, rarely, comest thou,  
Spirit of Delight!  
Wherefore hast thou left me now  
Many a day and night?  
Many a weary night and day  
'Tis since thou art fled away.

I love all that thou lovest,  
Spirit of Delight!  
The fresh Earth in new leaves dressed,  
And the starry night;  
Autumn evening, and the morn  
When the golden mists are born.

How shall ever one like me  
Win thee back again?  
With the joyous and the free  
Thou wilt scoff at pain.  
Spirit false! thou hast forgot  
All but those who need thee not.

I love snow, and all the forms  
Of the radiant frost;  
I love waves, and winds, and storms,  
Everything almost  
Which is Nature's, and may be  
Untainted by man's misery.

As a lizard with the shade  
Of a trembling leaf,  
Thou with sorrow art dismayed;  
Even the sighs of grief  
Reproach thee, that thou art not near,  
And reproach thou wilt not hear.

I love tranquil solitude,  
And such society  
As is quiet, wise, and good;  
Between thee and me  
What difference? but thou dost possess  
The things I seek, not love them less.

Let me set my mournful ditty  
To a merry measure;  
Thou wilt never come for pity,  
Thou wilt come for pleasure;  
Pity then will cut away  
Those cruel wings, and thou wilt stay.

I love Love - though he has wings,  
And like light can flee,  
But above all other things,  
Spirit, I love thee -  
Thou art love and life! Oh, come,  
Make once more my heart thy home.

### **First Movement**

So what was it that struck me - an innocent, untrained ear hearing a 20<sup>th</sup> century symphony live for the first time? First of all there was excitement as that tremendous energy that barely slackens for forty-six bars takes the listener by the hand and plunges him or her into Elgar's world, with its *Spirit of Delight* theme or phrase stated for the first time in the third bar. For the listener in 1911 who was familiar with Elgar's First Symphony with its stately, reflective and luminous opening the new work must have come as something of a shock, for few symphonies begin with so much energy. Even with my untrained ear and eye I could tell from the score in the school library that it looked exciting: *Allegro vivace e nobilmente (f)* the first bar being marked *Largamente* followed by two bars (*ff*) *Accelerando* before the true tempo is settled (crotchet = 92) in the fourth bar. It was and is heady stuff!

Finally the energy subsides after the exposition takes us through to a *fff* climax (2 after fig. 21)

where 'one has to imagine the giant figure of the composer rising from his seat to cap the whole of this mighty edifice with all the strength at this command.'<sup>34</sup> Having been whirled along at what seems a headlong rate we are in a different world as we arrive at the forty-seventh bar and, in what Norman Del Mar calls a 'new, gentle atmosphere of repose',<sup>35</sup> the second subject emerges.

In 1964 I was sitting behind the orchestra looking straight at Sargent and I could tell the mood was changing (he stopped singing), but it is not long, with the marking *Impetuososo*, before a new energy is injected. Then the listener can relax again to bell-like chimes from the harps, instruments which play a more significant role in this symphony than the first. At fig. 24 the development begins with a new theme that seems to be in search of a focus, labelled appropriately by Elgar 'Ghost'. The theme achieves acceptance at last with a restatement of the *Spirit of Delight* phrase and *Tranquillo* the music is now hushed as it embarks on the first of the three moments in the Symphony that still disturb me. From figs. 33 to 35 we enter what Elgar told Alice Stuart Wortley was: 'the most extraordinary passage I have ever heard - a sort of malign influence wandering thro' the summer night in the garden.' Ernest Newman was told that this is 'a love scene in a garden at night when the ghost of some memories comes through it: - it makes me shiver.'

Of course I now know that these bars anticipate the Rondo and like the 'Maud' music there the tension dissipates to be cut off with a thud as we head towards the reprise. The old energy is back and we sense the music is heading somewhere. *Strepitoso* (noisy) places the mood as the orchestra gather its skirts running headlong to the momentary break in the music. At last the reprise begins, the second subject to the fore as the build to the thrilling end becomes unstoppable.

### Second Movement

In Elgar's letter to Alfred Littleton he wrote: 'The second movement formed part of the original scheme before the death of King Edward; - It is elegiac but has nothing to do with any funeral march and is a "reflection" suggested by the poem.' So if this is not a funeral march do we take Elgar at face value or do we use our ears? It is difficult to work out which verse or verses in Shelley's poem he had in mind which suggested a 'reflection' that matches Elgar's profound music. Obviously the music works on several levels. The movement begins with a profound tribute to King Edward or Alfred Rodewald but as the movement moves towards the recapitulation we have the famous oboe threnody - a lament of great emotion that leads to a repeat of the great theme.

Then, it becomes intimate: the music looks inwards and moves towards its almost unbearable climax. For me Elgar is recalling something appalling or is imagining the unbearable. This is very English (or what was once 'very English') - the moment is stated and we move on, shattered, but we are not allowed to dwell on whatever it was and, certainly, it will not be repeated. As most Elgarians will have discovered, for this movement, Elgar's 1927 recording of the Symphony is particularly appropriate: the *portamento* of the strings adding to the poignancy as the music seems to weep. It is, as Norman Del Mar, states: '... the climax of the movement, and there is a most moving suggestion of universal grief in the violins' melodic outpouring, with its marks of 'vibrato' and 'glissez' for the descending intervals in the *fff* molto espressivo.'<sup>36</sup> 'Today the movement rings

in our ears like the death-knell of pre-war England'<sup>37</sup> and in a fine performance it is impossible not to weep with the composer.

### Third Movement

Taking the whole movement, I find this of greater emotional contrast than some writers. It is true we enter a version of Elgar's 'heart of darkness' but the Rondo begins almost comfortably (perhaps the German word *gemütlich* is appropriate) and, despite the *Presto* marking, ends 'cocking a snoot' at what has gone before. Also, in sustaining the atmosphere, Elgar in his 1927 rehearsal recording stresses the marking *sonoramente* at fig 93. Despite this there is nothing disturbing in this music and certainly no intimation of what is to come when, between figs. 118 and 121, as that 'malign influence' from the first movement appears like a nightmare, we are drawn into another world. Did Elgar set out to mislead his audience when he wrote to Alfred Littleton, saying that 'The spirit of the whole work is intended to be high & pure joy'? It is difficult to understand this statement when it is related to the central section of the Rondo, particularly as Elgar drew attention to the words of Tennyson from the poem *Maud*:

Dead, long dead,  
Long dead!  
And my heart is a handful of dust,  
And the wheels go over my head,  
And my bones are shaken with pain,  
For into a shallow grave they are thrust,  
Only a yard beneath the street,  
And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,  
And the hoofs of the horses beat,  
Beat into my scalp and my brain ...

In the *Musical Standard* of 27 May 1911 Ernest Newman reviewed the Symphony (which he had analysed beforehand but had now heard): 'In [the Rondo] occur passages which seemed to the present writer to approach a state of things only to be described as terrible - in intensity of black import ...' Elgar having looked once again into an abyss withdraws preemptorily from embarking on disaster: he averts his eyes and moves away for it is as if Tam O'Shanter has won 'the key-stone o'the brig' - just. Elgar now inhabits the same world as a Mahlerian *Rondo Burleske*. As we know, the ending is thrilling, dispelling doubt and horror and imagined premature burial.

### Fourth Movement

There are those that feel the Symphony is one long (admittedly interrupted) diminuendo to the final bars of the fourth movement. However, although this may be true musically, I am not sure this is the case emotionally. There are at least three main themes in the movement, one describing the great conductor, Hans Richter. Some critics have called the opening theme commonplace and unworthy of what has just been heard. I disagree. Elgar was not a Mahler who wore his personal agonies on his sleeve and, in changing the atmosphere after the Rondo so completely, Elgar skilfully turns us away from the personal to the general. The movement begins as a kind of balm: *moderate and*

34 Norman Del Mar, *Conducting Elgar*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 54.

35 Del Mar, *ibid*, 52.

36 Del Mar, *ibid*, 66.

37 Peter Warlock, from a programme note of 30 October 1930.

*majestic*, and the second subject which Elgar said was ‘Hans himself’ moves the listener forward to the *nobilmente* third theme. Even if this work is a tribute to a dead king, we do obtain an impression of Richter’s character and the man who was so critical to Elgar’s career.

Even so, this is not a movement of introspection and, as the tension increases, any suggestions that this is a music of complacency seem wrong as the end becomes a wonderful example of Elgar’s mastery of the orchestra with the horn writing at fig. 164, for example, stunningly reminiscent of Part 3 of *The Kingdom* (bars 2-4 after fig. 113). Elgar’s control of his material is manifested in the way he brings the Symphony to its end: the lower strings recalling the opening and upper strings floating above, *pianissimo*. The harps, so prominent throughout, add their decoration as Elgar recalls the *Spirit of Delight* and, in colours of autumn reflecting the end of a long journey, the full orchestra concludes on a *fortissimo* chord which is allowed to dissipate into eternity ‘the chain of sequences - as long, indeed, as the movement itself - rolls on to its beautiful end like a winding and broken river that at last gathers all its waters together and finds the sea.’<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

Alice Elgar, always biased but frequently comprehending, saw what the Symphony meant when she wrote in her diary the day after Edward completed the short score: ‘It seems one of his very greatest works, vast in design, and supremely beautiful’<sup>39</sup> ‘... It resumes our human life, delight, regrets, farewell, the saddest mood & then the strong man’s triumph.’<sup>40</sup> No wonder so few listeners ‘got it’ the first time for ‘... unlike the First Symphony, that later work involves the listener in a much more introvert experience, taking time and repeated hearings to absorb.’<sup>41</sup>

So what of the triumph? Elgar’s Symphony received a reception that was not anticipated and, in the immediate aftermath of the first performance, it would not be performed in the numbers that the A Flat Symphony attracted at a similar stage. Furthermore, the Symphony’s temperament hardly matched that of the country for most of the Great War. Its time would come as the mood of reflection consumed the country after the armistice in 1918. It is generally accepted that Sir Adrian Boult did as much as anyone in establishing the Symphony’s reputation and a performing tradition which was to be developed by Barbirolli and Sargent. Boult chose to include the Symphony in a concert with the L.S.O. on 16 March 1920. He studied the score with Elgar who attended the rehearsal the day before the concert. ‘The performance was a triumph and the critics were almost unanimous in wondering why so great a work had been allowed to fall out of the repertory and in acclaiming Boult’s “revelation” of it.’<sup>42</sup>

Alice Elgar, who would die within the month, wrote to Boult the following day: ‘I must send you a few lines to thank you from my heart for your wonderful performance last evening. I cannot describe the delight to me of hearing that great work so splendidly rendered ... I know you will like to hear that Edward was so happy & delighted it has done him so much good.’<sup>43</sup> Indeed he was and it had, Elgar writing at the same time to the conductor: ‘With the sounds ringing in my ears

38 Ernest Newman, *Musical Standard*, 27 May 1911.

39 Alice Elgar diary, 28 February 1911.

40 Alice Elgar diary, 21 February 1911.

41 Del Mar, *ibid.*, 50.

42 Michael Kennedy, *Adrian Boult* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 73.

43 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Music and Friends: Letters to Adrian Boult* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), 43.

I send a word of thanks for your splendid conducting of the Sym: - I am most grateful to you for your affectionate care of it & I feel that my reputation in the future is safe in your hands. It was a wonderful series of sounds. Bless you!’<sup>44</sup>

Eventually most great works of art will come to be recognised for what they are and their worth appreciated and at least Elgar did not have to wait long for his Symphony to be comprehended and for it to take its place in the repertoire and be the one to be adopted by non-British conductors. Unsurprisingly it is not difficult to answer my two questions. Perhaps the answer is simple, for the Symphony shared a programme with two other novelties, the Bantock tone poem and Walford Davies’s *Parthenia* Suite and Elgar’s reputation was insufficient to counter a programme of unknown music. All the same the mood of the country had altered considerably in the year since the old King died. Court Mourning had finished, a Coronation was being celebrated, the country was uneasy because of industrial unrest and the difficulties with Germany and, furthermore, the hot summer created an out of doors culture. There were too many other distractions and it is likely that those who usually paid for the cheaper tickets did not attend the concert in the numbers expected and those who came were, in John Lennon’s words, those who ‘rattled their jewellery’. Despite Elgar’s reputation he was never going to win and for those who attended the first concert, a Symphony that was an emotional mirror of the First Symphony with a deeply reflective and impassioned Larghetto and a Rondo that overwhelms the listener was probably not what the average listener expected or even wanted.

In October 1932 T. E. Shaw (Lawrence of Arabia) wrote to Elgar after meeting him at Marl Bank: ‘... your 2<sup>nd</sup> Symphony hits me between wind and water. It is exactly the mode that I most desire, and so it moves me more than anything else - of music - that I have heard’.<sup>45</sup> This is what the music is for: producing an emotional response from those who listen. Lawrence surely speaks for the countless numbers who have found solace, inspiration and emotional release in Elgar’s music and in this Symphony in particular, for Lawrence would also have understood the extraordinary range of emotions in the Symphony that contradict John Fielder Porte and his assertion that the Symphony is ‘a gorgeous wealth of unbounded joy’. Elgar’s Symphony is not Mendelssohn in Italy or Beethoven’s 7<sup>th</sup> or Haydn’s 101<sup>st</sup>. His Symphony is more serious than those for he called it a ‘passionate pilgrimage of a soul’ and is therefore music that at times is highly personal. The sensitive listener hears and feels this in the music that obviously contradicts Elgar’s misleading comments to Alfred Littleton. In the fourth movement the sun does break through and make us smile after the thought provoking pages in the Larghetto and the moment of terror in the Rondo, but few (if any) are likely to consider it is music of ‘unbounded joy’!

For me, Diana McVeagh, that most precise and compassionate of observers, hits the nail on the head as she describes the ending: ‘There is no triumph, no certainty here, but a courageous and compassionate reconciliation of the extremes of this great work. The Symphony’s final pages unforgettably mingle delight, regret and acceptance.’<sup>46</sup> Exactly.

*Andrew Neill is a Vice-President and former Chairman of the Elgar Society.*

44 *Ibid.*, 42.

45 Letter from T. E. Shaw, 12 October 1932, EBM letter 1053.

46 Diana McVeagh, *Elgar the Music Maker* (Woodstock: The Boydell Press, 2007), 129.

# Symphony No. 2: the music

Julian Rushton

It is easy to enthuse, as I intend to do, about the music of Elgar's Second Symphony; to contribute something new to understanding it is less so. So in this short article on a piece worthy of a book to itself, I shall try to drape my enthusiasm with accretions of context and, just possibly, ideas that may be new to some readers of this Journal.<sup>1</sup>

What of that opening? Its exuberance is Elgar's own, however one may interpret it in relation to the Shelley motto. But its striding arpeggios and syncopation echo Schumann's E flat ('Rhenish') symphony, while Brahms's Third - a favourite of Elgar - also opens with a theme whose ascending and descending motifs are separately developed. Both those models are in triple metre; Elgar's 12/8 is essentially duple and the scalar bass descent (bar 2) is a marching trope, developed over the next few bars in alternation with a motif of larger intervals (Ex. 1, showing the middle-part imitation of the opening in bar 5). The steady bass disciplines the breathless syncopations of the melody, and the whooping horns. At fig. 1, a premonitory moment, the bass stabilizes on C - the key-note of the central movements.

This is a lot of information for two pages of score. With no loss of intensity, Elgar develops this material into a huge paragraph extending, with a final decay, to fig. 8. A complete analysis would take note of other shapes that derive from the opening (e.g. at fig. 5) and that generate material for the third movement (fig. 2; cf. fig. 93). Thus with hindsight (or repeated hearings) we may hear Elgar projecting a 'gigantic work' whose diversity - never to be underrated - is complemented and controlled by factors that contribute to a unified vision covering four movements. Indeed, fig. 5 seems to generate the 'Hans himself' theme from the finale, which compresses its essential shape, freed of chromatic inflexions and transformed in character (Ex. 2). In saying this I am deliberately disregarding our knowledge of Elgar's compositional processes.<sup>2</sup> As we know, he dipped into papers and sketchbooks where he had notated ideas for future use, or had first conceived for another project; but ideas that find their way into a work on this scale deserve to be understood mainly in their final position, where the composer through inspiration and craft has formed them into symphonic argument.

The overall design of the Second Symphony is unproblematic; it does not clone the first by

1 The most thorough and original analysis of the music is J.P.E. Harper-Scott, 'Elgar's deconstruction of the *belle époque*: interlace structures and the Second Symphony', in Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (eds.), *Elgar Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172-219. See also, Christopher Mark, 'The later orchestral music', in Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 154-70; Robert Meikle "'The True Foundation": the Symphonies', in Raymond Monk (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 45-71.

2 Christopher Kent, 'A View of Elgar's Methods of Composition through the Sketches of the Second Symphony', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 103 (1976-7), 41-60; Brian Trowell, 'Elgar's Use of Literature', in Monk, *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, 182-326, at 256-267.

Ex. 1. Symphony No. 2, first movement, opening (treble and bass, tempo inflections omitted)

Ex. 2 Symphony No. 2  
First movement fig. 5 compared to Fourth movement fig. 139 (transposed)

joining its central movements, basing their themes on the same series of notes, or pairing keys as radically separate as A flat and D. Elgar returns to the more normal ordering, slow movement second and Scherzo third; that these are in C (minor and major) is readily assimilated to 19th-century practice from Beethoven to Brahms. Elgar's transference of material between movements, especially the first three, is a personal application of practice well developed over the previous century. But the framework no more makes a symphony than the frame makes a picture. Choice of a less unconventional outline than that of the First allows Elgar to deploy and communicate ideas of no less marked originality.

The first of these is the haunting of the opening movement noted by Elgar himself ('it makes me shiver'), in which all the *Schwung* of the beginning is dissipated.<sup>3</sup> From fig. 26 the music is grounded on a pedal E natural, without which it might seem entirely lost. The pedal is sustained against harmonies - notably the E flat in the third bar - that seem incompatible; the augmented triads could fit in a number of keys, and thus belong to none. From fig. 28 (*Più lento*) the textural complexity becomes frightening. Previous material continues (first violins); the E pedal persists as

3 Letter to Ernest Newman, 29 January 1911; Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 229.

a rhythmic pulse (lower strings, bass drum); harps, flutes, and violas interject tremulous arpeggios and scales; and from the second bar, as if that were not enough, other strings try out the opening motive. But if this were Schoenberg (texturally it is hardly less involved) the ‘Hauptstimme’ (principal part) would be awarded to the first cellos with a new theme of critical importance. This paragraph is re-presented with a deeper sonority at fig. 33; the pedal is now C and the pulsation is strengthened by more percussion and harp. Elgar breaks loose (three bars before fig. 35) to find himself as it were in the wrong place; the music is that of fig. 1 but a semitone too high and remote, *pianissimo*. It is as if the scenery is vaguely familiar, but we have emerged from the wood into the wrong valley; getting home will not be easy.

Nearly 50 years ago the late David Drew, among the foremost music critics of his time, used this passage to distance Elgar from received associations of Imperial rodomontade to call attention to the heroism of his achievement in essentially musical terms:

To Elgar’s new listeners, ‘his’ England is mercifully remote and almost unimaginable. If, for instance, we are moved by the tremendous recovery of the tonic key in the E flat Symphony, it should be because we have registered the cost (in terms of harmonic and textural conflict) at which it has been achieved, not because we are reminded, say, that ‘in those days’ the British Raj was still a going concern.<sup>4</sup>

This recovery (fig. 42) is assisted by a bar of *Lento*, a stunning blast from the trombones, and a death-defying leap into third bar of the opening theme and the main tempo. And unlike the First Symphony, which barely recovers its main key at the close of the outer movements, this first movement ends with a blaze of glory.

This very blaze is essential to the larger scheme. A quiet ending would pre-empt the hushed opening of the second movement, with its deep C and divided strings, topped by violas, rotating in opposite directions to produce gentle diatonic clashes.<sup>5</sup> Elgar may not have wanted us to hear this movement as a funeral march, but his music speaks more strongly than words; it is processional, in a minor key, its main melody on ceremonial brass over a sombre off-beat (again harp and percussion, a shadowy recall of the first movement). That the sequel is more noble elegy than march only reinforces this interpretation, for the same is true of the two most obvious models. The Funeral March of Chopin’s B flat minor piano sonata has a rhythmic pattern matched by Elgar.<sup>6</sup> The association with the C minor slow movement of another E flat symphony, Beethoven’s *Eroica*, is surely deliberate given Beethoven’s prominence in Britain’s concert life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Elgar’s indebtedness is limited; he eschews any echo of Chopin’s nocturne-like Trio, and of Beethoven’s major-key acceleration and severe fugato.<sup>7</sup> Instead he develops new melodic ideas, such as fig. 73 with its yearning but inexact (or yearning because inexact) sequences (Ex. 3), and new textures; at fig. 74 the ghosts in the orchestral machine again take over, with tremolo, fleeting scale figures, and pulsations (flutes, harp), through which exquisite textures we hear another solemn melody in the middle register, soon passed to the horns to release an immense climax. While recomposing all this for the second part of the movement, Elgar invents a new and still more disconcerting pulsation at fig. 79, and the ceremonial reprise of the main theme is disturbed by an

alien voice, a mourning solo oboe defying the regular pulse with its tied triplets.<sup>8</sup>

Beethoven in his ‘heroic’ symphony follows the traumatic disintegration of the funeral march with what Berlioz interpreted as ‘funeral games’, a scherzo with a jolly crescendo and sporty horn-based trio.<sup>9</sup> Elgar has other ideas, starting with the key (C major, not Beethoven’s tonic). The opening is also *pianissimo* but there is no crescendo to the main theme: instead the key is immediately destabilized.<sup>10</sup> The repetition in a sharp key (E, fig. 90) leads to a chromatic boiling up of the main idea, its two beats (two semiquavers, quaver) conflicting, or even suspending, the triple

Ex. 3. Symphony No. 2, slow movement from fig. 71: inexact sequences

metre. Such conflict was hardly new, but its application is novel, with tonality as well as metre temporarily suspended.<sup>11</sup> The sequel will be familiar to readers of this Journal, but (I hope) never comfortable. The Scherzo as a genre was anticipated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but its full development from Beethoven onwards involved a variety of types: fairy, bucolic, melancholy, danger, satire.<sup>12</sup>

4 David Drew, ‘Crown Imperial’, in *The New Statesman*, 22 March 1963, 433–4, also discussing Walton (hence the title).

5 The music is modal, avoiding the tonal inflexions of C minor; there is no B natural until the third bar of fig. 67.

6 Two quavers, dotted quaver, semiquaver: see the third bar of fig. 67. Elgar later orchestrated Chopin’s March.

7 Would Elgar have read G.B. Shaw’s hilarious account of his personal association of this movement with Dublin funeral directors, whipping up the horses between built-up areas? Dan H. Laurence (ed.) *Shaw’s Music. The Complete Musical Criticism of Bernard Shaw* (3 vols.; London: The Bodley Head, 1981), III, 133–5.

8 The passage is reminiscent of Berlioz’s ‘Ride to the Abyss’ (*The Damnation of Faust*), in the same key, where the oboe, mournful, agitated, and at odds with a pulsating rhythm, represents Marguerite (Gretchen) in prison.

9 Berlioz, *The Art of Music and other essays* (A Travers Chants), trans. and ed. Elizabeth Csicsery-Rónay (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 15.

10 Major chords of C, D, E flat, E, F in five bars; the longest note of the opening melody, F sharp, is foreign to C major.

11 Beethoven in the *Eroica* scherzo also pits a duple motif over the triple metre. Elgar’s willingness to engage in such rhythmic games will have been stimulated by other models (e.g. a Dvořák ‘Furiant’).

12 Fairy: Berlioz ‘Queen Mab’; Mendelssohn *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Pastoral: Schubert ‘Great’ C major; Bruckner ‘Romantic’ (No. 4). Melancholy: Dvořák Fourth Symphony. Dangerous, Beethoven’s Ninth, Bruckner’s Ninth, and later Vaughan Williams’s Fourth, which may also be satirical: in its contemporary Walton’s First the Scherzo is marked ‘con malizia’.

Few, however, combine as many types into a single movement as Elgar does here (which is not to underrate the diversity of the Scherzo in his First Symphony: fairy, march, pastoral but not, perhaps, danger).

In the Second Symphony's Scherzo, the fleet main theme is never settled. Harmony gains a foothold (pedal G, fig. 92) but heads for C minor; the second theme (fig. 93) is rhythmically obsessive (like the first movement) and overtly confident, but it too fades into chromatic uncertainty (from fig. 95). The oboe solo from fig. 96, subtly coloured by flute, is melancholy despite the fast tempo. The development of the main material is comprehensive and by fig. 106 we might be considered to have heard enough music for a standard Scherzo, with fig. 93 as 'Trio'. But a 'Trio' is usually more relaxed, like what actually follows, the pastoral idyll from fig. 107, elegantly freeing the rhythmic design by a figure with four notes in a bar. This light only deepens the coming shadow. Fig. 116 is a reprise of the opening; but with what a difference. Two bars earlier an apparently harmless octave G (second violins) is the inception of a smooth line that doubles the spiky main theme before taking on a life of its own; meanwhile the bass continues to growl (Ex. 4). With the ninth bar, in E major, the first violins pick up the smooth line, and we begin to recognize it as the cello theme from the first movement (fig. 28). The reprise of the Scherzo is lost (fig. 117) and pulsations return (fig. 118), signifying the ghost of a march and - danger.<sup>13</sup> Textural superimposition, already a feature of the first two movements, reaches a terrifying apotheosis, with the Scherzo trying to reclaim its rights on top of everything else (from fig. 120). Luckily we awake from nightmares. Elgar shakes this one off with the C minor theme and eventual return to the Scherzo. A graver lyricism intervenes (fig. 130, violins then cellos) and with an effort comparable to the recovery of the tonic in the first movement, we seem to be leaving the movement in the glow of a new day until the chromatic scream after fig. 135, reminder of a nightmare of stunning originality.<sup>14</sup>

Ex. 4 Symphony No. 2, Third movement, from 2 before fig. 116  
Ghostly theme (second violins) doubling notes of Scherzo reprise (woodwind)

'After each movement a definite pause': Schoenberg wrote this to prevent his tiny piano pieces Op. 19 (also from 1911) from running into each other. The end of Elgar's Scherzo invites rapturous applause, but that is no longer the custom in our perhaps over-solemn concert culture. In any case, some regrouping of our mental forces is advisable before a finale which, like the rest of the symphony, has completely different aims from that of Elgar's First or his more recent Violin

13 This reading is compatible with the passage's well-known association with Tennyson, but there is more to it than an illustration of the nightmare in *Maud*, just as there is more to the whole symphony than a commentary on Shelley.

14 Elgar is unlikely to have known one precedent, the third movement of Mahler's Second (see the primal scream after fig. 50), but sinister apparitions appeared as early as the Scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth.

Concerto. Elgar seems to defy the tradition of the summation finale to which his first symphony adheres, that striving for apotheosis rhetorically parallel to the later symphonies of Bruckner, however differently achieved.<sup>15</sup> Instead Elgar's model is Brahms's Third, which recalls its opening theme in a gently transfigured manner before daring to end quietly.<sup>16</sup>

Three movements have been invaded by ghostly forces and by the fierce rhythms of the military. As if to banish these, Elgar chooses a moderate tempo and triple metre.<sup>17</sup> The main theme is characterized by rhythmic repetition, like the Scherzo, and textural elaboration, like the slow movement; note the delicate filigree-work from fig. 136. Safe enough, too, is the structuring of the exposition with three themes, the second 'Hans [Richter] himself' (fig. 139), the third clearly in the dominant key and *nobilmente* (fig. 142). With its soft reminiscences of its first theme, the exposition lacks the modernist elements - chromaticism, textural superimposition - that characterized the earlier movements. The middle section (*Poco animato*, fig. 145) develops the second theme with a wild counterpoint (violins, third bar of 145; later, stunningly, horns); the regular recurrence of this combination may provoke memories of ritual, or march. At fig. 149 thematic superimposition (first and second themes together; disruptive trumpets) brings a fierce climax, but the whole section lies in tonally alien territory, settling into B minor on a pedal (fig. 150). The following passage works back to the recapitulation at fig. 157, but without the first movement's overt heroism. It is based mainly on a falling idea (from fig. 152) that reinforces the triple metre and seems, in its dying fall and despite intimations of the main theme, to want to settle in the principal subordinate key-area of the symphony, C (here minor: after fig. 155). A drum-beat on the rhythm of the main theme contains a note of menace, but a side-slip allows the recapitulation to start unobtrusively.

Order thus restored, the themes are worked through more glowingly than before. What is to be the outcome? Anthony Payne had to wrestle with more than one possibility before bringing the 'Third Symphony' to a close in a fashion which is typical of Elgar in having no precedent in the earlier symphonies. As the glow fades (from fig. 166) the Second settles for nostalgia: a pedal (fig. 167), tonic at last, an afterglow of textural superimposition (fig. 168), with scales and harp figures supporting the wistful recall of the falling motif from the first movement's opening; then fragmentary, dying returns of finale material (after fig. 170). Particularly touching is the last breath of the main theme (fig. 171, cellos): it manages its recurring rhythm only once, slows down, but rests poised on the dominant rather than falling as before. The violins ascend and a rich series of chords - resisting, as often in Elgar, the conventional perfect cadence - brings 'quiet consummation'.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Notably Bruckner's Fifth, which like Elgar's First uses the same notes for the middle movements' main themes.

16 If we discount the special case of Haydn's 'Farewell', Brahms's Third is perhaps the first important symphony to end softly; Mahler's Ninth precedes Elgar's Second but he could not have known it.

17 The first movement is duple compound, i.e. each beat of the four in a bar is subdivided into three; the Scherzo is one in a bar, but bars are usually grouped together in duple patterns (including multiples of two).

18 Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* IV.2 ('Fear no more the heat of the sun').

## Newman and *The Dream of Gerontius*

### Ian Ker

John Henry Newman (1801-1890) was one of the outstanding geniuses of the nineteenth century. His achievement in inspiring and leading the Oxford Tractarian Movement, which so changed the face of the Church of England by recalling it to its Catholic rather than Protestant roots, is well known. The conversion to Rome in 1845 of the famous Fellow of Oriel and Vicar of St. Mary's, Oxford eventually had a decisive effect on traditional English attitudes of contempt and hostility to Roman Catholicism.

The last book Newman wrote as an Anglican was the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), which remains one of the great theological classics. As a Catholic, he was drawn unwillingly into controversies that fortunately had the result of eliciting from him an ecclesiology or theology of the church that substantially anticipated the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), the council that was called by Pope John XXIII to renew the Catholic Church and to promote the reunion of Christendom. In January 1991 Pope John Paul II declared Cardinal Newman to be 'Venerable', the first step towards canonization, an event that would certainly be followed by formal recognition of Newman as a 'Doctor of the Church'.

Newman, however, is not only one of the greatest Christian and Catholic theologians, but a thinker whose philosophy challenged the narrow rationalism of the Enlightenment in ways that strike a very contemporary chord. As a writer, too, Newman's reputation has steadily increased. One of the great Victorian prose writers, to be ranked alongside writers like Matthew Arnold, Carlyle, and Ruskin, he is the author of one of the most famous autobiographies in the language, the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864), as well as an educational classic *The Idea of a University* (1873), and several works of satire which rival the best of Swift and Dickens. Although Newman cannot be called a major poet, he did write two pieces of verse which are regularly anthologized, *Lead, Kindly Light* and *Praise to the Holiest*, the latter of which forms one of the choruses of *The Dream of Gerontius* (1865).

The poem was published in two parts in May and June 1865 in the Jesuit magazine the *Month*. Newman professed not to know how the idea of it came to him, but thoughts of death had certainly been occupying his mind. He wanted to support the recently founded magazine as he hoped it would help raise the intellectual level of English Catholics, as well as appeal to Protestants. He thought the *Month* should introduce Catholic topics, but not in an academic or technical way.

This is what the *Dream* attempts to do by dramatising the Catholic beliefs about life after death. Actually, the view Newman puts forward is not exactly conventional. For instead of portraying purgatory in terms of penal punishment, Newman sees it as essentially a purification, although this process inevitably also involves pain.

The poem, in fact, constitutes Newman's most extended writing on the afterlife; and what might look like a poetic representation of traditional Catholic doctrine, actually contains a completely

Fig. 1. Cardinal Newman in 1864.



fresh treatment of the subject, in terms that anticipate later, 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic eschatology, that is, the theology of death.

The difficult idea of disembodied souls in purgatory awaiting the final resurrection is vividly conveyed through the striking analogy of the continuing impression of experiencing pain in a limb that has actually been amputated and is no longer a part of the body:

Hast thou not heard of those, who after loss  
Of hand or foot, still cried out that they had pains  
In hand or foot, as though they had it still?  
So it is with thee, who hast not lost  
Thy hand or foot, but all which made up man.

This boldly imaginative attempt to describe the indescribable in understandable concrete human terms is continued in the treatment of the pain of purgatory. At that time usually seen in terms of physical punishment, purgatory is here depicted in strictly spiritual terms. The fire that purifies by burning the sinner is the burning fire of God's love:

It is the face of the Incarnate God  
Shall smite thee with that keen and subtle pain;

And yet the memory that it leaves will be  
A sovereign febrifuge to heal the wound;  
And yet withal it will the wound provoke,  
And aggravate and widen it the more.

And so the purgatorial pain is not a physical punishment externally afflicted by God, but rather the purification, which is both the pain and the punishment, is the sight of the God of love contrasted with the sight of one's own sinfulness:

There is a pleading in His pensive eyes  
Will pierce thee to the quick, and trouble thee.  
And thou wilt hate and loathe thyself; for, though  
Now sinless, thou wilt feel that thou hast sinn'd,  
As never thou didst feel; and wilt desire  
To slink away, and hide thee from His sight:  
And yet wilt have a longing aye to dwell  
Within the beauty of His countenance.  
And these two pains, so counter and so keen,  
The longing for Him, when thou seest Him not;  
The shame of self at thought of seeing Him,  
Will be the rarest, sharpest purgatory.

Using a marvellous image, Newman suggests that we should not so much pity as envy Gerontius in purgatory, for the fire that burns him is actually the loving look of God that burns away the cancer of sin:

O happy, suffering soul! for it is safe,  
Consumed, yet quicken'd, by the glance of God.

This scorching fire destroys, and yet brings to life. This is why Gerontius paradoxically longs for the pain of purgatorial purification. Far from being dreaded, it is the very pain that the sinful soul desires above all else, for it essentially consists in nothing else but a keen longing for God combined with a sense of utter unworthiness.

Take me away, and in the lowest deep  
There let me be ...

Although Newman's *Dream* is only a relatively minor poem compared with Elgar's great setting of it, nevertheless in its own time it became the most widely read literary work, after Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, on the subject of the afterlife in an age that was preoccupied with death. Newman himself was deeply moved to be sent a pocket edition of the poem that had belonged to General Gordon at Khartoum, which he had been reading and annotating as he himself faced imminent death.

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## Troyte Griffith and the Philosopher's Stone

or

## The Hogwash Express

### Martin Bird

At the beginning of 1933 a New York piano salesman, Walter Koons, wrote to Elgar to ask him to contribute to book he was compiling entitled *The Mystery of Music*.<sup>1</sup> Elgar declined, and although his reply has not been found, it is safe to assume that he adopted one of his three standard replies to unsolicited requests for help: 'this is outside my allotted sphere'; 'I fear it will not be possible for me to contribute the article you ask for, much as I should like to write it; but I am travelling during the next four weeks & can find time for nothing else'; or, if he sensed that money might be involved, 'I am obliged to you for your letter suggesting that I should contribute an article to ...; the question arises as to what terms are offered for such an article.'

Let Mr. Koons himself explain the genesis of his book.

It happened more than fifty years ago, back in the days when this writer was in charge of the promotional activities of the Mason & Hamlin piano. His comfortably appointed office on Fifth Avenue, New York, large enough to accommodate two concert-sized instruments, by nature of its purpose, was a rendezvous for many music celebrities of the day. Among them, the artist involved in this particular episode, was Ossip Gabrilowitsch, distinguished protégé of Ignace Paderewski and one of the truly great piano virtuosos of his time, then also conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and, for those who may not recall, the son-in-law of Mark Twain, having married the author's daughter, Clara Clemens.

On several occasions, before giving his New York recital, Mr. Gabrilowitsch would come to our office to limber up his fingers and 'tryout' his program on us, after which we would discuss interpretation as well as content. On this particular occasion, we found ourselves involved in an argument over the turning of a phrase in a Mozart sonata - whether it should go this way or that. There being no criterion in such matters of taste, we were getting nowhere fast. In an endeavour to terminate an argument gracefully, we casually asked: 'After all, Ossip, what is music?'

Turning with an expression of utter amazement, he exclaimed: 'You floor me. Here I am, having spent most of my life making music and studying music; to tell the truth, I don't know! What is music? ... Young, man,' said Mr. Gabrilowitsch (we were fortysome years younger then), 'since you raised the question, it's up to you to find the answer.'

Too busy at that time to tackle such a job, the assignment was pigeon-holed. But it was not long thereafter that the Depression caught up with the piano business and a prolonged period of unemployment provided ample opportunity for some serious pondering. The more we thought about

1 Walter E. Koons, *The Mystery of Music* (New York: Vantage Press, 1976).

that question, the more perplexing it became.<sup>2</sup>

So, with time a-plenty on his hands, Koons wrote to the great and the good all over the world, 'even statesmen', asking: 'Will you please give me your definition of music, not just your reactions to music-making nor your appreciation of it, but what music (in the abstract) means to you?' Over time, more than one hundred and seventy contributions were received, with Bax, Copland, Ives, Schoenberg and Sibelius among the composers who replied.

Koons was not one to take 'no' for an answer from Elgar. Yehudi Menuhin was among those who had agreed to contribute: now Koons enlisted Menuhin's father's help in securing Elgar's co-operation.

Dear friend, if a certain Mr. Walter Koons, of New York, approaches you again about a Symposium on 'What is Music?', - and if it is not against your principles, may I ask you to kindly give him some sort of answer. He is a very worthy, lovely, good man, and his book, now nearly all prepared, will not be complete without your reply. Please!<sup>3</sup>

Koon had jumped the gun and written two days earlier.

Dear Sir Edward Elgar,

It is at the suggestion of Mr. Moshe Menuhin, father of Yehudi, that I again address you. Last evening, while visiting at the Menuhin home, I discussed with Mr. Menuhin the symposium which I am compiling on the subject: 'What IS music?'. In telling Mr. Menuhin of the splendid co-operation I have already received from those to whom my letter has been sent, I happened to mention the receipt of your post card. Whereupon Mr. Menuhin requested that I give you further information about my work for the purpose of impressing you with its serious purpose which he felt certain would engage your attention.

... Amongst those who have already endorsed my work by contributing their thoughtful and serious replies are: Dr. Felix Weingartner, Dr. Serge Koussevitzky, Messrs. Rachmaninoff, Bauer, Siloti, Grainger, Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt (wife of our President-elect), etc., etc., etc. You see I am trying to examine this thing we call 'music' from the outside as well as from the inside, with the telescope as well as with the microscope. My replies have ranged from one (very intelligent and significant) word to five pages of typewritten paper.<sup>4</sup>

Elgar discussed this epistle with Troyte Griffith and, not being one to offer five typewritten pages when a few very intelligent and significant words would do, dispatched the following reply ...

Dear Mr. Koons:

My friend, Mr. Mosche [sic] Menuhin, would like me to reply to your enquiry.

This I can best do in the marvellous & soul-searching words of the philosopher, Arthur Troyte-Griffith:- '*Music is the last mystery of modern life*'. I would like it to remain so.

Believe me to be  
Yours faithfully  
Edward Elgar<sup>5</sup>

2 Ibid., 2-3.

3 Letter from Moshe Menuhin, 18 January 1933, Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 2014.

4 Letter from Walter Koons, 16 January 1933, EBM letter 2589.

5 Letter to Walter Koons, 31 January 1933, EBM letter book 266.

... and let the Malvern philosopher in on the jape.

As to that Yank Book - Einstein has sent its compiler a message & many others have done so. So I have said 'I will only quote the words of the philosopher, Arthur Troyte-Griffith etc.'

This ought to be reproduced all over the world.

Yours  
EE<sup>6</sup>

Koons swallowed this, hook, line and sinker.

Please accept my very earnest thanks for your courtesy in replying to my question? 'What is music?' I particularly prize the content of your answer for its intrinsic truth, philosophy and the beauty of thought.<sup>7</sup>

Elgar underlined the closing sentence, marked it 'A.T.G.', and sent the letter on to Troyte, saying '... you ought to see the opinion expressed in par. 1. concerning the words you dropped at my table & which are now to be quoted as the "wonderful words of the philosopher A. Troyte-Griffith" ...'<sup>8</sup>

Alas, neither Elgar nor Troyte lived to see their treasured words 'reproduced all over the world', for ...

... we found ourselves busily engaged in radio, and later in commercial pursuits, with little time for more than a hasty acknowledgement and reading of each definition as received, but all this correspondence was carefully filed away with the hope that some day we would command the necessary leisure to study it - and complete the task assigned by Mr. Gabrilowitsch. Eventual retirement at long last provided that opportunity.<sup>9</sup>

*Walter Koons became a music supervisor and editor with the National Broadcasting Company, and then a partner in the family firm of Charles A. Koons & Company, exporters and importers. He retired in the early 1970s.*

6 Postcard to Arthur Troyte Griffith, 31 January 1933, EBM letter 7304.

7 Letter from Walter Koons, 11 February 1933, EBM letter 7364.

8 Letter to Arthur Troyte Griffith, 25 February 1933, EBM letter 7365.

9 Walter Koons, *ibid.*, 7.



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Edited by Morna O'Neill and Michael Hatt: *The Edwardian Sense: Art, Design, and Performance in Britain, 1901-1910***

New York and London: Yale Center for British Art and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2010

328 pp + viii 87 illustrations (57 in colour)

ISBN 978-0-300-16335-3

When Queen Victoria died in January 1901, H.G. Wells compared the late monarch to 'a great paperweight that for half a century sat upon men's minds ... When she was removed, their ideas began to blow.'<sup>1</sup> But the history of ideas, like the history of events, is seldom that simple. Fresh breezes were undoubtedly blowing when Edward VII took the throne that August, but they had been brewing for some time. The previous five years had seen the publication of A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), Wells' own *War of the Worlds* (1898) and Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899). These are hardly the signs of an oppressed or dormant culture. In fact, a few years earlier Edmund Gosse had already articulated an artistic manifesto that many writers, painters and sculptors of the Edwardian period would make their own:

I am tired of the novelist's portrait of a gentleman, with gloves and hat, leaning against a pillar ... I want the gentleman as he appears in a snapshot photograph with his everyday expression on his face, and the localities in which he spends his days visible around him.<sup>2</sup>

Wells was, however, right about the way cultural winds were shifting. Today's historians see the reign of Edward VII as a time of social upheaval, marked by rapid urbanisation and a steadily eroding consensus about the role of women, the rights of labour and the cost of Empire, particularly the 22,000 British lives that had been lost in the war in South Africa. The general election in 1906 saw a resounding Conservative defeat.

This handsome volume considers the social conflicts of the era and asks: 'How do art, design and performance produced in the Edwardian period not only register these confrontations, but constitute some of the very terms of the debate?' (p.3). The editors want to achieve a better understanding of the sense the Edwardians had of their own historical moment, and, in the process, to arrive at a deeper appreciation of what their period means to us today.

Unlike most books that survey a period from multiple perspectives, this one is not simply a group of articles strung together. Morna O'Neill, assistant professor of art history at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, and Michael Hatt, professor of art history at the University of Warwick, have organised the book's 17 essays under three headings: spectacle, setting and

1 Edmund Gosse, *Questions at Issue* (London: Heinemann, 1893), 31.

2 Quoted in Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, eds., *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 3.

place. Within each of these topics, the editors have designated one main focus: how Edward VII's coronation ceremonies were captured on the new medium of film; the interpretations of the Edwardian moment in William Nicholson's 1910 painting, 'The Conder Room'; and the changing ideas about childhood reflected in George Frampton's statue of Peter Pan in Hyde Park. Each of these subjects is investigated by three writers. Bringing their diverse backgrounds to bear, each trio uncovers connections that a single writer might not detect. A generous mix of photographs and artwork in various media accompany the discussions, all reproduced to a high standard. (This is the twentieth title in Yale's series about British art and architecture.)

Like much writing about the visual arts these days, the commentaries occasionally lapse into foggy generalisation, but Tim Barringer's article on 'Elgar's Aesthetics of Landscape' is mercifully free of that. A professor of art history at Yale, Barringer demonstrates a genuine love of Elgar's music, and he sees an aspect of Elgar's work habits during the Malvern years that no one else seems to have noticed:

Elgar was able to develop a compositional practice closely resembling that of a landscape painter. It was quite different from the essentially urban and usually metropolitan lifestyle traditionally associated with the composer, from church musicians and Kappellmeisters to the creators of operas and symphonies. (p.233)

Of course, regardless of where they have lived, many composers have found inspiration in the countryside. But for Elgar, the fields and lanes of Worcestershire were also a workshop. While working out the climaxes for the Ascension in *The Apostles*, Elgar made repeated trips to Longdon Marsh. On two of those visits, he was accompanied by Alban Cloughton:

I remember we went down there, and we passed a field with a gate on the road, and he'd say: 'Look here, do you mind going forward for about a hundred yards or so and just waiting for me?' And he'd get over the gate and be in the field by himself twenty minutes or half an hour ... Then he'd catch me up, and we'd go off and have tea somewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Longdon Marsh was still a peaceful place in 1903, but rural England was under threat from international competition and encroaching industrialisation. His letters and diaries show that Elgar was well aware that his world was changing, and Barringer suggests analogies between his 'turbulent scores and these explosive historical tensions: from this context, surely, Elgar's music derives its mercurial changefulness, its demonic energy and its melancholy grandeur.' (p.231) While this description also fits Schumann's Symphony in D Minor, composed in 1841, the deeply empathetic public response to Elgar's First Symphony suggests that he had indeed tapped into some very powerful

3 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 407-8.

- and widely shared - feelings of his time.

Most revealing of all are the connections Barringer draws between Elgar and his fellow Worcester native, the painter Benjamin Williams Leader (1841-1923). When Leader was honored in Worcester in 1914, the composer was on hand and publicly thanked Leader 'for the inspiration which his picture of the country had been to [Elgar] in carrying out what he had been able to do in his own art.' (p.234)

Notable though Elgar himself now was, his life had followed the same path from country to city that many of his Edwardian contemporaries had travelled. Barringer notes that an inventory of his London home, done for insurance purposes the previous year, shows that Elgar's personal dressing room contained just one work of art: an engraving after Leader that must have been a poignant daily reminder of distant Worcestershire.

Frank Beck



**Eleanor Allen: *Heddle Nash: Singing against the Tide - The Life and Times of a British Tenor 1894-1961***

Many readers of the Journal when seeing the name 'Heddle Nash' will immediately think 'Gerontius'. It is not just perversity that makes me think 'Rodolfo', for I grew up loving the recording of Act 4 of *La Bohème* with Nash and Beecham. It is a rare tenor that can be equally at home - and equally convincing - in both roles. Heddle Nash was one: Richard Lewis another. But it is Nash who is firmly on today's menu, in the form of a much-needed biography by Eleanor Allen (fittingly, a near neighbour of the Elgars when they moved back to Worcester from Broadheath, albeit at a distance of 150 years).

It is an engaging piece of work: the phrase 'rollicking good read' comes to mind. Those seeking mellifluous prose may not find it here, but what you will find is a thoroughly good story, well researched and told. Somehow the style of writing gives Nash a cheeky-chappy, end-of-the-pier character (and one reinforced by the picture of him on p.108 looking for all the world like Les Dawson in drag). Now that may be a fair reflection of reality, but one also gets the impression that Nash was forever anxious to escape the stereotyping of his south-east London roots. There is a jarring between the fine and sensitive artist one hears from recordings and the manner of the telling of his story.

Does that really matter? Well, to be honest, no. Here you will find all you would ever reasonably want to know about a fine English artist set against the background of musical life and circumstances in England at the time - and that to me is priceless.

For the Elgarian there are facsimiles of Elgar's letters to Nash (which, incidentally, reveal that previously published transcriptions are incorrect). His debut in *Gerontius* was at Croydon on 10 November 1931. He wrote afterwards to a member of the chorus: 'The critics seemed to think that my Gerontius was about the worst thing I have done. So for that reason I shall

London: Jubilee House Press, 2010

264 pp

ISBN 978-0-956599-60-5

memorise it and make it the best in the country. It was a first performance with a voice crippled by a heavy cold.' Elgar, however, was delighted with his singing and, indeed, with the evening in general, for as he wrote next day to a certain Mrs. Hockman: 'I really enjoyed last night although my eyes were for things other than the score, I fear.'

The book is well produced and copiously illustrated. One might have wished for a discography but, sadly, with so few of Nash's recordings currently available it would serve only to tantalise. Definitely recommended!

Martin Bird

**Diana McVeagh: *Gerald Finzi - His Life and Music***

I leapt at the opportunity to review this book. I was smitten many years ago by the sublime World Record Club recording of *Dies Natalis* with Wilfred Brown and Christopher Finzi, and since then have come to know and play much more of Finzi's music. But I knew nothing of his life, and who better than our Vice-President, Diana McVeagh, to rectify that gap in my knowledge?

The book is very well researched and immensely informative. Diana was encouraged initially by the composer's widow, Joy Finzi, and given access to the family archives. Above all, it is beautifully written by an author who understands and has a love of the written word. That, sadly, is a gift possessed and appreciated all too rarely. I found it hard to put down as a gripping tale of a multi-faceted man unfolded.

In design it follows the precedent set by Jerrold Northrop Moore in his *Edward Elgar: a Creative Life*, with comment on and analysis of the music integrated within the whole. I agree that there are compelling reasons for such an approach, while admitting that I find it difficult to read about music that I have not heard. For the music I do know, my appreciation has been enhanced by the commentary: for the rest, I am encouraged to seek it out and listen to it. There can be no more positive result from reading a composer's biography than to wish to hear his music.

From reading this particular biography, there is also the wish to read more by Diana McVeagh, and I am delighted to see that this wish will be granted with her forthcoming *Finzi Letters*.

Martin Bird

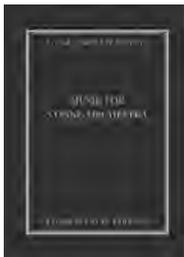


Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 2005 (paperback 2010)

352 pp + x

ISBN 978-1-84383-602-5

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## MUSIC REVIEWS

### Elgar, Music for String Orchestra

Elgar Complete Edition Vol. 24, edited by Julian Rushton

Rickmansworth: Elgar Society Edition Ltd., 2011

ISBN 978-1-904856-24-5. 124 pp + xxxii.

This is the latest volume in the magnificent Elgar Complete Edition, containing, among other things, the *Introduction and Allegro* and the *Serenade for Strings*. In his review of the later solo songs<sup>1</sup> Julian Rushton himself pointed out that ‘volumes in a Complete Edition present different types of problem according to content’. Among the problems presented by this volume are that, in the editor’s words, its ‘contents are not too novel’, and that they have always been readily available in editions that are, in John Pickard’s words, both ‘scholarly and practical’. While it is important that all of Elgar’s music is available in the Complete Edition, we must not expect revelations with every volume, especially those containing long-familiar music.

A light editorial touch has been possible throughout: evidence, if it were needed, both of Elgar’s care with proof-reading and of his intimate knowledge of string instruments.<sup>2</sup> The layout of the score of the *Introduction and Allegro* has been much improved on the Novello original. Elgar himself said that ‘accurate “ranging” is imperative in complicated full-scores, and if ... not correctly spaced by the composer, a vast amount of thought and labour is laid, quite unfairly, on the “reader”’.<sup>3</sup> Having improved matters dramatically by generally having only one system per page, it is a shame that pages 61 and 62 have two. The other ‘big’ score, *Sospiri*, is laid out impeccably, as was the Breitkopf original. Incidentally, when string parts come to be extracted from the newly-originated scores, it is to be hoped that Elgar’s warning: ‘Mind the ‘turns’: remember that the ‘Solo Quartet’ sits apart so that the tutti players cannot turn for them’<sup>4</sup> is heeded.

As regards layout, the *Serenade* is the only piece that disappoints. The original Breitkopf full score had three systems per page yet was perfectly clear. That clarity was enhanced by modern printing techniques in their 1987 edition of the miniature score. Despite having a page size slightly larger than the Breitkopf full score, the Complete Edition offers only two systems to the page, and the amount of empty space somehow makes the score less

comfortable to read.

The *Serenade*, too, is the only piece where one wishes that Elgar had had the experience to make his intentions fully clear. One can judge (or guess) his intentions with regard to dynamics, bowing, or fingering where these are unmarked, but in a scholarly edition such as this such editorial (or conductorial) judgements must remain, and are, excluded. Elgar’s recording is helpful in turning a scholarly edition into a practical one in this instance. Harmonics in the third movement that don’t appear in the Breitkopf full score are confirmed in the recording: the implied *sforzando* in the violas in bar 6 of the first movement is not. But the recording also allows us to judge what Elgar wanted in terms of bowing, fingering, and the quality of sound. In the opening phrase of the second movement, did Elgar want the *sfp* in the second bar of the first violins, and the corresponding point in the fourth bar of the second violins, to be separately bowed and emphasised, or merely to be a warming of the sound with the left hand within the overall dynamic of *piano*? The score is unclear: the recording revealing, as it is with the fingering, and it therefore forms an invaluable adjunct to this volume.

As is usual with the Edition, an extensive Foreword is provided, a taster of which can be found in Rushton’s article on this volume in the April issue of the *Journal*.<sup>5</sup> Fascinating illustrations are also provided from both scores and sketches.

In his ‘General notes on performance’ Rushton makes some interesting comments with regard to the range of the contrabass in Elgar’s time, as the *Introduction and Allegro* calls for a number of low Ds, a tone lower than the normal bottom note of a bass.<sup>6</sup> He suggests that three-stringed basses had survived in use into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. True, but it is likely that by then the majority had been converted to four-stringed instruments by the addition of the low E string: (the editor tells me that his own double bass of c.1860 started life as a three-stringed instrument). Five-stringed instruments were rare in Elgar’s day, although they are recorded in European orchestras from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays most professional bass players (in the United Kingdom, at least) have C extensions fitted to their instruments, enabling the lower notes to be played with ease. The London Symphony Orchestra’s bass players of 1905 are more likely to have tuned their E strings down to D in order to play all the notes.

Richard Wiley

1 *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.17, No.1, (April 2011), 47.  
2 I do not seek to under-estimate or under-value the amount of editorial work involved in ensuring that even the most carefully prepared original manuscript and printed edition was clear, consistent, and accurate.  
3 Preface to H. Elliot Button, *System in Musical Notation* (London: Novello & Co., 1920), x.  
4 Note on MS full score.

5 Julian Rushton, ‘Tales from the Complete Edition - 6: Music for Strings’, *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.17, No. 1, (April 2011), 15-17.  
6 I am indebted to Martin Bird for providing information on the intricacies of the double bass.



Naxos

8.572643-5 (3CD)

## CD REVIEWS

### **Violin Concerto, *Serenade for Strings*, Violin Sonata, Fugue in D minor for violin and oboe, Miniatures for violin and piano**

Marat Bisengaliev, violin; Benjamin Frith, piano; Camilla Bisengalieva, oboe

West Kazakhstan Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Bundit Ungrangsee

Elgar's short pieces for violin and piano have had a chequered career. Most of them date from the 1880s and 1890s when he had hopes of becoming a solo violinist, and they were no doubt composed for his own use and with his own technique in mind. As one would expect, they are expertly tailored for the violin, and if he could play his own *Gavotte*, for instance, he was certainly no slouch as a violinist. He did, in fact programme all Beethoven's Violin Sonatas in his early recitals. Several of his works were published by well-known publishers such as Schott or Breitkopf and Härtel, and so pieces such as *Salut d'Amour* or *La Capricieuse* became popular and widely distributed. But most were placed with small companies and have been long deleted as those companies were swallowed up or went out of business, and consequently some real gems have languished in obscurity until quite recently, although I edited two volumes for Thames Publishing some dozen years ago, which brought ten of them into a modern edition.

This 3 CD box set, then, is very welcome. The two CDs (nos. 2 and 3) of the Miniatures were released by Black Box Music some ten years ago, but the Concerto and *Serenade* are new recordings. These discs contain a wealth of lovely material, and it is a particular pleasure to see that a violinist from Kazakhstan has not only championed them, but plays them with such warmth and understanding. CD 2 starts, appropriately enough, with Elgar's op. 1 *Romance*, and immediately one is aware not only of the fine tone of the instrument, but in the gentle rubato a true Elgarian feeling. The following *Mazurka* is bold and forthright, with a fine rhythmic impetus, while *Chanson de Nuit* immediately captivates with the beautifully rich tone on the G string. And the lovely *Idylle* - why is it not as popular as *Salut d'Amour*? The charming *La Capricieuse* has been a favourite with virtuoso violinists for long enough, but here was one of my few disappointments. I feel that the rhythm is pulled about too much, alternate bars hurrying then lingering, and the throw-away ending is too rushed, and misses some of the graceful charm. The virtuosic *Gavotte*, a real showpiece, is finely done at a steady, sensible pace, although I did wonder why Bisengaliev plays the reprise of the opening *Gavotte* section pizzicato, which it isn't marked. A real find is the *Étude-Caprice*, which was completed by W.H. Reed from an unfinished sketch that Elgar gave to him. It is a charmer. Another charmer is *May Song*, which, like several of the pieces, also exists in a small orchestra version, and which here receives a lovely

performance. *Carissima*, though, is too fast for me, losing something of its gently nostalgic atmosphere. The two late piano pieces, *Serenade* and *Adieu*, were arranged for violin and piano by the great Hungarian violinist Josef Szigeti, following Elgar's suggestion to their publisher Keith Prowse that they might be suitable for such arrangement (he was long past doing such tasks himself). *Adieu* is lovely in its aching melancholy, although I'm not sure if Szigeti's idea of working in a theme from the Violin Concerto is a good idea or not. This disc closes with the fiendish *Études caractéristiques for solo violin*, one of the most daunting things in the violinists' repertoire. Menuhin and Zukerman have both balked at playing them in public, and this is only its second recording. The first was by the young English violinist Chris Nicholls on the British Music Label (BML 048) - he is exciting, faster and more impetuous, but I think Bisengaliev is the more musical.

It's a pity that works sharing the same opus number (op. 4, or op. 13, for example) are split across the two discs - I can't see any logical reason for that; and the set is not quite the complete Elgar violin and piano music. It is a pity it was recorded before the Music for Violin volume appeared in the Elgar Complete Edition, for that includes Elgar's own arrangements of *Sérénade Lyrique* and *Rosemary*, as well as *Offertoire* and the *Étude* that he gave to Heifetz, and the *Very Easy Melodious Exercises in the First Position* (op. 22). CD 3 includes a number of arrangements for violin and piano by other hands that I could have done without in favour of those original works. *Dreaming*, for instance, wrenched from the *Nursery Suite* by W.H. Reed and sounding feeble out of context, or two of the *Bavarian Dances* arranged by William Henley to go with Elgar's own arrangement of the second of the Dances. They are effective enough, however, but why are we given an arrangement (by Eirian Griffiths) of *Sospiri*, when Elgar's own violin and piano version exists? To be honest, I didn't notice a lot of difference - the opening chords are altered, and odd notes and the occasional arpeggiated piano chord are different. But why not the Elgar version? The two unfinished *Polonaises* have been spatchcocked together by Christopher Polyblank, an interesting if ultimately wrong solution. Both of them (the keys are D minor and F major, not F minor) are unique in that they are fully written out by Elgar for violin and piano but suddenly stop just before the end, as though the back pages are missing. I would think that they were finished at one time, but why Elgar didn't publish them is a mystery - perhaps he felt they smacked a bit too much of Wieniawski and the like. At any rate they have now been logically completed by Paul Rooke and published by Elgar Works. The witty *Allegretto on GEDGE* is nicely played, Benjamin Frith revelling in the Chopinesque middle section. In fact throughout he gives excellent support in Elgar's idiosyncratic piano writing, which is frequently more than just simple backing for the violin. *Duett* for violin and oboe, again receiving only its second recording, is a charming trifle, but the CD ends with Elgar's major work for violin and piano, the E minor Sonata of 1918. There are many versions available and detailed comparisons are not relevant here. Suffice to say that Bisengaliev and Frith turn in a truly excellent performance. The first

movement has ardour and impetuosity, and Bisengaliev plays the arpeggiated figure at fig. 5 in strict tempo - it is marked *tranquillo* but too often violinists linger too long and lovingly here. The second movement is exquisite, both players capture the fantasy and mystery here, and the long-breathed melody at fig. 28 is beautifully done, with real rapt emotion. Thankfully they notice Elgar's instruction in the last bar for the piano to finish before the violin, thus leaving a note hanging in mid-air. The finale is excellent, full of virtuosity, natural rubato and poignancy in the epilogue just before the final coda.

I left CD1 till last. How pleasing it is that an orchestra from Kazakhstan, with a Thai conductor, is playing and recording Elgar. Having recently been bowled over by recordings of the Violin Concerto by Znaider (with the Dresden Staatskapelle) and Zehetmair (with the Hallé) I was getting ready to make allowances for this version. How wrong I was! No excuses at all necessary. The opening tutti immediately announces a fine ensemble, playing with fine tone and confidence, with a natural Elgarian rubato when necessary - notice the magical and expertly-judged lingering at the second (Windflower) theme. Marat Bisengaliev has championed this Concerto, and is in full technical control of all the challenges that Elgar presents to the soloist. Again, notice his warm rich tone at the opening of the second movement, which develops into a passionate movement of great intensity which I have rarely heard bettered on disc. The finale rises to the challenges too, with a rapt and deeply felt cadenza, and with fine orchestral detail in the pizzicato tremolando accompaniment. There is virtuosity aplenty in the scorching coda which leads to a most majestic and exciting ending. The *Serenade for Strings* was another revelation, the loping rhythms of the first movement judged to perfection. I'd have liked a little more double bass tone at the very end of the movement, to point the final cadence, although they are prominent enough at the close of the slow movement. The finale's gently swinging rhythms and inner detail are finely done. I'd like to hear more Elgar from this orchestra and conductor.

So, despite occasional critical niggles, there are riches galore in this set, and at Naxos's budget price it's a terrific bargain which ought to be in every Elgarian's collection. And praise be to Marat Bisengaliev for playing and recording this music. Surely he deserves an Elgar Society award - is anybody on the Executive listening?

Barry Collett

A further imperative for buying this set, if one was needed, is that the majority of the music on the third CD, including the Violin Sonata, is played on Elgar's own violin, lent by the Birthplace. Elgar Society member Norman Rosenberg recalls visiting the Birthplace with Marat Bisengaliev to see the instrument, making sure that he had a new set of strings with him. At that time the violin was thought to be a Chanut, but Norman tells me that it is most probably by Charles Claudot II. And if that is not enough, Marat was able to use Elgar's bow for the recording. This is by the Sheffield bow maker James

Tubbs (1835-1921). Marat says 'It's a soft bow, and very forgiving.' The bow was presented to Elgar in January 1878 by fellow members of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society, which he led. It still has a silver plaque and inscription by the screw. The accompanying testimonial reads:

We, the undersigned, members of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society, request your acceptance of a Tubb's Violin Bow, as a testimonial of the kindly feeling and regard we have towards you. We likewise take this opportunity of expressing the hope that you may by continual perseverance, eventually attain an eminence in the profession for which you have evinced so great a love and aptitude.

In November 1921 Elgar gave the bow to that champion of his concerto, Albert Sammons. His diary records: 'Sammons' orch Concert 8. Gave him my old bow.' Carice adds: 'Father presented Albert Sammons with his own old presentation violin bow - *so nice* but S. not very thrilled - curious.'

Martin Bird

**String Quartet, Piano Quintet, *Mina, Laura Valse*, March in D, Impromptu**

Piers Lane (piano), Goldner String Quartet



Hyperion

CDA 67857

It is always good to welcome new recordings of Elgar's Quartet and Quintet, both of which, although much more often played and recorded than was once the case, are not nearly so well-known amongst chamber musicians as they deserve to be. The Quartet is one of the composer's most elusive works, nervy and restless, its constantly shifting moods never settling for long. The first movement in particular is concise and intricate, fleeting themes growing out of the opening rhythmic motifs and disappearing into harmonic uncertainty, right up till the elliptical final cadence. The Australian Goldner Quartet plays it with great understanding, all of Elgar's myriad markings closely observed, with some notable *ppp* playing. The more lyrical slow movement (marked *Piacevole - pleasantly, agreeably*) was likened by Lady Elgar to 'captured sunshine', and its drowsy mood is finely captured here. The finale, fiery and wayward, is propelled with great rhythmic intensity, relaxing where need be, but driving on to the final, brusque, cadence. I have heard more dramatic and gripping performances, but this is a most musical performance of this wonderfully surprising work.

I have always admired Piers Lane's pianism; he has made some notable contributions to Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concertos series, and his CD of the complete Saint-Saëns Études is staggering. I was not disappointed by his performance of the more spacious and expansive Piano Quintet (his second recording: the first, with the Vellinger Quartet, dates from 1995). He has realised that the piano is fully integrated into the string quartet texture, and

does not lead from the front as in, say, the Schumann Quintet. Speeds seem to me to be absolutely right, especially in the first movement where wildly differing moods are stitched together. The slow movement, surely one of the loveliest in all chamber music, rises to an eloquent and passionate climax, as does the finale, sailing home in a sunny and exultant A major, Hyperion's recording capturing the interplay of instruments in a warm and clear sound.

The four piano pieces are a mixed bunch. *Mina*, based on Elgar's piano sketch adds nothing to the more attractive orchestral version which is familiar to us. The manuscript of the early *Laura Valse* seems to have disappeared with the death of Steve Race, who once recorded it on tape, and from which this version has been transcribed. The March in D (1887) sounds like Gounod on a bad day, and the intriguing but sadly incomplete Impromptu dates from 1932, a sketch sent to the secretary of a BBC producer in Belfast. I often feel, when I play or listen to Elgar's charming little piano pieces, what a shame it was that he did not develop them more. The *Laura* and *Enina Waltzes*, the *Presto in F*, or the tiny but charming *Griffinesque*, for example, are full of delightful invention, and if expanded would make notable contributions to the pianists' repertoire. Alas, they remain tiny chips from the master's workshop, seemingly too small for most pianists to bother with.

But this CD is a worthwhile addition to the Elgar discography, and Diana McVeagh's programme notes are alone worth the price of the CD.

Barry Collett

Unlike - I suspect - most readers of this Journal, I am not familiar with all Elgar's works, and thus came to this recording of the String Quartet and Piano Quintet, by the Goldner Quartet and Piers Lane, with an innocent ear. The fine performances - of which more later - both made a stunning impact and raised a number of questions. As the illuminating notes by Diana McVeagh make clear, Elgar was attracted all his life to the medium of chamber music, destroyed some early works, and made sketches which were incorporated into larger-scale compositions. So why was it that comparatively late in life, in 1918/19, he suddenly and unprecedentedly produced three substantial chamber works (the third being the Violin Sonata) in a short space of time?

The springs of genius - for these pieces deserve the word - must of necessity ultimately remain obscure; but the range of mood and feeling passionately expressed in the Quartet and Quintet surely reflects a mind under stress. The carnage of the Great War just ending and the revelation of hitherto unsuspected potential for human baseness; the collapse of a familiar world and attendant moral and social values and conventions, and the emerging signs of an uncertain and perhaps revolutionary future; the personal experience of a serious operation and the increasing frailty of Lady Elgar; and perhaps even the slightly sinister, legend-tinged atmosphere surrounding Brinkwells, the Sussex cottage where the composer was living; all these factors must have weighed heavily on a sensitive and somewhat insecure artistic personality. Diana McVeagh quotes Elgar as saying 'I

know it does not carry us any further, but it is full of golden sounds and I like it. But you must not expect anything violently chromatic or cubist'. Perhaps even the composer underestimated his capacity to convey turmoil and shadows. The musical language is not innovative, and certainly owes nothing to contemporary stylistic developments in Europe or even in Britain. Perhaps this implies an unconscious need for reassurance and continuity. But it is music of extraordinary emotional power, shifting moods and constant contrast underpinned by perceptible, if ambiguous, logic: in the real sense, serious music.

The artists already have a distinguished discography on the Hyperion label, with chamber music by Bloch, Bridge and Dvořák. On this disc they do full justice to the kaleidoscopic demands of the music, from forlorn bleakness through tender lyricism to the ferocious, almost desperate energy of the orchestral-scale climaxes. This is sensitive, stylistically aware, assured playing of the highest order. The recording is warm and well balanced. A welcome bonus, after the emotional demands of the main works, is Piers Lane's attractive interpretation of four almost unknown piano miniatures.

Andrew Carter

#### **Elgar: Variations for Orchestra (Enigma)**

#### **Brahms: Symphony No. 1**

BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult

For the second issue running I find myself reviewing a recording of Brahms's First Symphony, and once again it is the highlight of the CD; indeed, it is one of the very finest performances of the work that I have ever had the pleasure of hearing. It was recorded at a Promenade Concert in 1976, when Sir Adrian was a mere 87 years old. The performance combines the impetuosity and drive of youth with the wisdom and experience of age. The orchestra is at the top of its very considerable form, its members play as if possessed, and one gets the feeling that the music is being composed before one's very ears. How on earth did he achieve such miracles? Well, clues a-plenty to answering that question are given by the man himself in an extract from an interview broadcast at the time of his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, a mini master class in conducting and interpretation.

After the white heat of the Brahms, the *Enigma* Variations come, almost inevitably, as something of an anti-climax. The performance is very much what one would expect from these forces, but somehow that final spark of inspiration and spontaneity is missing. It was recorded in the Royal Albert Hall in March 1971, and great play is made of the fact that 'Boult included the optional organ part, played here by George Thalben-Ball, the leading organist of his generation'. The organ appears only in the closing pages of the finale, which had been revised after much nagging by Jaeger. Presumably the part



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was written as the first performance with the new finale was to be during the 1899 Three Choirs Festival at Worcester. This was not in the Cathedral, but in the Public Hall, where a new organ by local organ builder John Nicholson had been installed in 1884 at a cost of 2,000.

The recording is typical of BBC broadcasts of the 1970s, which means that it is very good indeed, with the orchestra naturally, though slightly closely, balanced. Digital remastering has not introduced any obvious electronic tweaks into the sound. The organ is, if anything, rather distant.

Feeling that perhaps I was damning the performance of the *Enigma* with faint praise, I returned to it after a few weeks and listened to it in isolation. Without the precedent of the exceptional Brahms it can be enjoyed on its own terms, and those terms add up to a very fine performance indeed.

Martin Bird



**The Elgar Edition**  
**The Complete Electrical Recordings of Sir Edward Elgar**  
Various artists, conducted by Sir Edward Elgar

You will have noticed that EMI have re-released their Elgar Edition in a single box of nine CDs at super-bargain price. Over the years these famous recordings have appeared in various incarnations and formats - indeed, I believe the Menuhin recording of the Violin Concerto has never been out of one catalogue or other in the past eighty years - and have been reviewed in the *Journal* more than once. So what possible justification is there for taking up valuable space to write about them yet again? Quite simply, this is a unique body of work, and one that is invaluable. Whether you perform the music, either as conductor, singer or instrumentalist, or merely love it as a listener, these recordings are absolutely essential to an understanding of the man, his music, and the time in which he lived. Any excuse for shouting these simple facts from the rooftops just demands to be taken.

I was lucky enough to grow up with these performances, and in many cases my first experience of an Elgar work was through a recording conducted by the composer. My school had been given the complete 78 collection from Hammersmith Public Library, which contained some of the recordings: others came from the headmaster's secretary, who was an Elgar enthusiast. I happened to be librarian of the school's record library, and by some devious teenage sleight of hand signed the records out to myself on semi-permanent loan. They are above me in the loft as I type ...

You may be in the lucky position of never having heard some or all of these recordings: what treasures you have in store! Or you may, like me, have known them for fifty years or more, and shied away from spending around £100 just to get them on CD rather than shellac or vinyl. Now, at a little over £20, there is no excuse for not having this piece of musical history in lovingly restored versions.

Much has been written of Elgar's abilities as a conductor, and not least by me. The fact remains that at his best he was without peer as an interpreter of his music: in the Symphonies, the Variations, *Falstaff* and the Violin Concerto you will not find better. He shows you, too, that by simply following the instructions in the score, you will, albeit with the addition of a soupçon of magic, produce a fine performance. Listen to track 9 of CD7 - the first movement of the Cello Concerto - and you will hear how much more musical and structural sense is made when the differing instructions for the bar before fig. 5 and the bar before fig. 16 are followed. It's a pretty safe bet that you will never have heard it played elsewhere as the composer intended.

In terms of pure conducting technique, Elgar was far more than a composer who relied on an orchestra's goodwill to produce results. Given that by the time he made these recordings he had been conducting regularly for more than 40 years, this is hardly surprising. Listen to the final 17 bars of the Violin Concerto (from fig. 115): firstly the *allargando* is judged impeccably, and then his pacing of the final page, his control over the crescendo in horns and cellos, and the overall balance of the textures produces a conclusion that is somehow inevitable and organic, quite unlike any other performance I have heard.

The orchestral playing at its best can be stunning, though one has to admit that there are many times when one realises just how much standards improved in the twenty years after these recordings were made. What *is* inimitable is the orchestral style of the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is fanciful to think that the playing style of the period may be recreated simply by marking a surfeit of *portamenti* in the violin parts and slapping on a set of gut strings. Listen carefully to the string playing: you will find that the prevalent left hand technique of the time was to change position more slowly than nowadays. It is a matter of milliseconds, but it is that that gives the sense of sliding between notes. It was something that players did quite unconsciously, and certainly not something they marked in their parts! It also enabled a string section to play with a more *cantabile* style. Individual players, too, were not scared to show Elgar that little improvements could be made (Elgar Complete Edition editors please note). Ernest Hall's holding of the trumpet's top note in the last movement of the Second Symphony for an extra bar is one example; the organist's holding of the pedal D for longer in the closing pages of the earlier recording of the first *Pomp and Circumstance* March another. Wonderful stuff.

What is less than wonderful, though, is the standard of choral singing at the time, which could never be described as stunning. To some extent this is down to the prevalent choral technique, especially in the tenors and basses, which was to produce the sound rather far back in the throat. The result, to my ears at least, is a somewhat raucous and flat choral sound. However, beggars can't be choosers: if you want to hear Elgar conduct *Gerontius* (and what sane person wouldn't?) you will readily adjust to the sound of the Royal Choral Society of 1927. What is surprising, though, is the lack of discipline and musical awareness exhibited by the Three Choirs Festival Chorus of that same year. There are moments in *The Music Makers* where

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choir and orchestra are all but two bars apart - the sort of mishap that would be completely unacceptable today but which, to judge from contemporary reviews, was seen as unavoidable from time to time.

But I must not end on a sour note, for there is so much in these CDs to be grateful for. So, if you haven't already done so, get in touch with the Birthplace and order your set.

Martin Bird

All these CDs are available now from the Elgar Birthplace Museum. Remember that buying from the Birthplace is a way of contributing directly towards its finances at this difficult economic time. You may shop online at:

[www.elgarfoundation.org/index.php/the-elgar-shop/cds](http://www.elgarfoundation.org/index.php/the-elgar-shop/cds)

## LETTERS

### ***Barjansky and the L.S.O.***

*From Paul Chennell*

I greatly enjoyed the recent article (*ESJ* Vol.17, No.1) concerning Elgar's time as principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. I wonder if I might comment on one character mentioned in this article. The Russian 'cellist mentioned on p.33, named here as Serge Barjansky, might be remembered by those who have read Eric Fenby's account of his time with Delius, as Alexandre Barjansky. Eric Fenby remembered him as: 'the most exciting and most musical cellist I ever heard ... In appearance he looked like a somewhat dilapidated Anglican dean, always dressed in black, with a great black pork-pie hat, a coat which he wore all through the summer, the astrakhan collar turned up, and black gaiters. He was an extraordinary fellow. And virtuosity? Well I have never met his equal.' Readers may remember that Eric Fenby writes most interestingly of Barjansky in *Delius As I Knew Him* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1936). Alexandre Barjansky's wife Catherine gives a detailed account of his visits to Delius in her memoir *Portraits With Backgrounds* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948). Readers of the *Journal* might like to hear Barjansky playing a brief extract of a work by Handel, which is available on YouTube. At present it is not clear why Barjansky chose to use different forenames at different times in his career.

### ***'Aquí está encerrada ...'***

*From R. A. Browning*

I was very interested to read Mr. Rosenberg's letter and ideas about the above. (*ESJ*, Vol.17, No.1) It did occur to me, no doubt fancifully, that the missing letters might be GEIGE, the German, I believe, for violin. Is it too fanciful? The soul of the violin is undoubtedly in the concerto.

## 100 YEARS AGO ...

Elgar arrived back in Hereford on 9 May. Alice wrote: 'E. delighted to be home. Telling of all experiences & detesting U.S.A. except the nice people'. He turned to completing the *Coronation March* he had begun two months earlier. On the 14<sup>th</sup> he and Alice went to London where they had taken a house in Gloucester Place to cover the period of the Second Symphony and George V's coronation. For some reason Edward did not attend Henry Wood's *The Dream of Gerontius* in the Albert Hall on 22 June, although Alice and Carice did. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Elgar saw the Hampstead house, then named 'Kelston', which Alice was hoping they would be able to buy.

The next day saw the first performance of the new symphony. Its lack of appreciation by its hearers is well-known: Alice called them 'dull and indiscriminate'. In the wings Edward said to Wood: 'Henry, they don't like it!': and more famously to Reed: 'What's the matter with them Billy? They sit there like a lot of stuffed pigs'. (Some have pointed out that the work lacks the triumphant ending of its predecessor: and the very hot evening may have stifled enthusiasm!)

The next few weeks were filled with much socialising - including visits to Ridgehurst and The Hut - rehearsals and concerts.

On 17 June Elgar received the news that he had been awarded the Order of Merit (the first composer to be so honoured); 'What a thrill of joy ... *The* thing he wishes for so much'. After rehearsals on 19 & 20 June for the Coronation, they did not attend the ceremony on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, although his *Coronation March* was played as the Recessional, and the choir sang *O hearken Thou* at the Offertory. Alice was 'dreadfully disappointed': no reason was ever given for their non-attendance, but the final diary entry for the day before might provide a clue: 'Felt it was impossible for E & A to sit 7 hrs. in those seats'.

However, they enjoyed the Buckingham Palace Garden party five days later, but that same day Edward officially terminated his agreement with Novello: he was disappointed and depressed that many of his works were infrequently played. He and Alice had now decided to move to London as he was to be principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. At the beginning of July they settled on 'Kelston' which they were to rename 'Severn House'. Elgar was restless and spent much time away from Hereford: at Ridgehurst; and The Hut, where he stayed during the middle of August, thus missing Carice's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. He also went to the Lake District on 24 August - Alice joining him three days later - revisiting the places he had first seen in 1883 in company with Charles Buck.

Elgar's depressed state was at least partly due to the prospect of leaving the West Midlands area for London. They went to Worcester on 7 September for the Three Choirs Festival, staying once again at Castle House on College Green. The following day Alice's diary recorded: 'E. down to river & reeds where the winds sang to him amongst them'.

The Festival saw the first performance of the new Novello edition of Bach's St. Matthew Passion in a new edition edited by Atkins and Elgar. Atkins had the idea of arranging two of the chorales from the work for brass instruments, and having them played from the cathedral tower during the Festival. Elgar complied, and after his name on the front of the manuscript he wrote: 'who was incited to this doubtful enterprise by the wiles of Ivor Atkins'. Atkins conducted the Passion - he had done most of the work on it - and Elgar conducted his Coronation March; the Second Symphony; and the Concerto with Kreisler. There was a feast of music, much of it new or recent, and conducted by the composers: Parry's Coronation Te Deum; Vaughan Williams' Five

Mystical Songs; Walford Davies' Sayings of Christ; Bantock's Overture to a Greek Tragedy; and W. H. Reed's Variations for String Orchestra.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

### **Editor's note**

Sadly, this is Geoff's final '100 YEARS AGO ...' The page first appeared in the late 1990s, when he was editor of the *Journal*, 'as we were approaching the centenary of Elgar's greatest works, and people seem to enjoy it. I've tried to incorporate information that is not readily available in the usual books, to make it more interesting.' Geoff, it has been more than interesting, and I'm sure my predecessors Philip Maund and Julian Rushton will wish to join me in thanking you for your contribution over so many years. Geoff has asked me to take over the column '... and you would earn my wife's eternal thanks!' Hopefully this change will also enable the revered name of 'Hodgkins' to appear more frequently in future elsewhere in the pages of the *Journal*.

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