

Wand Of Youth. Suites Nos 1 & 2, Op 1

Two suites for full orchestra:

Suite 1:

- 1 - Overture;
- 2 - Serenade;
- 3 - Minuet;
- 4 - Sun Dance;
- 5 - Fairy Pipers;
- 6 - Slumber Scene;
- 7 - Fairies and Giants.

Suite 2:

- 1 - March;
- 2 - The Little Bells;
- 3 - Moths and Butterflies;
- 4 - Fountain Dance;
- 5 - The Tame Bear;
- 6 - Wild Bears.

Suite No 1

Approximate Length: 20 minutes

First Performance:

Date: 14 December 1907

Venue: Queen's Hall, London

Conductor: Sir Henry Wood

Dedicated to: Charles Lee Williams,
formerly organist at Gloucester Cathedral

Suite No 2

Approximate Length: 18 minutes

First Performance:

Date: 9 September 1908

Venue: Three Choirs Festival, Worcester

Conductor: the composer

Dedicated to: Hubert Leicester,
lifelong friend, later Mayor of Worcester

Like most children, Edward and his brothers and sisters engaged in fantasy games, but theirs were more ambitious and purposeful than most. At tender ages (Edward was eleven at the time), they staged a play based on their fantasy world from which adults, lacking an understanding and appreciation of children, were banned. Elgar composed a few simple tunes to be played as incidental music by an improvised band using whatever instruments the Elgar children could lay their hands on. A few years later, Elgar committed the tunes to one of his sketchbooks.

We do not know what sort of reception the play or its music received but it clearly made a lasting impression on Elgar. Some 40 years later, having passed his fiftieth birthday, he dug out his sketchbooks and set to work turning the incidental music into these two charming suites. The pieces may be melodically and structurally simple but the orchestration is delightful, far in advance of what the youthful Elgar could have achieved with the limited

resources and skills then available to him. Curiously, Elgar chose to disregard the chronology and gave the suites the opus number 1, demonstrating to the world his wish that they should be regarded as no more than a new arrangement of his earliest surviving work.

The suites are infrequently performed as a whole but some of the pieces, notably Wild Bears, have secured a separate reputation as orchestral concert encores. Considerations underlying the choice of an encore rarely lead to the selection of superlative works and Wild Bears cannot be considered particularly representative of the suites, while a short excerpt cannot convey the structural balance and delicacy of the suites as a whole. To gain a full appreciation of their enchantment, they must be heard in their entirety.