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izze • Offertoire • The Apostles • In The Sout  
tion and Allegro • Evening Scene • In Smyrn  
Wand of Youth • How Calmly the Evening • I  
of Mind • Elgar • Violin Concerto in B minor  
No. 5 • O Jealous Thou • Coronation March  
ear is the Lord's • Sunday • The Music Master

# The Elgar Society Journal



**JULY 2007 Vol. 15, No. 2**

• The Light of Life • King Olf • Imperial Ma  
St George • Te Deum and Benedictus • Carac  
on an Original Theme (Enigma) • Sea Pictur

# The Elgar Society

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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

*Front Cover: Elgar enjoys a smoke outside 'The Hut' near the village of Bray,  
Berkshire, 15 July 1906 (see p.15)*

## Editorial

This issue appears in the afterglow of Elgar's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday. Unable to get to Worcester, I was able to attend the study day organised by the Society, jointly with the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Royal College of Music; as with Vaughan Williams in the past, these joint ventures can prove particularly stimulating. The topic of the day was orchestration, and a report is expected for the next issue of the Journal.

Mutterings have reached the editor concerning BBC coverage, but they have surely died down by now, with the early June concerts, Elgar as the week's composer shortly afterwards, and even some serious talking, on Radio 4 as well as Radio 3. This is surely not bad coverage, and it is interesting to compare it with what the BBC achieved fifty years ago. Thanks to Geoffrey Hodgkins's researches, readers of this issue can do so. Nor has Classic FM been left out. Were it not for the tactlessly timed ending of Elgar's long tenure on the £20 note, we would have no cause to complain.

Unfortunately overt displays of enthusiasm and commitment often generate a backwash. The BBC's commitment to impartiality led to a dissenting voice being hauled into a dialogue with a committed Elgarian; but their choice of a person apparently entirely ignorant of recent critical thinking, and of the reviving interest in Elgar abroad, could even have been subtly subversive (in Elgar's favour). As for the £20 note, Adam Smith undoubtedly deserves a run on the money. But that was no good reason for a business columnist in *The Independent* to harrumph about Elgar's unworthiness to be on it anyway. The writer shot himself in the foot by claiming that Elgar's music was inferior because he was not modernistic like, for example Stravinsky, whose *Rite of Spring* was contemporary with *Falstaff*. But Stravinsky was 25 years younger than Elgar. By this criterion, all Strauss after *Elektra*, all Franz Schmidt, indeed all Stravinsky after about the date of Elgar's Cello Concerto, might be dismissed as mediocre. Oh, and a few other fogies who didn't keep up with the times, like J.S. Bach. For critical intelligence, *nul points*; and I write as a great lover of Stravinsky. But we shouldn't take any of this too seriously. Presumably the writer wouldn't go for financial advice to a music critic.

Among correspondence, we have a trenchant view from Richard Redmile that the way forward for Elgar performance in general, and for that elusive perfect *Gerontius* in particular, is the use of period instruments and performing style. Given that we have Elgar's recordings of so much of his music, it is perhaps surprising that more has not been done. Developments in that direction may receive further stimulus from the 'Leech' recordings (see p. NN). But as is often pointed out, and was pointed out again at the RCM, the people who move and shake to such desired ends are mainly conductors, some of whom are allergic to period instrument revival. Then

again, perhaps people find that the existence of Elgar's own recordings makes historically informed performance unnecessary. The Editor is happy to hold the ring for future correspondence, while summing up his own view: let us have new interpretations, but let them not be confined to one style of performance. Bach can be played on the piano; Elgar can be enthralling on a modern orchestra, as was shown by Andrew Litton's splendid performance of the Second Symphony at the RCM, using enthusiastic and talented young players. Modern instruments, revived instruments: we can have both. 'Vive la différence'.

This issue marks the anniversary mainly by our receiving the Chairman's permission to use a spot of colour. I am grateful to the authors who have supplied appropriate material, and in particular to David McBrien for banishing any idea that 'The Hut' was some kind of wattle and daub affair, or a retreat on the scale of Birchwood. The recent article on Kreisler is nicely complemented by Arthur Reynolds's researches into Joachim, a violinist who features more prominently in the biography of Stanford. But a composer's relation to performers, even those who didn't necessarily play his own music, are replete with interest, and the comments on Joachim's playing style are timely, given Richard Redmile's comments and the welcome publication of Vol. 37 of the complete edition; the editor, Clive Brown, has been heard to play several of Elgar's pieces including the sonata in a historically informed manner. A review will appear in a future issue, and we look forward to publication of *King Olaf* in the not too distant future. At last Elgar will be getting his just deserts alongside all those other complete (though in most cases not yet complete) editions.

Those who would like to have seen the cover of the March issue (H.A. Payne: The Enchanted Sea) reproduced in colour are commended to the CD by David Owen Norris of songs and rare piano music (Avie records: AV2129); a review of this should appear in the next issue. This may be the place to mention that the editor feels barely capable of keeping up with the flood of recordings; any reader who possesses a recording we may have overlooked is welcome to get in touch, or indeed to send me a review, though advance consultation is recommended, in case there is already one in the pipeline.

I am grateful to Alan Tongue for drawing attention to the Westminster Cathedral Gerontius panels, and to Tom Phillips for permission to reproduce them, and his explanation of his conception. Thanks also to all contributors, reviewers, and letter writers; and as always, to Geoffrey Hodgkins, for 100 years ago. But should we now start a feature on '150 years ago'?

Julian Rushton

### ***The Gerontius Panels in Westminster Cathedral***

*The following text is adapted by kind permission from Tom Phillips's proposal for marble panels in Westminster Cathedral; these are illustrated as plates 1 and 2.*

The two panels in Westminster Cathedral flank the Chapel of the Holy Souls. The original request was to provide a portrait of Cardinal Newman for the left-hand panel, but after many visits it seemed to me more and more appropriate that the long vertical panel to the left of the chapel should feature Newman himself, and that the two smaller panels should relate his work to the chapel, especially via his poem on the journey of the soul of Everyman, *The Dream of Gerontius*. It is a happy coincidence that the first London performance of Elgar's setting of *Gerontius* was given in the Cathedral in 1903 under the direction of the composer. 1903 also saw the completion of the mosaics in the chapel itself.

My unprompted visits to the cathedral when I was a schoolboy in the fifties are forever associated in my mind with the magnificent music, both old and new, which enriched the Mass.

The left-hand panel celebrates Gerontius, whose story reflects the upward surge of the purified soul from Purgatory to Heaven. The musical embodiment of Newman's meditation is manifest in the five lines of the stave. The right-hand panel links the stave with the cross and with a ladder symbolising the soul's ascent, thus making an anagogical equivalent of *The Dream*. Where elements intersect, a point of light represents, so to speak, a spiritual spark. The route upward, via the ladder (perseverance) and the stave (art), produces a number of these flashes of illumination; but the route of greatest illumination is through the ladder, stave, and cross together, i.e. Perseverance, Art and Faith.

Fig. 1: Ordnance Survey map, 1912



## A Visit to ‘The Hut’

David McBrien

I became aware of Elgar’s association with Bray, Berkshire, before I moved into the parish in 1984. Elgar was a frequent visitor to ‘The Hut’, Frank Schuster’s riverside residence, where he composed significant portions of many of his major works; and I had already explored its location with the help of Pauline Collett’s invaluable *An Elgar Travelogue*, published the previous year.<sup>1</sup> However since the house is in private occupation I had never, until recently, been able to do more than gaze at the exterior from the footbridge to Monkey Island (Plate 3). Then I had the good fortune to meet the owner of the house, who kindly allowed me to look around while the house was between tenants, together with a friend who is a keen photographer (Plate 4 shows the main entrance).

The house and its surroundings are very different now to what they were in Elgar’s day; so let me first describe those differences. ‘The Hut’ was renamed ‘The Long White Cloud’ in 1925–6, but for simplicity I shall continue to refer to it as ‘The Hut’, except when necessary. ‘The Hut’ is located about three-quarters of a mile to the south-east of Bray village, downstream of Bray lock, on the Berkshire bank of the Thames opposite Monkey Island. These days, except on foot, it can only be approached from the north. From Bray village, go first down Old Mill Lane and then Monkey Island Lane. Monkey Island Lane continues southwards beyond the turning to ‘The Hut’ until it reaches a junction with the main road between Windsor and Maidenhead. It would once have been possible for visitors to approach from the south, but public access, except on foot, is now prohibited beyond Bray Marina. In Elgar’s day, the route after leaving Bray village would have had open fields on either side with only a farm and a few labourers’ cottages alongside the lane. The lane was muddy and unsurfaced until well into the 1920s. Since the 1940s Bray has advanced substantially along the eastern (river) side of the lane, and between the village and Monkey Island the M4 has carved its way across the fields; it crosses the river between Bray lock and Monkey Island on a new bridge. To the south of the motorway the fields on the western side of the lane have been excavated for gravel, forming a large lake which is used for water sports. The noise of motorway traffic, and of planes flying into and out of Heathrow, means that the location is no longer the tranquil haven which Elgar found so conducive to composition.

Birney and Russell say that the original house was 175 years old in 1998, suggesting an origin c.1823; the entrance front was added in 1896 while the house

<sup>1</sup> Pauline Collett, *An Elgar Travelogue* (London: Thames Publishing, 1983).

was in the ownership of Miss Van de Weyer.<sup>2</sup> She was, presumably, a member of the family of Jean Sylvain Van de Weyer, Belgian Minister to the English Court, who, in 1857, had built the large gothic house, New Lodge, on the Bray/Winkfield boundary and whose estate extended to Water Oakley, downstream of Bray.<sup>3</sup> Miss Van de Weyer was a lady in waiting to Queen Victoria, and Windsor is only four miles to the south of 'The Hut'; Birney and Russell relate a village tradition that when Queen Victoria decided to make one of her visits to 'The Hut', she would send a telegram at very short notice to the village Post Office, which had to despatch a runner to the house post-haste. It is not known precisely when 'The Hut' passed into the ownership of Frank Schuster, but he was certainly there by 1903.<sup>4</sup>

Fig. 1 shows part of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of the vicinity, published in 1912. 'The Hut' and its gardens occupy plot 907. The house was substantially smaller then than it is now. At that date it lacked the cruciform lounge at the river end of the property and the single story extension at the opposite end of the house, now called Sundial Cottage and named after the sundial, shown as S.D. on the map. It is not known exactly when the cruciform lounge was added, but since it was not there when the survey was made for the 1912 map, Elgar could not have used it on his earlier visits. Pauline Collett says 'sometimes he would work in the cross-shaped lounge, where there was a grand piano, but more often than not he isolated himself in the music room'. The music room, which Schuster called the Orchard Room, was a substantial wooden building located on the riverside some distance from the main house; between it and the house there was the coach-house. The music room was a large room with a stage, and the building also contained a kitchen and living quarters for staff. The coach house incorporated stables and had a flat above for the groom and his wife. 'The Hut', the coach-house, and the music room are the only substantial buildings on plot 907 on the 1912 map. There is also a small boat house which has since disappeared.

Schuster owned 'The Hut' and its estate until he died in 1927, but for several years before that he had allowed Anzy Wylde and his wife exclusive use and it was Anzy (a New Zealander) who changed its name in 1926, following extensive alteration, to 'The Long White Cloud' – the English form of the Maori name for New Zealand (Aoteatoa).

Some time after 1935, following the sudden death of Anzy Wylde, 'The Long White Cloud' became a childhood home of Stirling Moss the racing driver, who had been born in London in 1929. In 1958 the Mosses sold the house to Mr and Mrs Saunders of nearby Weir Bank Farm. The Music Room was demolished in 1959 and in 1963 the whole of the estate was sold and broken up. Seven houses now stand on the original plot 907. 'The Hut' was, for a while, subdivided into two houses: 'The Long White Cloud' at the river end and 'Riverview Court' (which incorporated the original front door to 'The Hut') between it and Sundial Cottage. Happily both

2 Nan Birney, *Bray Yesterday and Today*; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (ed. Richard Russell, London: Kelmescott House, 1998), 134.

3 Luke Over and Chris Tyrrell, *The Royal Hundred of Bray* (Maidenhead: Cliveden Press, 1993).

4 Personal communication from Richard Russell.

were reunited in the 1980s and once again form a single property under the name of 'The Long White Cloud'. Sundial Cottage remains under separate ownership. Of the other houses built on the old garden of 'The Hut', the old coach house, now called Aughton Cottage (Plate 5), has been extended and adapted for residential use with an indoor swimming pool; in the spring of 2006 it was on the market with offers invited in excess of £1 million. A bungalow called River Place has been built between 'The Hut' and Aughton Cottage, and on the site of the Music Room a large modern house, called (inaccurately) 'The Old Music Room', was built in the early 1960s. Two other houses (Brook House and Waterfield Lodge) have been built between the three riverside properties and Monkey Island Lane.

Another big difference between the surroundings of 'The Hut' in 1912 and the present day has been the development of the Monkey Island Hotel. The hotel had been on the island since the 1840s, but until the 1950s it had to be approached by boat. The building of a footbridge in the 1950s allowed the hotel to expand but, because vehicles cannot cross the bridge, a large car park has been developed on the land immediately to the north of 'The Hut' (plot 911 on the 1912 map).

### ***Elgar and 'The Hut'***

Those familiar with the Elgar biographies will not need telling of the importance which 'The Hut' played in his composing life. Many of the facts were conveniently drawn together in Pauline Collett's *Elgar Travelogue*. However, that book is now long out of print; so, with due acknowledgement, I think it worth outlining the story.

Frank (Leo Francis) Schuster was born in 1852, and was thus five years older than Elgar. He was a wealthy member of an originally German banking family which had settled in England; he was educated at Eton. His early, unsatisfactory, experience of the family business led him to decide to devote his life, and money, to the service of the arts.<sup>5</sup> Michael Kennedy has quoted Siegfried Sassoon describing him thus:

Unable to create anything himself, he loved and longed to assist in the creation of music. He wanted to create artistic history but could only do so by entertaining gifted people.<sup>6</sup>

He owned a town-house in Old Queen Street, Westminster, and sometime in the late 1890s or early 1900s he bought 'The Hut' as a country retreat. During 1898 he had heard some of Elgar's music and was so immediately attracted to it that he visited Elgar at Malvern and commissioned a bust of him from the sculptor Percival Hedley which, to the astonishment of some of his friends, displaced the bust of Wagner in his music room at Westminster.

After 1898 Schuster saw a great deal of the Elgars, entertaining them and introducing them to many of his influential friends, including the 'Windflower', Alice Stuart-Wortley, daughter of the painter Millais, with whom Elgar developed a strong

5 Basil Maine, *Elgar, his life and works* (London: Bell, 1933), 168–171.

6 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 87.

relationship, and who may be the (\*\*\*\*) of the Violin Concerto's epigraph. Schuster worked tirelessly to promote Elgar's music. He was also a friend of Gabriel Fauré, and through him he was influential in securing the first performance in France of *The Dream of Gerontius*. Among many other activities on Elgar's behalf, he was involved in the commissioning of the *Coronation Ode* in 1902 and the promotion of the Covent Garden Elgar Festival in 1904. He was rewarded with the dedication of the overture *In The South*. Percy Young, the biographer of Lady Elgar, says that she did not like Schuster (whom he calls 'a homosexual dilettante'), although she often accompanied her husband on visits both to Westminster and to 'The Hut'.<sup>7</sup> However, Elgar also often visited 'The Hut' alone, on extended visits, where he was able to make use of the tranquil atmosphere to compose quietly in the music room. Among the visits documented were, in 1905, one in which the *Introduction and Allegro* for strings was given a private rehearsal; in 1906, when Elgar spent almost the whole of July working on *The Kingdom* (during this time two of the familiar photographs of Elgar at 'The Hut' were taken; see below); and June 1908, during composition of the first symphony.

W.H. Reed, who was helping Elgar on aspects of the composition of the Violin Concerto, describes a visit in 1910:

Sir Edward went to stay at Bray, near Maidenhead, at a house called 'The Hut', belonging to Mr Leo Schuster: Frankie, as Elgar and the other frequenters of 'The Hut' always called him.

It was not very long before I received an urgent summons to go there. The slow movement and the first movement of the concerto were almost finished; and the Coda was ready. Could I therefore come and play them with him?..

I can see it now as it looked that spring morning when I first arrived. It was a sweet riverside house, raised several feet above the level of the lawn, with wooden steps leading up to the veranda from the gravel path. It was evidently constructed in anticipation of floods, being only a stone's throw from the Thames, which, however, flowed past serenely enough between its banks whenever I happened to be there. Across the lawn, and almost screened by trees, was the studio, away from the house and approached by stones placed in the grass about a pace apart. It had rather a barn-like exterior, but inside, it was a home for most of the curios, Chinese ornaments, rare and extraordinary objects which Frankie had collected and brought from all parts of the world. I remember particularly well a stuffed lizard, or a member of that genus- a fine specimen, though, perhaps, rather large for a lizard. It was suspended from the ceiling in such a way as to be swayed by every gust of wind coming in through door or window, and I always felt that it swung around to have a good look at us when we played the slow movement or the opening of the Finale, for it was here that it first took shape....

When we were tired of playing, or if Sir Edward wanted to go out in the air for a change, the fiddle was laid in its case and we went off together, strolling about the riverbank, watching the small fish in the water and enjoying the quiet beauty of the place.<sup>8</sup>

7 Percy M. Young, *Alice Elgar – Enigma of a Victorian lady* (London: Dobson, 1978), 157.

8 W.H. Reed, *Elgar As I Knew Him* (London: Gollancz, 1936, reprinted 1978), 26–28.

In June 1912 Elgar worked at 'The Hut' on *The Music Makers*, and in June 1913 on *Falstaff*. After the outbreak of the Great War, Elgar was staying at 'The Hut' in November 1914 working on his *Starlight Express* music, when Schuster entertained a group of wounded soldiers with whom Elgar engaged in 'much interesting talk'. Brian Trowell has speculated that, since Kenneth Munro was at that time in London convalescing from a wound inflicted at Gallipoli, Elgar may have had news of him and his mother during this encounter. Kenneth was the son of Helen Munro, née Weaver, who had been engaged to Elgar when both were in their twenties, but who had broken their engagement to Elgar's great sorrow and emigrated to New Zealand. Kenneth subsequently died during the battle of the Somme and Trowell further speculates that the news of this led directly to a well documented breakdown in Elgar's health.<sup>9</sup>

Trowell points out that it was around the time of this encounter that Frank Schuster took Leslie ('Anzy', from ANZAC) Wylde under his wing; he was 'a handsome young New Zealand officer who had lost a leg at Gallipoli', whom Frank had met when he visited Lady Astor's hospital at Cliveden not far from Bray. Anzy became Frank's protégé, his companion, and even, despite his disability, his chauffeur. The relationship persisted even after Anzy's marriage to the painter Wendela Boreel in 1924, when 'The Hut' was extended to accommodate them, and it was to Anzy and his wife that Frank left 'The Hut' when he died in 1927.

Elgar continued to visit 'The Hut' for quiet composition up until the time of Lady Elgar's death in 1920, for example in 1919 working on the Cello Concerto. However, after Alice's death, which itself, of course, had a profound effect on Elgar, he found the change in atmosphere at 'The Hut' associated with the arrival of Anzy Wylde inimical. Elgar disliked the new young set attracted to 'The Hut' by the increasingly dominating presence of the Wylde, and visited it less and less frequently; this dislike is reflected in his correspondence with Alice Stuart-Wortley. For example, on 7 June 1922:

I arrd. last night from 'The Hut'.

I missed you: Claude, Glyn Philpott, R. Nichols, S. Sassoon & myself were the party & of course, the N. Zealander – reminds me of Macaulay's N. Zealander sitting on the ruins not of London Bridge but of 'The Hut', and the Host!

And on 16 April 1924:

Frank called one day – he is at 'The Hut' – Bankrupt he says & very vague: this afternoon he was sitting in the back of a smart car – the young man [Wylde] was driving with an odd looking – I hate to say it – 'bit of fluff'!! [Wendela Boreel] in flamboyant PINK on the front seat, all laughing loudly: they did not see me & I was glad for I shd. have been thoroughly ashamed.<sup>10</sup>

9 Brian Trowell, 'The road to Brinkwells: the late chamber music' in Lewis Foreman (ed.), *Oh, My Horses – Elgar and the Great War* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001), 355–7.

10 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, the Windflower Letters* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 273, 290.

In July 1924 Elgar visited 'The Hut' for a weekend when the other guests were Siegfried Sassoon, Walter Sickert and the Wylde, whose marriage took place a week or so afterwards. By this time the house was in overall charge of the Wylde, who were soon to rename it. The following extract from Jean Moorcroft Wilson's biography of Sassoon sets the scene:

The Long White Cloud was an idyllic place to be in summer. Though less than thirty miles from London, it was surrounded by fields on three sides, with the fourth facing the Thames. Its large grounds included a tennis court bordered with lilacs and poplars, croquet grounds, a terrace for moonlit dinners, a separate garden music room and well-kept lawns running down to the river. The house itself, long, low and rambling, was architecturally undistinguished but beautifully furnished, exuding an air of tranquillity, order and civilised living. There was a staff of six, including a butler, cook, housemaid and head gardener, who provided Schuster and his numerous guests with the fine food and wine he expected. Schuster, according to Sassoon, was 'a monarch among the maitres d'hotel of Europe'.

He was also a connoisseur of music, another source of pleasure for Sassoon at Bray. When they were not travelling up to London in Frankie's Rolls-Royce to hear an opera or concert, Schuster would often invite well-known musicians to his house for private recitals. The most famous of these and the one Sassoon came to know best was Elgar.

Sassoon had admired Elgar's music long before he met him at Schuster's, particularly his violin concerto, about which he had written at least two poems. 'He knew how to design on a big scale, as Handel so gloriously did' he wrote to his mother after Elgar's death, 'and his feeling is so beautifully English'. Elgar's appearance, that of a 'smartly dressed "military"-looking grey haired man, with a carefully-trimmed moustache and curved nose' was so different from the 'magnificence' of his music that Sassoon had difficulty reconciling the two. But listening to his 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony, for example, he felt he was seeing the man in his 'higher nature' and 'gloried in having known him'.

... His fondest memory of the composer was an hour spent in Schuster's music room in 1924, with Elgar playing snatches from Sassoon's piano music (Mozart's A major Concerto and Bach's fugues and Chaconne), some of his own choral works ('Death on the Hills', 'Te Deum' and 'Light of Life') and parts of Schubert's Rondo Brillante, which he loved. Watching him 'glowing with delight' at the music Sassoon felt he was seeing the 'real' Elgar. It helped him forget the other side of Elgar, the one who told long winded anecdotes about himself at lunch and who seemed to him 'just a type of club bore'. Unfortunately, this side was never absent for long and Sassoon's overall impression was of someone 'a bit petty and disappointing'.<sup>11</sup>

From the mid-1920s Schuster, having sold his house in Westminster and effectively handed over charge of 'The Hut' to the Wylde, lived most of the time in Hove. However, as a celebration of Elgar's 70th birthday in June 1927 he borrowed back 'The Hut' and invited a large gathering of friends, old and new, for a concert of Elgar's chamber music given in the music room by a very distinguished group of musicians including Albert Sammons, Lionel Tertis, W.H. Reed, William Murdoch, and Felix Salmond. But Elgar's music was no longer fashionable and the mix of

11 Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon – the journey from the trenches. A biography 1918-1967* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 139–9.

bright young things with the Victorian and Edwardian worthies of Elgar's circle failed to gel. Osbert Sitwell, a member of the former group, recalled the occasion in a famous passage from his autobiographical *Laughter in the Next Room*. Sitwell found Elgar's music 'obnoxious' despite acknowledging his genius and this attitude colours his account.

I seem to recall that we saw from the edge of the river, on a smooth green lawn opposite, above an embankment, and through the hallucinatory mist born of the rain that had now ceased, the plump wraith of Sir Edward Elgar, who with his grey moustache, grey hair, grey top hat and frock-coat looked every inch a personification of Colonel Bogey, walking with Frank Schuster.

... The music room was so crowded that, with Arnold Bennett, we sat just outside the doors in the open air ... From where I sat I could watch Elgar, enthroned on the side, near the front. And I noticed, too, several figures well known in the world of English music, but in the main the audience was drawn from the famous composer's passionately devout but to me anonymous partisans here gathered for the last time. It is true that these surviving early adherents of Elgar's genius seemed to be endowed with an unusual longevity, but even allowing for this, it was plain looking round, that in the ordinary course of nature their lives must be drawing to an end. One could almost hear, through the music, the whirr of the wings of the Angel of Death: he hovered very surely in the air that day, among the floccose herds of good-time Edwardian ghosts, with trousers thus beautifully pressed and suits of the best material, carrying panama hats or glossy bowlers, or decked and loaded with fur and feather ... Most of them knew, I apprehend, as they listened so intently to the prosperous music of the Master, and looked forward to tea and hot buttered scones (for it was rather cold, as well as being damp) and to all kinds of little sandwiches and cakes, that this would prove to be their last outing of this sort. The glossy motors waited outside to carry them home ... some of the motors were large and glassy as a hearse.<sup>12</sup>

Ironically, this self-consciously purple prose could, with very little adaptation, be equally applied, as I remember it, to the concert at the Royal Festival Hall in 1962 which celebrated the 75th birthday of Dame Edith Sitwell, Osbert's older sister.

Six months after the concert Frank Schuster died and, in a final act of generosity towards the composer, left Elgar ('who has saved my country from the reproach of having produced no composer worthy to rank with the great masters') £7,000 in his will. He left the bust of Elgar to the National Portrait Gallery.

### **'The Hut' today**

Accompanied by Mrs Betty Lambourne, who had kindly offered to take photographs, I visited 'The Hut' on the invitation of the owner while it was being cleaned in preparation for new tenants in April 2006. Entering the property from the Monkey Island Hotel car park one first encounters the north, or entrance front (Plate 4). On the far right-hand side of the front lies Sundial Cottage, added to the house in the 1920s for Anzy and Wendela Wylde and now owned and occupied separately (Plate 6). To the left of this (Plate 4) is 'The Hut' itself, looking from this standpoint just as it must have done to Elgar on his earliest visits. The date '1898' can be seen on a

12 Cited from Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 775.



**Fig. 2:**  
**(i) (above) Tea party at 'The Hut'**  
**(ii) (left) Elgar enjoys a smoke**  
**- outside.**

plaque above the main entrance. At the river end is the cruciform lounge with even later additions below it of some service rooms and a garage. The garden (south front of the house (Plate 7) faces onto a lawn sloping down to the river, with the cruciform lounge on the extreme right. A veranda runs the full length of this side, now solidly constructed but in earlier accounts (such as Reed's) made of wood. The window with the black panel below it seen on the left of the house in Plate 7 appears once to have been fitted with wide French doors onto the veranda. This seems to be the place where the photographs of Elgar were taken on 15 July 1906 (see below), with the doors folded back and a tea table set just inside.

The inside of the house has been so much altered that there is little worthy of comment. The cruciform lounge has been converted into an indoor swimming pool. Partitions between other rooms have been altered and shifted so that it no longer resembles the house Elgar would have known. The garden is now much smaller than it was in Schuster's time.

### **Photographs of Elgar at 'The Hut'**

Only three photographs of Elgar at 'The Hut' have, to my knowledge, been published in the many biographies and other books about him. Two of them (Fig. 2) were clearly taken on the same occasion, identified by Moore as 15 July 1906.<sup>13</sup> He identifies the people in Fig. 2.i as, from the left, Claude Philips (keeper of the Wallace Collection), Adela Schuster (Frank's sister), Charles Stuart Wortley, Elgar, Lady Elgar, and Schuster; he suggests the photographer was probably Alice Stuart Wortley or her daughter Clare. Fig. 2.ii shows Elgar sitting smoking on the threshold of the room, the French doors opened behind him, the wooden veranda to his left. The tea table can also be seen, with the same tea-pot and a small frame (containing coins or medals?) as in the previous photograph. Elgar had been working on *The Kingdom* and shortly after the photographs were taken he played 'The sun goeth down' to the guests.

The third photograph (Fig. 3) is not identified by date or occasion, but judging by the greying of Elgar's moustache it would appear to be considerably later. The site is somewhere along the riverbank in the garden of 'The Hut'. Frank Schuster stands behind Elgar and Lord Northampton on the right. The two ladies are unidentified.

Lodged at the Elgar Birthplace Museum archive are several photographs taken by an unknown photographer in the garden of 'The Hut' on the occasion of the concert on 26 June 1927. One (Fig. 4) shows Elgar seated on a bench. The younger man on Elgar's right, in shirt sleeves, is Felix Salmond, soloist at the premiere of the Cello Concerto, who played at the birthday concert. On the left of the photograph is Ernest Newman and on the right Sir William Henry Hadow. One photograph (Fig. 5) was taken in the Sundial Garden. Elgar stands on the left and George Bernard Shaw is seated in the foreground. None of the others has been identified. Fig. 6 shows Elgar standing flanked by four men; W.H. Reed is on his right. Again, the others have not been identified.

<sup>13</sup> J.N. Moore, *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford University Press, 1990), plate 4b.



**Fig. 3: Elgar with Frank Schuster, Lord Northampton, and two ladies**

**Fig. 4: Elgar with Felix Salmond, Ernest Newman, and Sir Henry Hadow**



**Fig. 5: Elgar, GBS, and others in the garden of 'The Hut'**



**Fig. 6: Elgar with W.H. Reed and three others**

### **Acknowledgements**

Photographs: Plate 3, Author; Plates 4, 5, 6, 7, Betty Lambourne. I am grateful to Mr Keith Strachan, the present owner of 'The Long White Cloud', for allowing me to visit it and for generously devoting so much time to showing me around. I thank my friend Mr John Webb for introducing me to Mr Strachan. I am grateful to Arthur Reynolds for permission to reproduce the photographs in Fig. 2. I also thank Sue Fairchild of the Elgar Birthplace Museum for helping me find the photographs in Figs 4–6, which are reproduced by permission of Elgar Foundation Enterprises.

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## Elgar and Wagner

Ian Beresford Gleaves<sup>1</sup>

To trace the connections between one great composer and another can be a fascinating and rewarding exercise, provided we do not fall into the trap of playing them off against each other, or of trying to prove which was the greater. As Schopenhauer observed, 'Proofs are generally less for those who want to learn than for those who want to dispute'.<sup>2</sup>

Of course Elgar was but one of several major composers writing in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth who were influenced, in one way or another (or in several ways together) by Wagner. Not for nothing has it many times been said, or implied, that a whole musical epoch was born with the publication in 1859 by Breitkopf und Härtel of Leipzig of the score of *Tristan und Isolde*, six years before its first performance in Munich. That Wagner published the full score without having heard a note of it is a sufficient indication of his absolute confidence in his total mastery of harmony and orchestration, particularly striking in view of the new and complex harmonic idiom of that work. And, as is always the case with a significant new development in musical language, it is impossible to determine precisely and categorically when such a thing happened. For *Tristan*, like the apparently sudden flowering of the Golden Age of English music from 1580–1620, was the result of possibilities and tendencies that were latent in musical language (not merely Wagner's) before the time at which it was written. In other words, its intensely chromatic style was always potentially realizable; and, as is fairly well known, there are various anticipations of *Tristan* in earlier music – for example the slow movement of Mozart's E flat quartet (K. 428), the introduction to Haydn's *Creation*, and, perhaps most notably, in certain works of Liszt.<sup>3</sup>

It is perhaps scarcely surprising that Elgar's first acquaintance with Wagner's music occurred at an impressionable period in his own life (early to mid-twenties), and at a time when Wagner was beginning to be taken seriously in England. Thus we hear of Elgar being present which Richter performed the *Meistersinger* prelude in

- 1 This essay is based on a lecture given to the Thames Valley branch of the Elgar Society on 14 November 2006; this in turn was based on a study day for the Wagner Society on 9 October 2004.
- 2 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (trans. E.F.J. Payne, New York: Dover, 1966), vol. i, 68.
- 3 One might add the harmonic freaks of Gesualdo (1560–1615), not all involving unexpected juxtaposition of pure triads.

London in 1882, the same year that the astonishingly enterprising Angelo Neumann produced the first London *Ring*, at Her Majesty's Theatre. We also know that Elgar heard the *Parsifal* prelude at the Leipzig Gewandhaus that same year. In 1891 he saw *Parsifal*, *Tristan*, and *Die Meistersinger* at Bayreuth, by which time we can be sure that he had thoroughly immersed himself in the scores of all these works. This was also the time when George Bernard Shaw was campaigning on Wagner's behalf, leading to the publication in 1898 of *The Perfect Wagnerite*.

Of course Wagner was then (and still is) a highly controversial figure; otherwise Shaw would not have noticed him, either literally or figuratively. The 'English musical establishment', among them the academics of the day, viewed Wagner with suspicion, and sometimes with downright hostility.

This brings me to an important similarity between Wagner and Elgar as composers; they were essentially, if not entirely, self-taught. Herein lies the basis of the total mastery of technique, particularly of harmony and orchestration, that each so conspicuously displays. This is not something that can be acquired through an academic education, or from text-books; it is something of which the aptitude is partly inherent, and partly connected with the ability to assimilate the facts in a score, translating them immediately into imagined sound – and, conversely, being able to imagine sounds and musical structures and see them, mentally, on paper. To most non-musicians, and even to some musicians, this is something mysterious and arcane. But I am, of course, talking about genius, and in many circles today talk of genius is more or less outlawed. Such a view is not new, and it accounts to a large extent for the opposition and hostility frequently encountered by genius, even posthumously in some cases. It is precisely that instinctive ability to perceive and imagine patterns that is one of the hallmarks of genius.

That music was 'in the air' for Elgar, as he once said, is supported by remarks made in later life, and evidenced, perhaps best of all, by the two enchanting *Wand of Youth* suites, written in mid-career but partly based on pieces sketched in childhood and early adolescence. Among his early works are numerous pieces for wind quintet, written for himself and friends to play, and not least the various Latin motets written for St George's Catholic church in Worcester, where his father was organist. Most important of all, however, were the scores that he discovered in his father's music shop, and which he studied avidly. And we should not forget his proficiency as a largely self-taught performer, on violin, bassoon, piano, and organ, with a thorough working knowledge of several other instruments. That these facts are well-known does not diminish their importance, or their relevance to Elgar's mastery as a composer; on the contrary, they are an essential part of it. In fact, the only formal lessons that Elgar ever had, in the sense ordinarily understood – involving a teacher-pupil relationship with fees paid, or not, depending on who was profiting the more – were a few sessions with the Hungarian violinist Adolphe Politzer (1832–1900), who was leader of the orchestra of His Majesty's Theatre, where Neumann gave his four cycles of the *Ring* in 1882.

Wagner's musical apprenticeship did involve a number of lessons in harmony and thorough-bass with August Müller, a violinist in the Leipzig orchestra, when Wagner, in his late teens, was resident there. This was followed by a few months of more formal study with Christian Theodor Weinlig (1780–1842), cantor of the

Thomaschule (and thus a successor to Johann Sebastian Bach). Weinlig managed to convince the volatile and impatient young man of the values of discipline and application, but he can have been of little direct use to Wagner as a composer of modern opera, being steeped in Baroque and Renaissance counterpoint. Wagner respected him sufficiently to dedicate to him his B-flat major piano sonata (a student exercise of no originality, modelled on a sonata by Haydn's student Pleyel). But like Elgar later, Wagner derived most of what he needed to know about modern music by hearing performances and by studying scores, in his case those of *Der Freischütz* and the Beethoven symphonies. In fact Wagner probably learned most about musical craftsmanship from transcribing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for solo piano, in 1829 – predating the famous Liszt transcription and not only a remarkable feat in itself, but particularly surprising considering that Wagner had had no opportunity to hear the work adequately performed; some still regarded it as the work of a madman.

The extent to which Elgar assimilated Wagner's work in all its manifold richness can be seen from the following description of him by his friend Rosa Burley, headmistress of the Mount School in Malvern, where Elgar gave violin lessons:

He plunged at once into an exciting lecture on the theories behind the music-drama of Wagner ... its use of leading motives ... which he illustrated on the piano with the 'Look' motive from *Tristan* ... and the welding together of musical, plastic, and dramatic elements into one art-form. His enthusiasm for the subject was at once a stimulus and a challenge to one's power of understanding.<sup>4</sup>

In the face of such informed enthusiasm and admiration, it is remarkable how few Wagnerisms can be detected in Elgar's music of this period, and how, knowing what a powerful influence Wagner can be once someone is under the spell, Elgar managed to retain his own individuality. One exception occurs in bars 49–50 of the slow movement of the *Serenade* for strings (Ex. 1).

Ex. 1

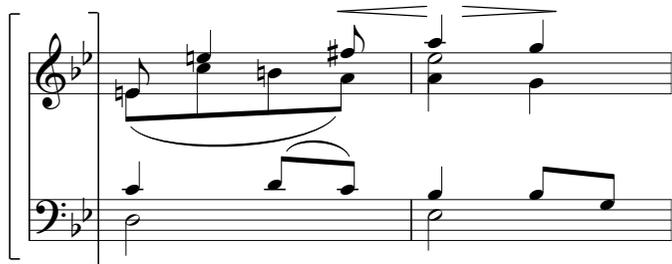


A mere detail, one might say; a link to the reprise of the expansive and spacious main theme, itself thoroughly Elgarian; but a moment so quintessentially Wagnerian (owing to the chromatic inner parts and the expressive *gruppetto* or turn in the second bar) that we at once exclaim 'Wagner!'. A bit of gratuitous self-indulgence, perhaps.

4 Rosa Burley and Frank C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar: The Record of a Friendship* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 56.

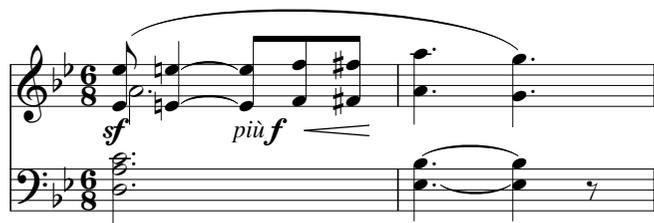
of the 'awful daring of a moment's surrender'.<sup>5</sup> Another Wagnerian moment, likewise unmistakable, comes in 'C.A.E.', the first of the Variations ('Enigma') (Ex. 2).

Ex. 2



This is a clear echo of bars 16–17 of the Prelude to Act I of *Tristan*: and the connection will be made clearer if we transpose the Wagner into the key of the Elgar (Ex. 3).

Ex. 3



By the time Elgar wrote the Variations (1898–9), he had become still further immersed in the world of Wagner, having by then seen most of the major works, including the *Ring*, and *Tristan*, once again, in Munich in 1897, conducted by Richard Strauss. That the Variations, Elgar's finest and most representative work to date, should still retain its freshness, vigour, and spontaneity today is the measure of its greatness and originality. And an essential aspect of that originality lies in the scoring, which, while not flamboyant or audacious in the manner of many French or Russian composers of that time, assimilates many of Wagner's methods, particularly as regards the *tutti*. It might be thought that this means heaviness and ponderousness, which when aligned with a certain seriousness and earnestness, is thought to be essentially Teutonic. Perhaps it is, but one only needs to study the scoring of the opening *tutti* of the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, and then to compare it with fully-scored passages in Schumann or Brahms, to see how Wagner has avoided their monochrome uniformity by constantly varying the orchestral nuances of colour, even in a *tutti*, to produce a rich, seamless, and rounded texture. As Tovey remarked, 'The real method for scoring a *tutti* will be found in Wagner, in Richard Strauss, in Elgar, and in very few other composers since Beethoven'.<sup>6</sup>

5 T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, V (line 403).

6 Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, vol. ii (*Symphonies II, Variations, and Orchestral Polyphony*), (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 11.

This is something that can only be fully appreciated by a detailed study of the score, and therefore thought to be the exclusive concern of trained musicians; but this is only true if we think in merely technical terms. Everything written by the composer is intended for realisation in performance, every note in every instrumental part contributing its exactly due effect. Wagner's scoring (and Elgar's, which derives from it) is concerned with what can be most immediately and effectively assimilated by the listener; and the extent to which these matters are the concern of the listener is precisely the measure of their success. In other words, what sounds most natural and effortless is exactly music of which the technique is least noticed by both professional musicians and the listening public; and this is just as it should be. It is also something which is instinctively understood by the composer of genius, and is therefore not learned, nor can it be taught, save by example. Vaughan Williams probably did not realise just how fortunate he was when, after being informed by Lady Elgar that Sir Edward was far too busy to take him as a pupil (especially of orchestration), he was obliged, by way of substitute, to study the scores of the Variations and of *Gerontius* in the British Museum.<sup>7</sup> And it is a measure of the independent mind of Vaughan Williams that his music and in particular his orchestration rarely suggest Elgar, and still less Wagner.

The mention of *Gerontius* brings us to the first full flowering of Elgar's genius, in which Wagner's influence, while no more blatantly obvious than it had already been, becomes absorbed into his mature style in ways not demonstrated before. By this I mean the use of leitmotifs relating to the imagery and symbolism of Newman's poem. In addition to that, there is the through-composed, large-scale musical texture, as in all later Wagner from *Lohengrin* onwards, which is not to be found in any of Elgar's earlier choral works such as *King Olaf* or *Caractacus*. I am not going to discuss the merits or otherwise of Newman's text as a poem in its own right; and it seems to be generally agreed that it is through Elgar's music that it still lives. The Wagnerian work by which Elgar's setting is most influenced is, of course, *Parsifal*; and, as in that work, there is expressed in *Gerontius* a psychic conflict (which is the essence of all drama) between positive and negative forces, between the polarised possibilities of redemption and damnation, or between Christ and the devil. In *Parsifal* this conflict is between the Holy Grail (and its community of knights) and the necromantic, pagan world of Klingsor; both works have, therefore, powerful echoes of *Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy*, works of pure literature not requiring musical interpretation (although the latter inspired Liszt's superb *Dante Symphony*).<sup>8</sup> But however we described the content in words, it is the metaphysical idea behind the text that inspired Elgar and which he brought to life so vividly through his music.<sup>9</sup> The Wagnerian elements, in so far as these were, by c.1900, not common to all musical language, have been fully integrated into Elgar's

7 Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 59. Vaughan Williams 'chiefly practiced orchestration with Ravel' (*ibid.*, 90).

8 Among other things, Milton is a source for the English text that lies behind Haydn's *Creation*. [ed.]

9 'Music expresses the metaphysical aspect of the physical world, the essence of every phenomenon'. Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, 262..

mature style, and the overall impression is one of utter conviction, of authentic lived experience, vividly realized. Elgar's remark, that Gerontius was 'a man like us, not a priest or a saint, but a *sinner*, a repentant one of course, but no end of a worldly man in his life', is pertinent here, as was his spirited riposte (in 1926) to the ecclesiastical dignitary of Worcester who had objected to parts of *Parsifal* being performed in the cathedral at the Three Choirs' Festival, on the grounds of its supposed worldliness and 'sensuality'.<sup>10</sup>

That the Wagner that most influenced *Gerontius* was *Parsifal* can be shown by comparison of passages where that influence is at its most palpable. First, their respective openings: Elgar, like Wagner, begins with a slow, numinous melodic line in unison (Ex. 4), on woodwind in the tenor register, with muted violas (in Wagner, one desk each of muted violins and cellos), and of four bars' duration (in Wagner, five).

**Ex. 4 Lento, mistico**

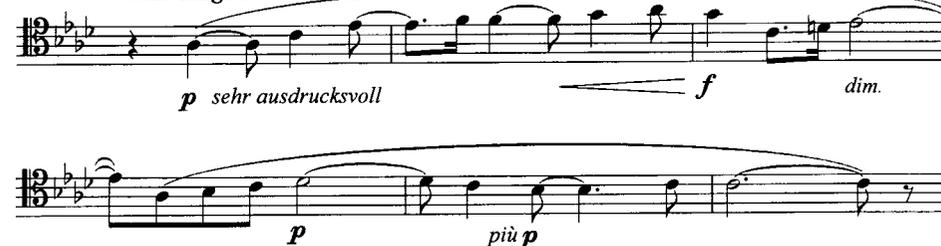


Elgar's opening proceeds almost entirely by stepwise movement, suggestive of plainchant; note also the marking *mistico*, less a directive to the players than a description of the effect which, like the opening of *Parsifal*, sounds as if it is emanating from a mystic cavern or abyss, exactly as at Bayreuth, where Elgar had heard *Parsifal* in 1891. Moreover Elgar varies the instrumental colour at the fifth bar by introducing the cor anglais, as in bar 2 of the Prelude to *Parsifal*. However, it needs to be observed that although both openings have these features in common, the Elgar is in a different key and mode; it has its own individuality and its own peculiar mystic aura. But I doubt very much whether it would have occurred to Elgar to begin *Gerontius* in the way he did, had he not heard the opening of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth (incidentally it was not possible to hear it anywhere else at the time). The opening of *Parsifal* is a chain of three separate motives, joined together to form a single, complete, and continuous line (what Ernest Newman calls the 'fishing-rod' principle: Ex. 5).

The most fascinating single cross-reference between these two works, to my mind, occurs between 'Erlöse, rette mich aus schuldbeleckten Händen' (Redeem me, save me from sin-defiled hands), in Act II of *Parsifal* where the hero intuitively identifies his own sin with that of Amfortas, the fallen king of the Grail, and by implication with the suffering of Christ on the cross, and 'Some angel, Jesu, such as came to Thee, in Thine own agony', in Part I of *Gerontius*, where Gerontius implores the godhead for mercy, having recently been assailed by the forces of unreason and negation in the form of demons (in Elgar's orchestra). It is interesting to note (as in many another example of unconscious reminiscence and/or quotation) that the key (in this case A flat minor) is the same on both occasions, as is the declamatory, impassioned style of writing for the solo tenor, soaring up towards the upper extreme

<sup>10</sup> The exchange is quoted in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar. A Creative Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), 773.

**Ex. 5 Sehr langsam**



of its range in each case (Elgar's tenor outdoing Wagner's in going up to b flat': Ex. 6(a) and (b)).

Ideally, of course, it is necessary to look up the full score of each passage and, if possible, to hear them side by side, to appreciate all the detail, and I exhort all dedicated Elgarians reading this (and liberally minded Wagnerians) to do just that. This is not a matter of gratuitous reminiscence-hunting; both passages spring from the same emotional and spiritual root, and because of this they find similar musical expression. This whole comparison is a demonstration of how equivalent emotions, prompted by different texts in different languages, can yield an almost identical musical image.

There is one more powerful reminiscence of *Parsifal* in Elgar's work that I would like to indicate, and that is in the first movement of the First Symphony. This (Ex. 7) occurs in its most intense form at fig. 45, although present in a less attenuated form in the Exposition.<sup>11</sup>

The music clearly derives from the transformation music in Act I of *Parsifal* (a gradual change of scene from the leafy domain of the castle of the Holy Grail into the

**Ex. 6 Wagner**



**Elgar**



great hall of the castle itself), where it signifies Amfortas's suffering, which is also Christ's suffering (for all mankind), and which is related to the concept of original

**Ex.7**

sin, or sin in general. In the light of Elgar's remark *à propos* his First Symphony – 'There is no programme beyond a wide experience of human life with a great charity (love)...'<sup>12</sup> – Amfortas's music, and the compassion inspired by that character, are all part of that wide experience of human life, and of charity. The Wagnerian leitmotif is perhaps best summarized by its harmonic outline (Ex. 8), which is common to all versions, as well as to the Elgar quotation above.

This is, of course, a familiar musical characterization of grief, sorrow, or suffering.

**Ex.8**

and has its roots deep in the past, well-known examples being the 'Crucifixus' in Bach's B minor Mass, and Dido's Lament in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.

This discussion has not touched on the later oratorios *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, the only completed parts of an intended trilogy, the third work being the projected *Last Judgement*. Elgar here employed a system of leitmotifs akin in principle to that of Wagner in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in so far as they were intended to appear in all three works. A proper discussion of that, however, would need to be the subject of another essay.

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12 Letter to Walford Davies, 13 November 1908. See J.N. Moore, *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), 205.

## Elgar and Joachim

Arthur S. Reynolds

The violinist Joseph Joachim (see Plate 8, a portrait in oils by Alice Donken, c. 1880) died on 15 August 1907. He was arguably the most highly esteemed performing musician of his time, and expressions of sorrow went out to the family in Berlin from all over Europe. King Edward VII sent this message: 'I deplore very much the loss of so great an artist'. But all the acclaim *in memoriam* could not match the accolades Joachim had accumulated during his lifetime. A telling tribute is found in the Plâs Gwyn Book, now at the Elgar Birthplace Museum (Fig. 1). A gift to Edward and Alice Elgar from May Grafton, the composer's niece as well as his secretary from 1904 to 1908, the Plâs Gwyn Book is both a visitors' album and a scrap book. Its pages include a letter (Fig. 2) together with an enclosure:

May 15, 1905  
Ridgehurst, Shenley,  
Herts.

My dear May

Here is Dr. Joachim's discarded first string on which he played yesterday.

It's a precious relic.

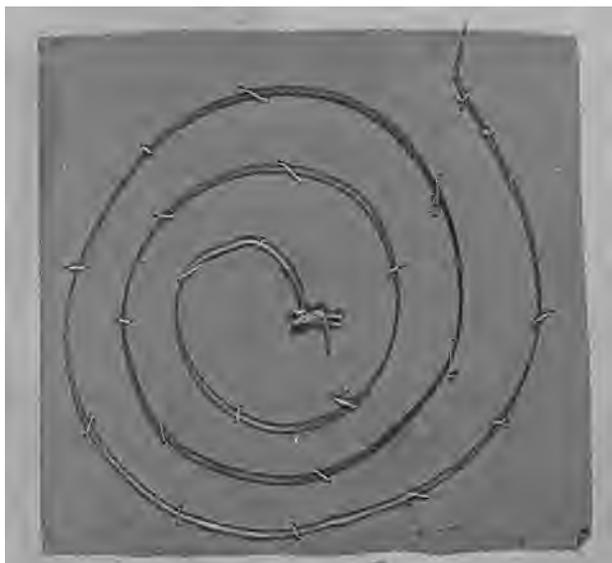
Love to the Gander  
Your affectionate uncle  
Edward

The Gander was May's father William Martin Grafton. Enclosed is a length of gut string arranged in spirals, and carefully sewn into a blank sheet of writing paper as though it were the lock of a loved one's hair (Fig. 3).

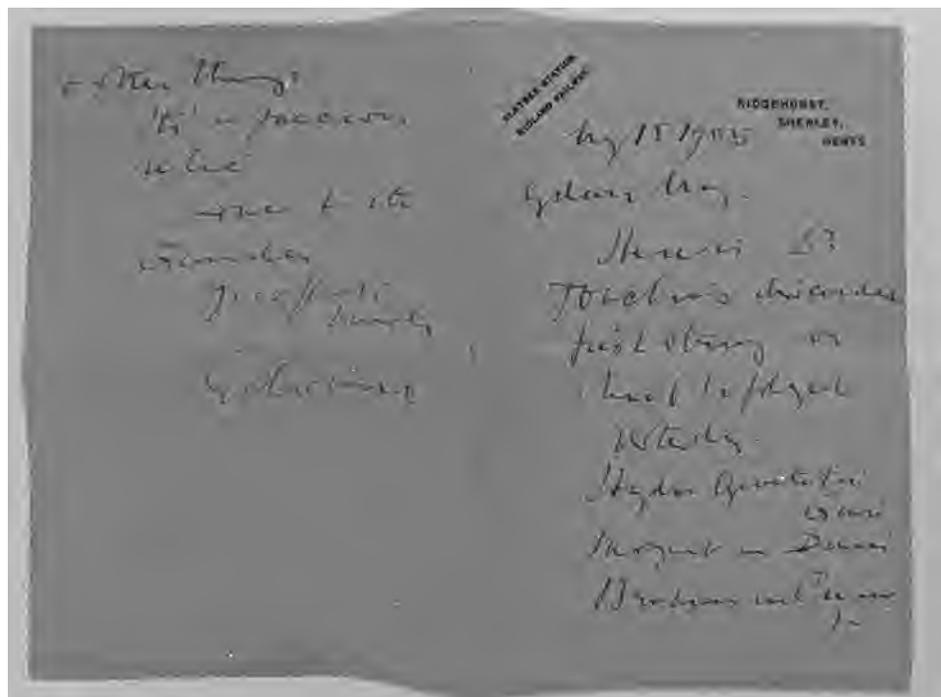


Fig. 1: Cover of the Plâs Gwyn Book

**Fig. 3: Joachim's discarded first (gut) string**



**Fig. 2: letter from Elgar to May Grafton**



During the early years of the last century, both Edward Elgar and Joseph Joachim were frequent guests at Edward and Antonia Speyer's house parties at Ridgehurst, the Speyer seat in Hertfordshire. Alice's diary records each occasion in minute detail. Here are her entries for the weekend commencing May 13, 1905:

13/05/05 - E. quite badly and nearly gave up going at last minute. xxx Arrived at Ridgehurst 5:52 train. Found the party, Joachim, Hausmann, Wirth & Halir, Miss Wilde, Alma Tadema & Anna A.T., Tovey, Mrs. & Miss Joachim. They played after dinner.

14/05/05 - Very grey & cold. E. not the worse for journey thankful to say. Delightful playing in music room. Mrs. Bruce, Prof & Mrs. Kennedy came - 18 to dinner. Mr. Speyer's birthday.

15/05/05 - At Ridgehurst. Great party left in the morning. E&A only guests left there. Lovely warm day, out in garden etc. Dined early & went up to Joachim 4t concert Bechstein Hall & returned afterwards. Fine playing.

Elgar's effort to retrieve the jettisoned E-string from Joachim's instrument, preserve it painstakingly, and despatch 'the precious relic' to May for safe-keeping, suggests an act of hero-worship by an ardent admirer. Since Joachim's name does not appear previously in Alice's diaries, it is safe to assume that Elgar met him for the first time on that weekend (Figs 4 and 5 show Elgar and Joachim in 1905). Only a few weeks beforehand he had premiered his 'string thing,' *Introduction and Allegro*, a work that calls for a solo quartet fronting a doubly divided string orchestra with undivided double basses.

**Fig. 4: Elgar in 1905**



**Fig. 5: Joachim in 1905**



What lay behind Joachim's Olympian status, what J.A. Fuller Maitland called 'his singleness of artistic claim' upon Europe's concert-going public in general and Elgar in particular? The quality of his playing would alone have qualified him for memorable greatness. Fuller Maitland, editor of the second edition of *Grove's Dictionary*, and music critic of the *Times* for 22 years, had this to say about Joachim's quartet performances:

To hear him lead the *Cavatina* in Beethoven's quartet in B flat, Op. 130, or the *Canzona in modo lidico* from that in A minor, Op. 132, is to be allowed to gaze into the uttermost profundity of human emotion, into a depth far below the source of tears.<sup>1</sup>

Reminiscing about Joachim's playing on the centenary of his birth, A.H. Fox Strangways, the editor of *Music and Letters*, found himself at a loss to

explain the inexplicable – how it is that the human spirit can transmute itself into sound and speak directly to other human spirits. And it was this quality in his playing, this intimate voice whispering from mind to mind, that made him different from all players we have ever heard...<sup>2</sup>

Crowquill's Jottings from *Berrows Worcester Journal*, quoting the *Birmingham Gazette*, presented Elgar's view in November 1903:

What is it that makes me, who have heard concertos and sonatas more than I can count, listen to a well-known old composition, say a concerto, with deepest interest when played by... Joachim? It is because I know that he is familiar with all the great concertos in existence; because he knows all the lives of the great composers, their struggles, their triumphs, all the storm and stress, all the poetry of their careers, and that he puts it all into the music, crystallizes all this knowledge in the performance. This and his own experience of life are included. It is all there!<sup>3</sup>

At the time it is unlikely that Joachim would have returned the compliment, having received a letter dated November 1903 from his close friend Sir Charles Villiers Stanford that included the following:

Is the art of music going mad? You should hear *the Apostles* by Elgar. Such ugliness! And all the papers raving about it. It gave me a bad stomach-ache.

As much as Elgar and his generation venerated Joachim the performer, they revered Joachim the last great musician of the German Romantic style. Here was an intimate of Mendelssohn, the Schumanns and Brahms who outlived them long enough to make gramophone records in 1903. Moreover, many British musicians attributed to Joachim the rise of the profession's social standing in the late nineteenth century. Typical was the point of view of the Rev. Duncan Crookes Tovey, as reported by his son Donald Francis Tovey:

- 1 J.A. Fuller-Maitland, *Joseph Joachim* (London & New York: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 195), 49.
- 2 A.H. Fox Strangways, *Music Observed* (London: Methuen, 1936), 56.
- 3 Cited from Jeremy Dibble, *Stanford* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 34.

My father was for a long time convinced that no musician but a Church organist could have any social status at all. He was enlightened by a visit to Eton of Joachim, whose ambassadorial presence, perfect command of English and obviously profound general culture completely changed his ideas of what a musician might be.<sup>4</sup>

Joachim was an innovator who altered the line of demarcation between the public and the private performance of music in Europe as well as Britain. Before his time, the public went to the concert hall to hear orchestral works, but listened to salon pieces at home. Chamber works were confined to the music rooms of the connoisseurs: gentry and nobility. Unaccompanied pieces such as Bach's Partitas were relegated to the domain of student exercises. Before Joachim and his quartet performed, concert programmers such as the Chappell brothers, majority owners of St James's Hall, refused to believe that the public would pay to hear an unaccompanied violinist, or a foursome performing a programme consisting solely of sonatas and quartets.

Born in 1831 at Kitsee near what was then Pressburg in Hungary, now Bratislava in the Slovak Republic, Joachim was a child of six when he began to study with Stanislaus Serwaczynski, leader of the opera orchestra in Pesth. By the time he was ten, Joachim was studying with Joseph Böhm, Professor of Violin at the Vienna Conservatorium. The Vienna school of violin teaching had seen a laying on of hands from one outstanding player to another for a century before Joachim's arrival in 1841. Joseph Böhm (1795-1876) had played for Beethoven and Schubert and succeeded the founder as leader of Schuppanzigh's quartet. A pupil of Jacques Rode, for whom Beethoven composed his G major Sonata Op. 96, Böhm's fifty-year career at the Conservatorium produced two generations of distinguished violinists whose tours of Britain would establish them as heroic figures in the eyes and ears of British audiences.

In 1843 Joachim left the old Conservatorium in Vienna for the new Conservatorium established in Leipzig that year. Felix Mendelssohn and his colleagues Ferdinand David and Robert Hauptmann had been building the musical reputation of Leipzig to rival Vienna since Mendelssohn's arrival from Berlin to direct the Gewandhaus concerts in 1835. So successful were their efforts that the centre of gravity of Austro-German music-making had shifted from Vienna to Leipzig by the time of Mendelssohn's early death in 1847. Years later, the dream of studying there would preoccupy Elgar's boyhood. Although Joachim intended to enrol in the Conservatorium, Mendelssohn, as soon as he heard Joachim play, resolved to guide the boy's development privately. 'The Cherub no longer needs the training of the Conservatorium for his instrument', Mendelssohn declared, 'indeed no teacher of violin-playing is necessary for him at all...' Joachim's first public concert in Leipzig took place on August 18, 1843, when the 12-year-old violinist shared the programme with a 25-year-old pianist, the wife of Robert Schumann. The mutual devotion that developed between Joseph Joachim and Clara Schumann would last until the latter's death 53 years later.

Less than a year after Joachim's arrival in Leipzig, Mendelssohn brought his prodigy to London. Joachim gave his first British performance on 28 March 1844,

- 4 Mary Grierson, *Donald Francis Tovey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 4-5.

participating in a 'Miscellaneous Concert' at Drury Lane, sandwiched between two acts of Balfe's *Bohemian Girl*. British critics responded admiringly but with jokes juxtaposing the Bohemian girl and the Hungarian boy. Two months later their admiration turned deeply serious when Joachim on his official debut astonished the audience with a performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto under Mendelssohn's baton. In time Joachim would come to speak of England as his second home. He was a long-established idol of British concert-going audiences by the time Edward Elgar was born in 1857.

Just as Joachim at twelve years old had worked to perfect his genius as a player, Elgar at the same age made use of the violin to incubate his own genius in a different direction. Since he was seven the boy had been taking lessons from Fred Spray, leader of almost every band in Worcester. But 1869 brought a revelation of what the violin could accomplish. It was Worcester's year to host the Three Choirs Festival and Elgar Bros. would be providing the parts for a performance of *Messiah*. William Elgar took his son along to the cathedral for a rehearsal of 'O thou that tellest'. Afterwards Edward begged his father for the loan of a violin and shut himself up in an attic with the violin part and the instrument for a fortnight of self-teaching. What would the boy have seen and heard in the cathedral that day that could explain his behaviour? Since the violins play in unison for 'O thou that tellest', young Edward would have seen the players arrayed on the platform bowing together in a single line – the firsts on the left, the seconds on the right, the leader in the centre next to the conductor. In the distance behind stretched the rest of the orchestral forces. What the child perceived was that the violin was the controlling instrument. Elgar's eagerness to learn the piece was not motivated by a desire to improve his playing; he was working out how to use the violin to control the orchestra.

Soon the boy's playing was good enough to enable him to join his father in the Worcester Glee Club's second violin section. But Edward's ambition was wider: he had begun to learn German with the hope of studying in Leipzig when he left Littleton House School in June 1872. Unhappily, there was no prospect of funds to pursue the pipedream, so the 15-year-old found himself obliged to set aside his longings for the Gewandhaus and accept the harsh reality of an apprenticeship to the Worcester solicitor William Allen. Basil Maine recounts how he was made to wash the office floors and submit to the bullying of a jealous assistant. He lived at home where life with his father was not easy. Rosa Burley opined that the 'deep-rooted and destructive sense of grievance from which he was to suffer throughout the rest of his life ... originated ... in the circumstances of his home life'.<sup>5</sup>

After a year's unwelcome apprenticeship, the violin came to Elgar's rescue. He said good-bye to Mr Allen's floors and eventually to his parents' board. For ten years until his marriage, he lived with his sisters' families, first the Graftons, then the Pipes, supporting himself chiefly on earnings from violin teaching and playing. While Elgar's takings from teaching were meagre, Joachim's was substantial. According to his biographer Andreas Moser, the burgers of Berlin established a new department of performance at the city's Königliche Hochschule für Musik in 1869

5 Rosa Burley and Frank C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar: the record of a friendship* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 81.

as a teaching facility for Joachim so that 'his extraordinary talent could be gained for the town at any price'.<sup>6</sup> Unhappily, the price Joachim paid was virtual oblivion as a composer.

Elgar's technique as a player improved to a point where he rose from the second violin section of the Worcester Philharmonic in 1875 to leader in 1879. This advance was due partly to his studies in London with Adolph Pollitzer (1832–1900). Pollitzer, another of Böhm's pupils who studied with the master at the same time as Joachim, came to London in 1851 to take up the post of leader at the Opera, where he stayed for ten years before being appointed violin professor at the London Academy of Music (the future Royal Academy) in 1861. Elgar took five lessons with him in the summer of 1877. Fig. 6 shows Elgar at the time – the only known image of the composer with his violin.

Pollitzer entreated the young man to return for more lessons, insisting that he found in Elgar's playing the makings of a very good violinist, though not a first-class performer. Elgar returned once or twice but then desisted, having decided his tone was inadequate after hearing a performance by another Joachim contemporary at the Vienna Conservatorium, August Wilhelmj. Now leader of the orchestra in Bayreuth, Wilhelmj (1845–1908) had come to London chiefly to help arrange a series of concerts at the Albert Hall to introduce English audiences (including Elgar) to Wagner's music. Wagner himself came to conduct, sharing the rostrum with his 34-year-old protégé Hans Richter. Yet another product of the Vienna Conservatorium, Richter (1843–1916) followed Joachim in making Britain his second home. The 'Richter concerts' he instituted in 1879 became a staple of London's musical calendar for many years. It was at one of these events, on 19 June 1899, that Richter introduced the world to Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations. Richter also directed the Birmingham Triennial Festival from 1885 to 1909. The star of the 1891 Birmingham Festival was none other than Joseph Joachim.

The section on Joachim in the memoirs of the outstanding violinist and teacher Carl Flesch tells us that 'Wilhelmj surpassed him in both beauty of sound and racy virtuosity'.<sup>7</sup> Would Elgar give up further study with Pollitzer because he could not

6 Andreas Moser, *Joseph Joachim. A Biography* (London: Philip Welby, 1901), 219.

7 Carl Flesch, *The Memoirs of Carl Flesch* (London: Rockliff, 1957), 32.



Fig. 6: Elgar with his violin, c. 1877

Mr. Edward Elgar,  
Violinist,  
(Pupil of Herr A. Pollitzer, London).  
BEGS to announce that he visits Malvern  
and neighbourhood to give Violin Lessons,  
advanced and elementary. Also Lessons in  
Accompaniment and Ensemble playing.  
For Terms, &c., address 4, Field Terrace,  
Worcester.

Fig. 7: Elgar's advertisement

the first Elgar work to be performed in London. It was also Pollitzer who introduced Elgar to Charles Volkert, London representative of the German publishing firm B. Schotts Söhne. In January 1885, Schott paid Elgar one shilling plus twenty gratis copies for all rights to his E-minor Romance, Op. 1. Three years later, Elgar accepted Volkert's offer of two guineas for *Salut d'Amour*. Fifteen years after his London lessons, Elgar published five of those violin study pieces as *Études caractéristiques* Op. 24, dedicating them to Adolph Pollitzer (Fig. 8 shows the autographed title-page).

Elgar succeeded in scraping together enough money for a brief visit to Leipzig in January 1883. There was more than music in it, for Helen Weaver and Edith Groveham were there. Helen was the girl next door who tended her father's shoe shop across the High Street from Elgar Bros. and spent her spare time making music. Helen and her friend Edith had been in Leipzig for six months by the time Edward arrived. Although it was Helen who caught Edward's heart, he could not help feeling flattered when Edith made it clear she was smitten by him. Edward gave Edith a copy of a popular romantic novel of the day, *The First Violin* by Jessie Fothergill. The heroine is an English girl of seventeen, Edith's age at the time, who travels to Germany where she finds herself compellingly attracted to an enigmatic young violinist. Elgar could have seen himself in the girl's first-blush description of her mysterious musician:

I saw a handsome – a very handsome face, quite different from any I had seen before: the startling eyes....which surveyed me with a look so keen, so cool, so bright which

match the player with the finest tone on the planet? Perhaps he was making excuses: he lacked the funds to continue. Those five lessons were sufficient to give Elgar what he needed: a means of differentiating himself from the numerous itinerant violin teachers competing for the trade in Malvern and its environs. Now he could advertise his status as a Pollitzer pupil; Fig. 7 shows the text of a notice he placed frequently in the *Malvern Advertiser*.

Pollitzer served a greater purpose following Elgar's decision to discontinue his studies. Impressed by a series of violin pieces Elgar had written in preparation for his lessons, Pollitzer offered to acquaint August Manns with the young man's compositions in the hope that Manns might air them in his Crystal Palace concerts. In 1883, Elgar sent Pollitzer the score of *Intermezzo: Sérénade Mauresque*. Manns showed no interest, but Pollitzer succeeded in persuading him to include *Sevillana* in an 1884 programme,

seemed to penetrate through and through me; while a slight smile curled the light moustache upwards—a general aspect which gave me the impression that he was not only a personage but a very great personage...8

The brilliant violinist turns out to be a nobleman fallen on hard times. After an agony of tribulations, he recovers his rightful Schloss on the banks of the Rhine to which he carries off the girl to enjoy the happiest of marriages. Clearly the 25-year-old Elgar's heroic ideal was a German violinist whose virtuosity derived from deep-rooted nobility – precisely the image Joseph Joachim projected at the time.

The Leipzig visit kindled in Elgar a lifelong love for the music of Robert Schumann. The programme of the first concert he heard on arrival included Schumann's *Overture, Scherzo and Finale* Op. 52. Afterward Elgar wrote out a piano transcription, now in the British Library. It was the nearest thing to a recording, allowing him to play over the work whenever he wished.

Elgar was not the only composer of genius held back by an impecunious youth. In 1853, an unknown, unregarded twenty-year-old Johannes Brahms had been

scraping a living as an accompanist to Eduard Reményi (1830-1898), another Hungarian alumnus of Böhm's Conservatorium. In May of that year Reményi and Brahms happened to be giving concerts in Hannover, where Reményi's fellow student Joseph Joachim was Konzertmeister to the King. Reményi took the opportunity to introduce Joachim to Brahms. The friendship that flowered immediately would transform the lives of both musicians. Until he met Joachim, Brahms had led a solitary life strapped in his North German reserve. Born and raised in Hamburg, Brahms composed in secret, calling himself 'Johannes Kreisler, junior' after the philosopher in E.T.A. Hoffmann's novel *Kater Murr*. Once only did the young man venture to seek an outside opinion by sending a selection of his compositions to Robert Schumann, in Hamburg on a concert tour. Schumann returned the papers with a curt

Fig. 8: Title page of Elgar's *Études caractéristiques*



8 Jessie Fothergill, *The First Violin* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1892), 29.

note declaring he had no time to look at them.

Shortly after his initial encounter with Joachim, Brahms's inability to bend cost him his means of earning a living. From Hannover, Reményi's next port of call was Weimar, where Liszt commanded a court of disciples grouped into what the maestro had proclaimed to be the New German School. Liszt immediately recognized a prospective recruit in Brahms, and welcomed him warmly. Brahms responded by making clear that he had no interest in the tenets of the New German School, and held scant regard for Liszt's compositions. Alleging that Brahms had insulted Liszt by falling asleep while the great man was playing one of his works, an indignant Reményi fired his accompanist on the spot. In desperation, Brahms wrote to Joachim for help. Joachim responded by inviting Brahms to visit him in Göttingen where he was spending the summer attending lectures at the local university. Joachim and his circle shared Brahms's disdain for Liszt's compositions. According to Ernest Newman, 'Schumann and Joachim were repelled by his attitude-striking and the too plentiful suggestions of flashiness and bombast in his music'.<sup>9</sup>

Joachim rightly judged that Brahms's escape from a forlorn past to a bright future could be accomplished with assistance from the Schumanns. So Joachim dispatched Brahms to Düsseldorf where Robert and Clara Schumann then lived. Smarting still from the slight in Hamburg, Brahms was reluctant. Eventually he laid aside his pride and arrived on the Schumanns' doorstep armed with an effusive letter of introduction from Joachim. This time Robert as well as Clara bade him play through a few of his pieces. What followed is the stuff of legend. The creative interplay that marked the Joachim-Brahms-Schumann friendship would provide a decisive contribution to the German Romantic style.

The intimate composing collaboration between Brahms and Joachim is seen in the manuscript score of Brahms's Violin Concerto. The margins are full of commentary in Joachim's hand; the cadenza is Joachim's. As a composer, 'Brahms regarded him as more gifted than himself', according to Carl Flesch. Joachim wrote three violin concertos, one of which – *Concerto in the Hungarian Style* – was hailed by contemporary critics as a work of genius. 'This work marks a climax in our literature' wrote Flesch; 'it is the most outstanding creation that a violinist has ever written for his own instrument'.<sup>10</sup> To Brahms's profound disappointment, Joachim's activities as a performer, teacher and socialite left him too little time to produce more than meteor-like moments of brilliance as a composer. Joachim's misfortune, wrote Brahms, was 'that he had not undergone the years of drudgery which alone can give command over the larger classical forms'.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the years were too kind to Joachim the performer. After Robert Schumann's death in 1856, Clara, Joachim and Brahms decades playing chamber music together in private and on tour, sometimes as duet performers, sometimes as soloists. Brahms never crossed the Channel, but Clara and Joseph frequently thrilled British audiences with their playing. For more than forty seasons from 1862, Joachim spent six weeks each year in London performing at the Saturday

9 Ernest Newman, *The Man Liszt* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1970), 2.

10 Flesch, *Memoirs*, 36.

11 Ibid.

and Monday Popular Concerts in St James's Hall. Elgar never forgot a Joachim-led performance of Schumann A minor Quartet at a 'Pops' concert on 10 March 1879. Hearing Clara Schumann play her husband's *Études symphoniques* at St James's Hall in February 1881 was another revelatory experience. Jerrold Northrop Moore of the incident: 'Here was a monument to a musician who had truly found a wife of sympathetic temperament'.<sup>12</sup> Clara Schumann's devotion is evident in this photograph (Fig. 9), showing her in widow's weeds 34 years after her husband's death.

Elgar was nearly 30 before he met Alice Roberts who became his own 'wife of sympathetic temperament' two years later. Joachim was the same age when he married the woman with whom he seemed fated to live happily ever after. Amalie Weiss was a well-known opera singer with a contralto voice Brahms found 'magical'. London audiences agreed, according to newspaper accounts of Frau Joachim's concerts given there in 1870 and 1878 – after which her husband obliged Amalie to retire. Unhappily, long periods away from his family gave birth within Joachim to a demon of doubt about his wife's fidelity; he was seized with the belief that their youngest child was not his daughter. When her husband's accusations of proved too hard to bear, Amalie turned to Brahms for support. Brahms wrote her a long letter bewailing 'the unhappy peculiarity with which Joachim torments

Fig. 9: Clara Schumann in 1890



Fig. 11: Rosa Burley's photo of Elgar at the Mount (1898)



12 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 91.

Fig. 10: Cover of the programme for the first London performance of Brahms's Double Concerto



CRYSTAL PALACE.  
PROGRAMME  
OF THE FIFTEENTH  
SATURDAY CONCERT  
(24th Annual Series),  
MARCH 15th, 1890.

VOCALIST :  
MISS ALICE WHITACRE.

VIOLIN :  
DR. JOSEPH JOACHIM.

VIOLONCELLO :  
MONSIEUR ERNEST GILLET.

THE  
CRYSTAL PALACE SATURDAY ORCHESTRA.  
CONDUCTOR—MR. AUGUST MANNS.

It is requested that all attending these Concerts will be seated before Three o'clock, in consideration of the comfort of those desirous of hearing the first piece; also that any one desirous of entering or leaving during the Concert will do so between the pieces.  
Numbered Stall for a Single Concert in Area or Gallery, Half-a-Crown; Unnumbered Seat in Area or Gallery, One Shilling—all exclusive of Admission to the Palace.  
N.B.—The number of Tickets issued for admission to the Concert Room will be limited to the number of Seats provided.  
HENSHAW RUSSELL, *Manager*.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



Plate 1: Gerontius panel (see p.5)

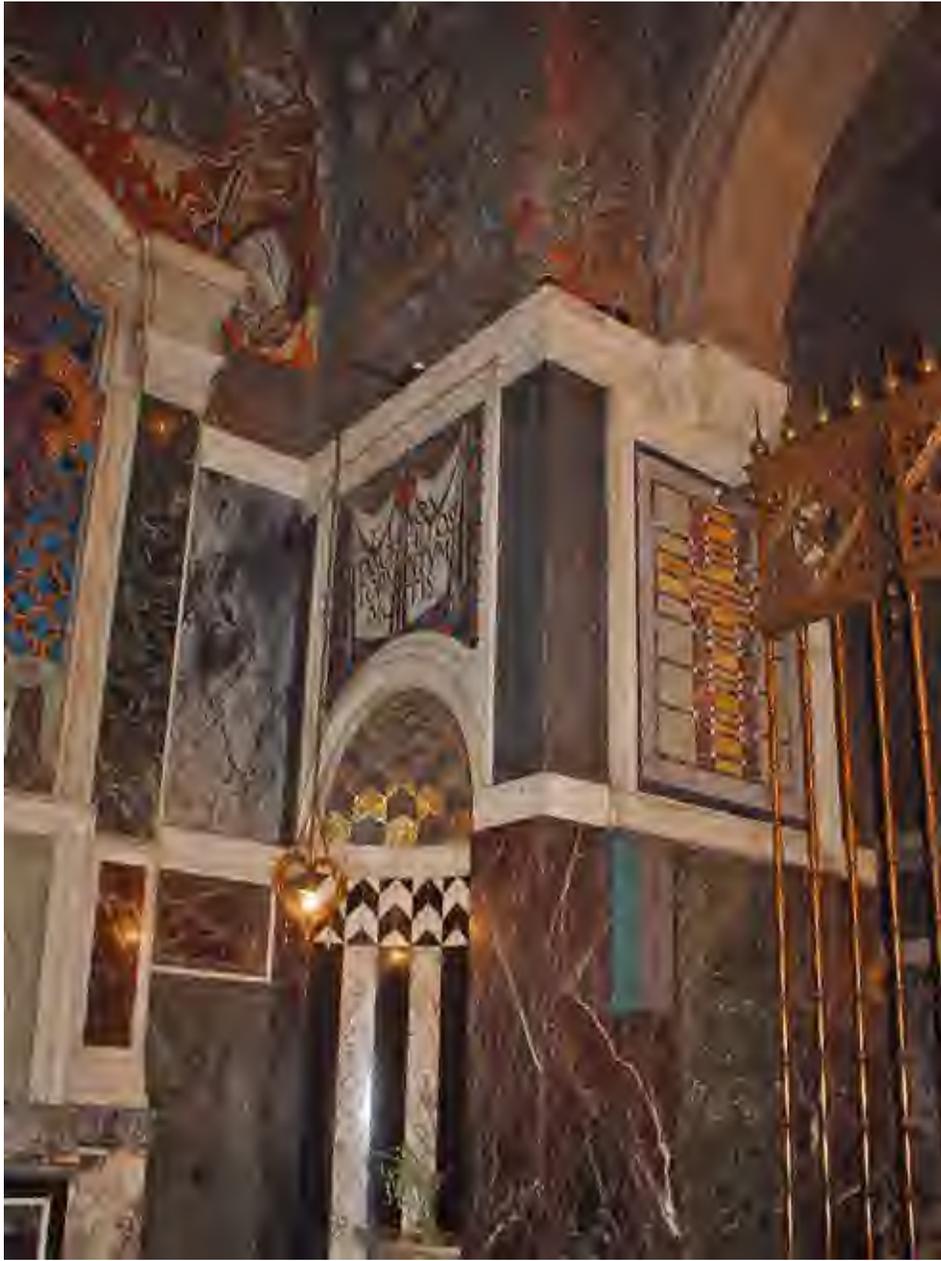


Plate 2: Gerontius panel (see p.5)



Plate 3: 'The Hut' from the footbridge to Monkey Island

Plate 4: 'The Hut', main entrance



Plate 5: The Coach House (now Aughton Cottage), lying between 'The Hut' and the Music Room (now demolished)

Plate 6: Sundial Cottage



Plate 7: 'The Hut' from the garden



Plate 8: Joseph Joachim. Portrait in oils by Alice Donken R.A., c. 1880

himself and others in such an inexcusable way'.<sup>13</sup> In 1884 Joachim shocked his friends and his public by openly declaring his allegations in the form of divorce proceedings. In court Amalie produced Brahms's letter in support of her innocence. Based partly on this evidence, Joachim lost his case and renounced his 30-year friendship with Brahms. When reconciliation came two years later, and Brahms composed his Double Concerto, his last orchestral work; Joachim gave its first British performance at Liverpool early in 1890 (Fig. 10). On 15 March Elgar heard him give the first London performance at the Crystal Palace.

When Brahms died in 1897, Elgar no longer needed anyone's intercession to bring his compositions to the attention of English concert-goers. *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* was given its first London performance at the Crystal Palace on 3 April, the day Brahms died in Vienna. The *Imperial March* Op. 32 was premiered there on 19 April. His growing reputation as a composer notwithstanding, Elgar continued to find himself obliged to live under the yoke of violin teaching. 'To teach the right pupils was a pleasure', he told his biographer R.J. Buckley, 'but teaching in general was to me like turning a grindstone with a dislocated shoulder'.<sup>14</sup> Among Elgar's 'right' pupils were two child prodigies: Averill Woodward, who went on to study in Dresden with Joachim's protégé Henri Petri, and a Malvern harpist's daughter called Marie Pauline Hall (1884-1948) whom Elgar taught as a 10-year old, while Alice rewarded her with chocolates. Twenty-two years later Marie Hall became the first violinist to record Elgar's Violin Concerto, conducted by the composer.

The 'teaching in general' Elgar so disliked occurred chiefly at The Mount, Rosa Burley's school for girls in Malvern, scene of Elgar's 13-year servitude as violin instructor (see Fig. 11). Liberation came in the spring of 1900. A few months later, when Cambridge University conferred an honorary degree on him, Elgar wrote to his sister Dot 'You must not think this is a 2½ thing ... it's a great thing: it has of late only been given to Joachim...and a few others'.<sup>15</sup>

Before 1900 old friends rarely saw Elgar without his violin; after 1900 they rarely saw him with it. New friends appeared unaware of his skills. Alice's diary tells us that Landon Ronald 'looked at him very doubtfully' when Elgar playfully picked up Max Mossel's violin during a charity concert of humorous music conducted by Ronald in October 1918; 'all were astonished at his playing', she records. The instrument had long since served purposes no longer required.

Joachim's beloved colleagues – Mendelssohn, Brahms, and the Schumanns – were gone by the time the legendary performer met the rising composer. Their host on that May 1905 weekend was that other great survivor, Edward Speyer (1837-1934), who outlived everyone. In old age he could relate vivid childhood memories of Mendelssohn, Spohr, and Mozart's son Carl Thomas. Born and brought up in Germany, Speyer prospered in London's banking community, became a British

13 Karl Geiringer, *Brahms His Life and Work* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1982), 143.

14 Robert J. Buckley, *Sir Edward Elgar* (London: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1905), 43.

15 Letter dated October 17, 1900, quoted in Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 337.



Fig. 12: Joachim in 1895

Fig. 13: The Elgars at Ridgehurst in 1902

subject, and came to live permanently in Hertfordshire with his second wife Antonia (1857-1939), the daughter of Hubert Kufferath, a pupil of Mendelssohn who performed and taught in Brussels. Speyer received regular visits from the friends of his youth in Leipzig, Joachim and Clara Schumann. They came to know and love his children, and Antonia, whose soprano voice won their admiration by her interpretation of songs by Schumann and Brahms, as well as 'Ich hab im Traum geweinet' by Joachim himself.

One of Antonia's girlhood friends happened to be Alice Roberts. Antonia and Alice got to know each other well as teenagers in the 1860s, when Alice came to Brussels to study piano with Professor Kufferath. Thirty-five years later, Alice invited her old friend, together with Antonia's husband, to the 1901 Leeds Festival where Elgar conducted an early performance of his Variations ('Enigma'). Friendship between the Speyers and the Elgars grew quickly. They met on 8 October, and Edward and Alice were houseguests at Ridgehurst on November 1. Elgar would take his place among the composers of songs for which Antonia Speyer was the chosen interpreter by dedicating 'Speak, Music' to her. From 1901 onward visits to château Speyer were regular occurrences, sometimes with momentous results. Here we see Edward and Alice promenading across a Ridgehurst veranda on 7 December 1902 (Fig. 13), the day Elgar's extemporizing on the piano produced the Christ-the-man-of-sorrows theme for *The Apostles*. Atop the photo, Elgar has written 'wife and pipe

worship'.<sup>16</sup>

Two events dominated London's 1904 musical season: the Elgar Festival in March and the Joachim Jubilee concert in May. The press and the public were united in their view of the Festival as 'an unexampled triumph' and their praise for Elgar as 'the man of the hour in the musical world'. A fortnight after the Festival ended, the Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, confirmed the public's esteem by proposing that Elgar's name be included in the King's forthcoming birthday honours list. At the same time Balfour honoured Joachim by chairing a committee that would organize a gala event to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his first appearance in London. The committee persuaded 500 subscribers to meet the cost of a presentation portrait by John Singer Sargent (Fig. 15). At the time Sargent had announced an intention to give up portrait painting, but he made an exception, declaring 'Well, if it's Joachim I must do it'. The composition draws attention to the fingers of Joachim's bowing hand.

The celebration took the form of a concert at Queen's Hall, for which the committee entreated Joachim to play Beethoven's Violin Concerto, the work with which he had thrilled his London audience on his debut six decades previously. Feeling the effects of age, Joachim protested he no longer played large difficult works in public, and asked that the programme book simply say 'Violin solo...Dr. Joachim'. On the night he gave a flawless performance of the Beethoven Concerto under Henry Wood's direction. The great and the good brought forth their tributes. Printed in the programme book is this specially-written sonnet from the Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges.

Fig. 14: Joachim in 1902

Fig. 15: Sargent's portrait of Joachim



16 Edward Speyer, *My Life and Friends* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1937), 191.

Belov'd of all to whom the Muse is dear  
 Who hid her spirit of rapture from the Greek.  
 Whereby our art excelleth the antique,  
 Perfecting formal beauty to the ear;

Thou that has been in England many a year  
 The interpreter who left us nought to seek,  
 Making Beethoven's inmost passions speak,  
 Bringing the soul of great Sebastian near.

Their music liveth ever, and 'tis just  
 That thou, good Joachim—so high thy skill—  
 Rank, as thou shalt upon the heavenly hill,  
 Laurel'd with them; for thy ennobling trust  
 Remember'd when thy loving hand is still,  
 And ev'ry ear that heard thee stopt with dust.<sup>17</sup>



**Fig. 16: Fritz Kreisler**

As the Prime Minister presented him with his portrait, Sir Hubert Parry gave an address that defined Joseph Joachim's significance to Britain's musical life from 1844 to 1904:

At a time known only by hearsay to most of us, you first brought before an English audience the promise of that performance which has been eminent among two generations of men; ...which we still welcome as a continuing delight, and which will remain for many generations more as a tradition and example to be prized by those who are born too late for the happiness of immediate knowledge.

At that day the fine arts, and music among them, languished in this country. It was not understood that the function of art is not merely the recreation of a privileged class, but an integral element of national life. We have now learnt to know and to do better. Opportunities of becoming acquainted with the music of the great masters have multiplied ten fold, and the general competence of both execution and criticism has been raised beyond comparison. This great and salutary change which we have witnessed is largely due to your exertions...<sup>18</sup>

So Joachim was primarily responsible for bringing to Britain the Austro-German musical ferment that nourished the spirit of Elgar's generation. Thanks to that transference, the German Romantic style would decisively influence the music of Edward Elgar. Arthur Nikisch, reigning master of the Gewandhaus at the time, cited the linkage when a journalist from the *Musical Times* asked his opinion of Elgar's First Symphony. Nikisch replied:

I consider Elgar's symphony a masterpiece of the first order, one that will soon be justly ranked on the same level with the great symphonic models –Beethoven and Brahms ... When Brahms produced his first symphony, it was called 'Beethoven's tenth' because it followed on the lines of the nine great masterpieces of Beethoven. I will therefore call Elgar's symphony 'the fifth of Brahms'.<sup>19</sup>

17 Quoted in Speyer, *My Life and Friends*, 187.

18 Quoted in Fuller Maitland, *Joseph Joachim*, 21-23.

19 *The Musical Times*, July 1909, 446.

A year later, Elgar was at work on his Violin Concerto. As Brahms had relied on Joachim, so Elgar collaborated crucially with W.H. Reed, at the time an up-and-coming violinist at the LSO, as well as with Fritz Kreisler (Fig. 16). Reed's detailed account of the composing process makes clear that the only instrument Elgar touched was the piano. Elgar dedicated the work to Kreisler, who gave the first performance in November 1910. Kreisler's debut in Berlin in 1898 had created a sensation, though Flesch tells us that Joachim received the young man with 'icy politeness', having rightly suspected that Kreisler's technique would usher in a new and unwelcome era in violin playing.

Joachim's misgivings centred on Kreisler's differing approach to vibrato and the consequent change in bowing technique. Joachim opposed the use of uninterrupted vibrato. 'Never too much vibrato', he admonished his great-niece Jelly d'Arányi, 'that's circus music'.<sup>20</sup> But Kreisler, according to Flesch, 'driven by an irresistible inner urge, started a revolutionary change ... by vibrating not only continuously in cantilenas ... but even in technical passages'.<sup>21</sup> Kreisler's continuous vibrato required a different bowing style. In common with most violinists of his generation, Joachim held the elbow of his bowing arm low, gripping with fingers held close together at a right angle to the bow. Kreisler's bowing technique called for a raised elbow with a grip on the bow that tilts the hand towards the index finger. According to Joachim, Kreisler and other newcomers 'carried the use of the too high elbow, with the resultant stiffness of bowing to [a]...most mischievous extreme'.<sup>22</sup> Most modern violinists would agree with Kreisler that raising the elbow allows more powerful tone production and greater intensity generally. Joachim's 1903 recordings demonstrate his unique ability to match any player's power and intensity by making accents with the speed of his bow that never left the string.

Although Elgar dedicated the concerto to Kreisler, he never recorded the work with its dedicatee for reasons discussed in Michael Plant's recent article.<sup>23</sup> Kreisler recovered, but the experience left him with a permanent fear of the immortality of the microphone. Elgar conducted the work in the recording studio twice. Marie Hall (Fig. 17) recorded an abbreviated version in 1916; then in 1932 Yehudi Menuhin recorded the work in full.

**Fig. 17:  
 Inscribed photo of Marie Hall**



20 J. MacLeod, *The Sisters d'Aranyi*, (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1969), 48.

21 Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing*, Vol. 1, 40, cited in Robert Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99.

22 Joseph Joachim & Andreas Moser, *Violinschule*, Vol.1 (Berlin, 1905) 13-14.

23 This Journal, 15/1 (March 2007), 43-46.

By the time Joachim and Elgar met, the great performer's powers were beginning to fail. Regardless of the decline, Joachim could not refrain from public playing. In April 1907 August Jaeger wrote to Dora Penny describing his journey to Switzerland for tuberculosis treatment: 'I came via Munich, where I spent 3 days & heard the Joachim quartet – poor Joachim. He really can't any longer'.<sup>24</sup> When Joachim died four months later Carl Flesch spoke for musicians everywhere when he declared that Joachim 'was, and will always remain, one of the greatest figures, a landmark in the history of our art'.<sup>25</sup>

Would Joachim have left his mark as a composer of the first rank if his talent as a player had been no greater than that of Elgar? Would Elgar have realised his greatness as a composer if his capacity as a violinist had reached Joachim's level, allowing him to evade those 'years of drudgery' Brahms and Elgar found indispensable for large-form composing? In music we often equate creativity and composing. But Joachim's creative urges took him in numerous directions. Beethoven had been dead only fourteen years when young Joseph arrived in Vienna; his late quartets were virtually unheard and his Violin Concerto regarded as unplayable. Most of Schubert's chamber works remained unpublished, and Bach's works for the violin relegated to an undeserved oblivion. These were among the unconquered mountain peaks Joseph Joachim set out to climb. By the time of Elgar's boyhood, Joachim and others coming after him had reached those heights. Edward Elgar would seek other summits to scale.

### Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to the Elgar Birthplace Museum for so generously placing its research facilities at my disposal as well as for kind permission to illustrate my text with photographs of Elgar's letter to May Grafton dated May 15, 1905, together with its enclosure. My gratitude is also due to the following Elgarians who kindly took the time and trouble to read and comment on what I had to say: Frank Beck, Martin Bird, Michael Kennedy, David Lloyd-Jones, Jerrold Northrop Moore, and Tully Potter.

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24 Dora Powell, *Memories of a Variation* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 96.

25 Flesch, *Memoirs*, 37-38.

## The BBC and the Elgar Centenary

### Geoffrey Hodgkins

It is a truism that a composer's reputation is often at a low ebb around the time of the centenary of his birth. In Elgar's case it was probably so in much of the musical establishment and academia, certainly enough for Basil Maine to fear that the composer's place in musical history may be as 'a one-work man' (the *Introduction and Allegro*). It is also true that the revival of interest in Elgar in the 1960s can be largely attributed to the showing of Ken Russell's 'Monitor' film (1962), and by the extraordinary impact made in the musical world by the teenage Jacqueline du Pré and her passionate commitment to the Cello Concerto.

The lack of interest in Elgar was picked up by Clive Barnes in the *Daily Express* on 30 May 1957: 'To the shame of British music, Elgar's centenary is being allowed to pass with no great festival of his work. Instead we are being pushed off with a few scattered celebrations...' Yet in the summer of 1957 the BBC celebrated the centenary in some style, not on television (perhaps too much to hope for, given the difficulties at the time in screening live concerts), but certainly on the radio. The first programme to draw the attention of the listening public to the centenary was a magazine programme, entitled 'The Fifteenth Variation'. Broadcast on the Home Service at 9.15 p.m. on Sunday 12 May and lasting an hour, it consisted of recollections of Elgar by fifteen friends, colleagues and family members. It was introduced by Alec Robertson, who had interviewed some of the contributors (others had simply made a recorded tribute).

The real celebrations began during the week beginning 26 May. On that day (again a Sunday) Ian Parrott spoke on 'Elgar's *The Kingdom* and *The Apostles*' in the weekly 'Music Magazine' programme at 10.30 a.m. on the Home Service. The following evening at 7.00 the 'Music to Remember' programme was an all-Elgar concert, given by the Southern Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Herbert Menges, and featuring the contralto Norma Procter (then at the peak of her fame). Introduced by Sir Steuart Wilson and given before an invited audience in the Brighton Dome, the programme consisted of *Pomp & Circumstance* March no 5; 'Music' (unspecified) from *The Wand of Youth*; four (again unspecified) of the *Sea Pictures*; and the overture *Cockaigne*.

On Wednesday 29 May at 7.45 came the first major concert, broadcast on the Home Service – then the BBC's flagship programme (the Third Programme had a much smaller audience).<sup>1</sup> It consisted of a performance of *The Kingdom*, given

1 The Third Programme, devoted to serious culture, only broadcast in the evenings. It

by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Croydon Philharmonic Society (chorus-master Alan Kirby), conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. The soloists were Heather Harper, Helen Watts, William Herbert, and Gordon Clinton. The 'Nine O'Clock News' was broadcast in the interval (presumably between Parts III & IV).

*The Kingdom* had fallen into neglect, and this point was made by many reviewers. John Warrack wrote in *The Daily Telegraph*: 'To many younger concertgoers it must have been a rarity, even a novelty'. Charles Reid in the *News Chronicle* spoke of 'many empty seats' in the Festival Hall. Describing *The Kingdom* as 'the mildest of the great Elgar oratorios', Reid complained that for the opening concert '...surely a more stimulating choice could have been made'. In the *Manchester Guardian*, Neville Cardus described the work as 'unjustly belittled': 'In spite of much lowness of pulse and lowness of spirits there are passages in it where Elgar is at his greatest, simplest, and most technically commanding. Unlike Haydn, Elgar does not praise God with a cheerful heart. There is the flavour of the pew and the lugubrious white choker in much of this unequal score'. The Prelude was '...the work of a composer tired and written out'; the 'New Faith' theme '...banal in its rhythm and triplet sequence; none the less it has the power to get round the head into the heart', adding modestly, 'which, I suppose, is a confession which only a mature critic would care to make'. Cardus concluded: 'Elgar was great enough a man not to have to depend utterly on the artist in him; he was not afraid of the obvious musical sentence; for having always something in his mind and heart, he had no need to conceal, by excessive technical elaboration, the fact that he had nothing to say at all'.

*The Times* was more positive, calling the concert 'a remarkably satisfying performance', and giving particular praise to the conductor: 'Sir Adrian Boult sees more in this oratorio than does practically any other conductor, and it was altogether to the good that he should have been in charge... He got every sparkle of light from the score and all the warmth and fervour that one imagined the music to possess, but had seldom heard fully expressed'. Boult had known *The Kingdom* for over fifty years, having attended one of the early London performances. It is well-known that he preferred it to *Gerontius*, and in 1969 made the first recording of it in honour of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

\* \* \*

Two days later, on 31 May, and this time on the Third Programme at 6.00 pm, Boult again conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a concert that included the Funeral March from *Grania & Diarmid* (this concert was repeated the following evening at 8.00 p.m.).

*Radio Times* for the following week contained a full-page article by Basil Maine, then arguably the leading Elgar scholar, entitled 'Passing on the Secret of Elgar', in which he 'considers the impact of Elgar on present-day audiences' (the article is reproduced below by permission). Maine saw hope in the recently-published biographies by Percy Young and the young Diana McVeagh, the first substantial

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later mutated into the music programme and the present-day Radio 3. The Home Service (now Radio 4) then carried concerts routinely, in the middle of the day and occasionally in the evening.

works on the composer since the Second World War: 'The fact that these writers of a later generation have been drawn to give serious study to Elgar's aesthetic, his fantasy, his "voice", helps to explain why those of a still later time, born perhaps during the last war or just before, are also being induced in increasing numbers to travel and discover with Elgar'.

The Centenary itself, on Sunday 2 June, began its celebration at 9.10 a.m. on the Light Programme, in 'Home for the Day' (the 'Sunday supplement' to 'Woman's Hour', which was broadcast daily during the week). In it, Dora Powell spoke of her memories of Elgar. At 10.30 a.m. in 'Music Magazine', A.E.F. Dickinson spoke on 'Elgar's handling of structure'. Then, at 3.00 p.m. on the Home Service, *The Dream of Gerontius* was broadcast from the Free Trade Hall, Manchester. Sir John Barbirolli conducted the Hallé Orchestra and Chorus and the soloists were Constance Shacklock, Ronald Dowd and Marian Nowakowski.

Barbirolli walked on with a stick and had to be assisted to and from the rostrum, following a fall from the platform during a recording session at the Free Trade Hall, when he tripped over a recording cable and chipped a vertebra. He was in considerable pain during the performance, but as Michael Kennedy wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* '...by its ovation the audience recognised not only his mastery of the music but also his admirable determination'. Kennedy called it '...a performance worthy of the occasion; and there was a full hall, despite the temptation of a beautiful summer afternoon outside, to show, as the conductor said in a short speech at the end, that "Manchester knows how to honour great men"'. The part of *Gerontius* was sung, for the first time in Manchester, by Ronald Dowd, and his interpretation met with general approval. Dowd, along with Richard Lewis, was generally Barbirolli's preferred choice in this role.

In the evening of the Centenary at 7.45 – again on the Home Service – was broadcast a 40-minute service live from Worcester Cathedral, entitled 'The Spirit of the Lord'. The service was conducted by the Dean, the Ven. A.P. Shepherd, and the preacher was the Bishop of Worcester, the Rt Rev. L.M. Charles-Edwards, who spoke about the spiritual value of Elgar's music and its appeal to the ordinary man as well as to the musician. The proceedings began with the first movement of the Organ Sonata, and the Bidding Prayer was followed by the choir singing 'The Spirit of the Lord' from *The Apostles*. After the lesson (Isaiah 12, vv.2-9), 'Nimrod' was played; and after the Address, the Prayers, and the final Grace, Norma Proctor sang the 'Angel's Farewell' from *Gerontius*. The choir was the Worcester Festival Choral Society accompanied by the BBC Midland Orchestra. David Willcocks, the Cathedral organist, conducted and played the organ, but for him and Edgar Day (the other organist in the service) it was one of the last appearances on such an occasion: Day retired after almost fifty years as assistant organist at the Cathedral, while Willcocks moved on to King's College, Cambridge.

Finally, on the Third Programme at 10.25 pm the Aeolian Quartet played Elgar's String Quartet.

On the following Tuesday, 4 June, the BBC West of England Light Orchestra conducted by Arthur Anton played 'Dorabella' from the *Enigma* Variations in a 'Home to Music' programme on the Home Service at 6.45 p.m.. Another major concert was broadcast on the Home Service at 7.30 the following evening, again

from Worcester Cathedral. Called 'The Centenary Concert', it featured the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent. The programme began with the Prelude to *The Kingdom* – possibly a late addition as it was not mentioned in *Radio Times*. It was followed by the Cello Concerto, played by James Whitehead. In the *Telegraph* Michael Kennedy wrote: 'After an initial spell of uncertain intonation he gave a deeply felt and accomplished performance'. The concert ended with the First Symphony. 'Hearing [it] in these surroundings it is impossible to forget that Elgar "took it from the air" of his beloved Worcestershire', Kennedy wrote. 'Sargent unfolded its panoply with a sure touch ... The great work, particularly the slow movement, was presented *con amore*, its wonders as inexhaustible as ever'.

On 6 June, at 7.15 on the Home Service, 'The Thursday Concert' was broadcast from Worcester Guildhall before an invited audience. The Element Quartet, with Tom Bromley (piano) gave a performance of the Piano Quintet; and the BBC Midland Singers sang *Weary Wind of the West*, *My Love dwelt in a Northern Land*, *Feasting I watch*, and *The Snow*, this last with its original accompaniment for two violins and piano. Sargent again conducted the BBC Orchestra on Friday 7 June at 6.00 p.m. on the Third Programme. The concert began with the Prelude from Wagner's *Parsifal*, followed by the Cello Concerto, with Whitehead again the soloist, and *Falstaff*. This last work was broadcast again the following evening, but the first half of the concert was a different programme. On Sunday 9 June, the 'Music Magazine' programme featured Elgar for the third week running, when Diana McVeagh spoke to the title 'Elgar Today'.

The final major concert to celebrate the Elgar Centenary took place on Wednesday 12 June, broadcast on the Home Service from the Royal Festival Hall at 7.45 p.m.. Sargent conducted the BBC Chorus, the BBC Choral Society and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a performance of *The Apostles*, thus completing the three great oratorios conducted by the trio of great Elgar interpreters. The soloists were Joan Hammond, Marjorie Thomas, William Herbert, John Cameron, Owen Brannigan, and Richard Standen. Once again the News separated Parts I & III.

Several critics pointed out that the order of the two biblical oratorios was reversed. Noel Goodwin in the *Daily Express* complained: 'Elgar expressly wished that his two noble oratorios ... should be given on consecutive nights. The BBC, however, decided to perform them in reverse order and a fortnight apart. Thus the overwhelming effect of hearing them close together was lost. Besides, there were not many of last night's performers who musically enriched Elgar's setting ... It was a 'somewhere near it' performance. Chief offenders were among the six soloists' (he identified Marjorie Thomas as the exception). In the *Kensington News* criticism again centred on the soloists, excepting both Thomas and Richard Standen, who sang the part of Jesus. However, the *Times* called it 'a performance of much beauty', although it was strongly critical of much of the composition, especially the final choruses of both parts. 'It was the merit of this performance that most of these infelicities were toned down, so that what can and often does sound like brass remained golden'.

On 22 June the Roman Catholic journal *The Tablet* was also critical. 'The concerts celebrating the centenary of Elgar's birth were a disappointment; they were straddled over several weeks, so that their significance was diminished, and

no studied effort appeared to have been made to present Elgar's music with what Miss Rosemary Hughes describes perfectly as its "kaleidoscopic contradictions". Two of the longest works, *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, which are thematically bound together in that order, were presented in reverse order at an interval of a fortnight; they were given what at best I can only call routine performances which lacked any sense of occasion'. The writer, Madeau Stewart, told of how he first heard *Gerontius* in 1941 at the Queen's Hall on the night before it was bombed, and of the overwhelming effect it made on him. 'How many people will be able to say that in a few days' time about the special performances of *The Kingdom* and *The Apostles* at the Royal Festival Hall? My impression is that standards of performance of oratorio in this country have gone down, particularly among the soloists, and that this is cause for serious concern'.

There was still more Elgar to come. On Saturday 15 June, at 10.20 p.m. on the Third Programme, Alan Loveday and Leonard Cassini performed the Violin Sonata. The following evening at 10.00 p.m. on the Home Service came more part-songs, given by the Stock Exchange Male Voice Choir, conducted by J Murray Whall. The programme consisted of the five *Greek Anthology* songs, *The Wanderer*, *The Herald*, and *Zut! Zut! Zut!*. Finally, on Wednesday 19 June the BBC Northern Orchestra under Lawrence Leonard played *In the South*.

It is interesting to note the major works which were *not* broadcast during this time – the Violin Concerto, the Second Symphony, and most surprising of all, the Variations! Also, given Maine's comments about *Introduction and Allegro* and the 'one-work composer', neither that work nor the *Serenade for Strings* was given. It should also be noted that during this period there was a Light Programme Music Festival being broadcast every Saturday evening for six weeks, but that these programmes contained absolutely no Elgar, even though pieces like *Salut d'Amour* and the two *Chansons* were still very popular.

Nevertheless, given the reputation of Elgar's music at the time, the BBC's coverage of the Centenary was extremely generous. As already mentioned, the two great Biblical oratorios were rarely heard at the time – even at the Three Choirs *The Apostles* had only been sung twice since the war, and was not to be given there again for another sixteen years, while *The Kingdom* had not been performed there since 1951. It is possible that the reversal of the order of performance, and the distance in time between the concerts, could have been due to the availability of the performers rather than a desire to space them out.

John Knowles, in his *Elgar's Interpreters on Record* (Thames, 1985) calls the 1950s 'lean and unadventurous years' for recordings of Elgar's works, and so the BBC's admirable commemoration of the Elgar Centenary must have been a welcome encouragement for lovers of his music – perhaps a small glimmer of hope for better things to come.

## Passing on the Secret of Elgar<sup>2</sup>

**Basil Maine**

Let me at once confess to a certain uneasiness about the Elgar Centenary. These celebrations have a way of inducing subsequent anti-climax and neglect, however temporary. No professional critic living in London through the Beethoven Centenary year, 1927, would welcome that intense, over-concentrated experience again. And with Elgar, there is not the same extensive choice as with Beethoven.<sup>3</sup>

I am, however, persuaded that those who have chosen the BBC's programmes for the celebration of Edward Elgar's birth on June 2, 1857, have been fully alive to the dangers. There is also this to be considered: as we were once again made aware on the last night of the 1956 Proms, a new generation is storming the concert-hall doors. Not so long ago, I was attending a Malcolm Sargent-BBC Symphony Concert in the provinces. We heard a remarkably fresh account of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, a performance which derived much of its compelling quality, I felt, from the wonderment and absorbed attention of the hundreds of young people present.

Many more of this new audience will certainly be drawn to the various centenary concerts of Elgar's music which the BBC and other organisations will be giving during the coming weeks in London and the provinces. One happily devised occasion is the Centenary Concert in Worcester Cathedral on Wednesday; another is the programme of chamber music and part-songs on Thursday in the room where Elgar was made a freeman of Worcester, near which he was born. That city, with the surrounding countryside, was always pulling at his heart-strings wherever for the time being he happened to be living. His last years were spent there and he was buried not many miles away at Little Malvern.

The biographical facts are available to any of the younger listeners who care to seek them out, and especially in the composer's letters, edited by Dr Young. Here let me remark that if Elgar was unlucky in the first forty years' struggle of his life, he has been decidedly lucky in two of his later commentators. In their studies, both Dr Young and Miss McVeagh have avoided the easy way of demeaning a reputation established in a preceding period, and, instead, have sought to understand something of the inner force which was disconcertingly but compellingly at work all through Elgar's early and maturer manhood, and then, when he was just over sixty, almost at the very time when his wife died, suddenly dwindled. The fact that these writers of a later generation have been drawn to give serious study to Elgar's aesthetic, his fantasy, his 'voice', helps to explain why those of a still later time, born perhaps during the last war or just before, are also being induced in increasing numbers to travel and discover with Elgar. To travel and discover: the symphonic works of

2 Reprinted by kind permission from *Radio Times*, 31 May 1957. The article was illustrated by a portrait of Elgar by Sir William Rothenstein dating from 1919. We are indebted to Geoffrey Hodgkins for tracing this article by Elgar's biographer and friend Basil Maine.

3 This reads poignantly, so soon after the Radio 3's Bach, Beethoven, and Chaikovsky/Stravinsky saturation weeks [ed.].

Elgar are journeys through an experience of English life. True, the life is past life, over and done with, as we say. But it is part of our history and a part, surely, that, as we ponder it, can furnish us with some of the things we most lack – elegance, for example, and eloquence; and a part of our history, incidentally, in which, if logic is to be trusted, every wearer of the Edwardian costume ought to find himself at home – suited at last, and no longer perversely.

We do well, I suggest, to bear the new audience in mind during these centenary performances. Among its numbers, let us hope, is a future Adrian Boult (fidelity in the highest), or Malcolm Sargent (to whom Elgar is an unending exploring), or John Barbiroli (who plays Elgar totally immersed, essentially saturated); or a future Sammons or Agnes Nicholls, or John Coates, or Beatrice Harrison. If we can, we must hand on the secret. That is easily said. An age of cut-throat speeding is as harmful to the sensibility of a conductor or interpreting soloist as to all other sensibilities. During the past few years I have heard Elgar readings so insensitive as to hint that the secret could easily be lost.

The other day I was saying this very thing to a young, intelligently musical friend, and he said, 'What do you mean – the Elgar secret?' I took *The Music Makers* and *The Kingdom* from the shelf and at the piano played the passage beginning 'But on one man's soul' from the first work, and, from the other, that effortless transition from the jangling chromatics accompanying the words 'and the patience' to the stillness and near-silence of the A flat chord. At such speechless moments we feel we are holding the trembling secret in our hands. No one who has not been aware of these intimations could possibly be an interpreter of Elgar. As an answer to my young friend's question, I could equally well have chosen an episode from *King Olaf* completed in 1896, and a landmark because of the self-assurance Elgar derived from it; or from the *Enigma Variations* (1899) or *Gerontius* (the vocal score of which Elgar finished a few days after his birthday in 1900) – those two works through which, astoundingly, the composer suddenly leapt to the plane of greatness, where he was met, recognised, and saluted by Richard Strauss. Or, by using the gramophone, I could have helped this musical young enquirer to know and recognise Elgar's voice, his 'sound', by singling out the clarinet's lament as Falstaff dies (a reflex to Brahms, possibly, but still Elgar's own), or the enrapturing sound of thrumming strings behind the solo instrument in the memory-laden cadenza of the Violin Concerto, the work which, when completed in the summer of 1910, was Elgar's full compensation for his failure to make the grade as a solo violinist in early days.

He used to tell me that some of his favourite haunts in the lovely Worcester and Hereford shires had 'got into' his music. Assuredly some open-air memory has been enshrined in that cadenza as well as in the slow movement of the same concerto; also, in some of the episodes of *Falstaff*, which, completed in 1913, is the apogee of his orchestral genius.

To help younger listeners to savour this Elgarian quality, however, is but one side of the problem of passing on the secret. We must be on guard against 'the legend'. Not least in the matter of the composer's personal religion, which, for the musical as such, ought to be sufficiently revealed in *Gerontius*, in the hushed communing of some pages, and the splendour of others in *The Apostles* ('a neglected work' was

Bernard Shaw's constant lament), and the more unified *The Kingdom*.

Then there is the patronising attitude of those who are averse to Elgar's art, an insinuating influence which, if not countered, may succeed in passing him on to posterity as a one-work man (*Introduction and Allegro*), as though he were another Mascagni, Balfe, or Walford Davies.

The reader, noting the skilful ordering of the BBC's Elgar observances, may deem these several fears of mine to be groundless. Even so, I am impelled to advise younger music-followers, after the centenary celebrations are completed, to space out their listening to Elgar's major works. It is better, even for ardent Elgarians, to feel the need of them than to risk a surfeit. And if, Squeers-like, we seem to be saying: 'Subdue your appetites, my dears', the welcome is no less warm which is extended to them and to all guests now gathering at Elgar's board.

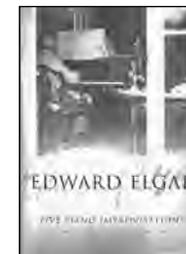
## REVIEWS OF MUSIC

### **Five Piano Improvisations, transcribed by Iain Farrington**

Notating improvisations has a long history. Works that reflect their improvisatory origins, often called Fantasia, survive from the Bachs (J.S. and C.P.E.), Mozart, and Beethoven. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of gifted improvisers producing sets of variations, not to mention fugues, on the spur of the moment; would that we had more from such masters of improvisation as Mendelssohn, Liszt, or Bruckner! The opening of Beethoven's Choral Fantasia Op. 80 was advertised at the first performance as an improvisation. Beethoven used no notation; what we cannot know, however, is to what extent he planned his 'improvisation' in advance.

What makes Elgar's improvisations exceptional is that they were not written down by the composer. They were, instead, 'notated' as recordings, all on 6 November 1929. The pieces Elgar improvised are not fantasias, nor fugues; nor are they variations, a form of improvisation reflected in the well-known origins of Elgar's Op. 36. They are more like those collections of short pieces that Brahms gathered under a single opus number, and called intermezzi or capriccios. But the peculiar constraint upon Elgar, who had to fit his improvisations onto one side of a disc, prohibited Brahms's freedom of design: the pieces all had to be roughly the same length, about four minutes (longer pieces wouldn't fit, shorter ones would appear miserly). Had Elgar wished to publish a set of piano pieces, moreover, he would probably not have set off by developing an idea of Rossini (No. 1), and he might have tried to avoid allusions to other work, not all his own (as with Wagner's Siegfried motive in No. 2, bars 104–5, and the allusion to Chopin's funeral march, which Elgar later orchestrated, at the start of No. 5).

Improvising for the gramophone, Elgar seems to have done what he normally did: pick up ideas from the air, and make them Elgarian. But other music is suspended in the available air. As David Owen Norris remarks in the notes to his recorded version of these improvisations,<sup>1</sup> the connection with the slow movement of Elgar's planned piano concerto means that No. 4 was not really a new piece at all, and the same is likely to be true of Nos. 2 and 3. No. 2 picks up an innocent idea from *The Fringes of the Fleet* and gives it a more richly extended treatment; No. 3 is so confident



London:  
Novello, 2006

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<sup>1</sup> David Owen Norris plays Elgar, vol. 1. Elgar Editions CD 002. In the last two pieces, however, Norris adds material that takes him outside the time-limit of a 78 rpm side.

in its main idea that it seems likely that this was a kind of ear-worm that Elgar wanted to get out of his system. The spontaneity of Elgar's improvisations results as much from his playing style, florid, impetuous, full of abrupt changes of tempo (like his orchestral conducting); the well rounded musical forms of the first four improvisations argue at least an element of advance planning.

The music under review is a conscientious and generally reliable transcription of Elgar's playing, representing a considerable labour on the part of Iain Farrington. It adds to the repertory, not overstocked, of piano music by Elgar, and will be welcomed by Elgarian pianists. That said, the pieces are surely not as Elgar would have left them, had he chosen to notate them himself. In relation to his own composition, they are like early developments at the keyboard before the notation stage. It follows that pianists using this edition need not take all the notation literally. A normal style of playing typical of Elgar's generation (and earlier, as is clear from early recordings) was to take left-hand notes a little ahead of the right hand, and to spread chords upwards, even when notated without any such indication. So prevalent were these practices that some pianists denied that they spread chords even though the acoustic evidence was against them. There is no sensible notation for the left-hand-first habit, and Farrington, rightly, has not attempted it. He has, however, diligently notated numerous spread chords. In No. 1, that means most of them, but Elgar spread even more than are marked, including some two-note chords. I conclude that perhaps fewer spreads needed to be notated. Elgar would surely have been surprised to see them written down that way. Players with a sense of period style will want to spread some chords, but how many should probably – and all the more in pieces called 'Improvisations' – be left to the individual, rather than prescribed.

Indeed, Farrington makes it clear that he doesn't want to prescribe every nuance. In his intelligent preface, he mentions that he opted not to notate Elgar's pedalling (if it were possible: to my ear, it is by no means always clear). Then there are the swirling middle-register arpeggios, especially in No. 3, that give the music such richness of texture. The arpeggios in the section from bar 30 are not susceptible to precise notation as played. But presumably if Elgar were to perform, for instance, *In Smyrna*, the subdivision of crotchets into three or four (from bar 22: simultaneously or, in the middle part, successively), he would not play every semiquaver, or every triplet quaver, exactly to the length notated – or the length that would be heard (horrid thought) if one fed the piece into a computer and played it back. Farrington has perforce to subdivide crotchets into three, four, five, six, and seven, but how he reached that result with notes of such speed I don't know (possibly by slowing the music down?). The problem is that what was done

spontaneously now *looks* calculated. But as he remarks in the preface, the best guide to performance is Elgar's playing; licence is desirable, and I hope Farrington would agree that Norris's liberal interpretation of this piece is entirely in the right spirit.

A few niggles. In No. 1 (bar 60) the left-hand A sharp against treble A natural is surely a wrong note from Elgar (though Norris dutifully plays it). Such false relations were well within Elgar's harmonic scope (as in No. 4), but they are expressive, and there is some resolution, whereas here the clash, momentarily attractive, goes nowhere. In the following bar, I can't hear, and Norris doesn't play, the upper notes in the left hand, though they are perfectly sensible in themselves. In No. 2 (bar 15), the lower part in the right hand, B natural should be marked between two A sharps. Elgar animates before the *Animato* marked in bar 31; it amounts to cutting bar 29 short. Clearly Elgar surged ahead here with no thought to eventual notation. In bar 64, Elgar slows down and there is clearly space for five beats in the bar (the first two, as here notated, lasting three; Norris's solution is to plunge ahead and ignore Elgar's extra beat, but a 5/4 bar would be a legitimate notation). Bar 106, last beat, the flat 7th (F natural) seems meaningless and isn't improved by Norris's emphasis; again, Elgar's modal touches usually lead somewhere, as in bar 108, but in bar 106 I think he meant to play F sharp. In No. 3, bars 39–40 sound to me as if Elgar is sustaining the treble line as Farrington notates it in bars 37–8 (of which 39–40 are a free sequence). Near the end of No. 5 (bar 57) I can't hear (which may be my fault) the left-hand tenor F; if it's an insertion (rhythmically it seems desirable), the note should probably be a D flat.

The first four pieces are admittedly repetitive, and in default of variation through instrumentation, might perhaps be pruned; curiously for improvisations, none reaches a catharsis by suspending the tempo for a cadenza, like *In Smyrna*. The fifth piece, however, is the most truly improvisatory. It lacks the conventional signs of a sense of direction, notably unity of key (it begins in D minor and ends in A flat: one could say the same of the finale of the First Symphony, but that happens within the context of the first three movements). And yet even as it stands – and even if we agree with Norris that Elgar had to round things off quickly because Gaisberg was signalling that time was running out – it is a noble elegy. We must be grateful to Iain Farrington for his labour which, like the Third Symphony, is also a demonstration, still needed in the wider world, that Elgar was not a completely spent force after the Cello Concerto. Certainly an important addition to any Elgarian music library.

Julian Rushton

## CD REVIEWS

### **Elgar's Interpreters on Record Volume 5 (3 CDs)**

Broadcasts from the Leech Collection at the British Library  
(1935-1950)



Elgar Editions  
EECD 003-5

I venture to suggest that when we come to the end of this anniversary year, this set will be seen as one of the most significant issues to have appeared. Historic recordings they may be, reissues they are not. These discs give us the opportunity to eavesdrop on performances given in the years immediately following the composer's death, and so may reasonably be construed as typical of the sort of performances he would have known in the latter part of his life.

What of their provenance? These recordings, preserved in the British Library, are due to one man, Kenneth Leech. Very unusually for his day, he had his own disc recorder, and so was able to capture extracts from broadcasts from his wireless set. As with commercial recordings of the period, there is a time limitation imposed by the size of the disc; but the difference is that with these performances there is no way anyone can even begin to say that this had any impact on the performance. The music making is continuous: it is just that for us, the doors of the concert hall open for five minutes, close and then reopen a few moments later when the disc has been changed. There are inevitably the limitations of both dynamic and frequency range that are inherent with AM radio signals. There are some whistles, and there are moments when the wireless discriminator fails, allowing some breakthrough of other stations.

So it is important to listen to these recordings with the right expectations. They are not complete performances: they are extracts. They are like old newsreels: it is no use expecting widescreen and colour. I have had opportunity to hear some of the originals and can report that the remastering and preparation of the CDs has been remarkably skilful and successful. There is quite a lot of surface noise at times, often at the beginning of a new side; and at times the sound is more like sepia than black-and-white. But it is remarkable how quickly the ear adjusts, allowing full concentration on the music. Inevitably there is audience noise, probably in some cases indicative of serious chest complaints, but then these trips to the concert hall do predate the availability of antibiotics!

Thus we are enabled to peep into the past in a way previously unimaginable. Of course we can't hear things in the same way as did the original audience. For them, this was comparatively

new music. We have heard it in many different performances since then, and inevitably when there is something not quite audible in these recordings, our brains fill the gap.

The first disc gives us just over 70 minutes of a Manchester performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* conducted in 1935 by Malcolm Sargent with Heddle Nash, Astra Desmond and Keith Falkner, predating by a decade the first complete recording. This is a dynamic and exciting account, especially poignant remembering that Desmond had sung in the memorial service in Worcester Cathedral just a year before. It is interesting to compare this with extracts from a 1936 *Gerontius* performance on the third disc. This also features Nash, but with Adrian Boult on the rostrum. Boult is more measured than Sargent, bringing richness and solemnity, and releasing great passion in Nash's singing. There is also a chance to hear Nash in an extract from *King Olaf*, which may not have the visceral excitement of Tudor Davies's old disc, but is very beautiful and sensitive.

Disc 2 takes us into the Shire Hall in Hereford in 1938 for *Caractacus*, conducted by Elgar's long-standing friend, the Cathedral organist, Percy Hull. There is a wonderfully natural ebb and flow in the music-making. Here is a conductor who really knew this music and how it should go. With beautifully controlled and naturally sounding rubato and appropriate touches of portamento, this conjures up a world long gone. Isobel Baillie, whose only commercial Elgar recording was her much loved disc of 'The sun goeth down', sings beautifully. She displays a real sensitivity to words, and it is easy to see why she was so much admired. There is some fine *piano* singing from the choir and, remarkably, even in the loudest passages the sound doesn't break up. The lead into the Sword Song is very impressive making it particularly sad that we don't have Hull's reading of the epilogue. The Sword Song itself is a touch disappointing. The voice seems to retreat somehow, and the orchestra is not as incisive as in the celebrated Dawson/Barbirolli recording made ten years earlier. There is a big chunk missing here. Perhaps Mr Leech had a copy of the Dawson record and so didn't want to waste one of his precious blanks. It's a pity too that we don't have much of 'O'er arched by leaves', for what is here is very good. What we do have is most of the first half of this big work; and, as Jerrold Northrop Moore comments in the booklet, 'As you listen, try and extend imagination to what Hull's broadcast must have made of the rest. Be thankful, with me, for this revelation-in-half.'

I first heard Boult's 1938 performance of *the Spirit of England* a few years ago and was bowled over by it. It takes a few minutes to get into its stride but then it carries all before it. There is grandeur, solemnity, and power. At a time when the shadow of

war was again hanging over the country, there can't have been a single performer who had not lost a relative or friend in the Great War, and for whom Binyon's words coupled to Elgar's music held deep poignancy. Even in 2007, this music still seems to be underestimated, but heard in a performance of this quality, it emerges as one of Elgar's finest scores. For me, this (albeit incomplete) performance is worth the cost of the whole box.

As would be hoped from an issue by Elgar Editions, the documentation is excellent. There are full details of exactly which parts of the music are included, together with information about the original broadcasts. Andrew Neill provides an introduction to the set. Christopher Kent writes about Kenneth Leech, Alan Blyth about the performances and the performers. Jerrold Northrop Moore offers a personal and very enthusiastic response to the *Caractacus* recording. This is a most adventurous set and we should be grateful to those who have had the foresight and courage to go ahead with the project. I trust this will be reflected in the sales figures.

John Knowles

#### **Great is the Lord: Elgar choral music**

Choir of Westminster Abbey

Robert Quinney (organ)

conducted by James O'Donnell

The coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II took place in Westminster Abbey on 2 June 1953. The date was not devoid of Elgarian significance, but if the Order of Service tells the whole story, not a note of Elgar's music was heard on that occasion, and only Walton's *Orb & Sceptre*, the successor of his *Crown Imperial*, kept its spirit alive. The making of an all-Elgar CD by the Abbey choir is not a particularly remarkable *phenomenon*, not nowadays, but we need from time to time to remind ourselves of the distance that musical taste has travelled. I hasten to say that the CD is remarkably fine. The selection is enclosed by the two psalm-settings, *Great is the Lord*, Op.67 and *Give unto the Lord*, Op.74; and mid-way between is the *Te Deum and Benedictus*, Op.34. The other items comprise a trio of works with regal connections (*They are at rest*, the motet commissioned by Walter Parratt for the anniversary of Queen Victoria's death; *O hearken thou*, Op.64; and the *Queen Alexandra Memorial Ode*, a Masfield setting written in 1932 for the unveiling of the memorial; some numbers from the Worcester 'prentice' years (the 1880 setting of *O salutaris hostia*, *Ecce sacerdos magnus*, *Ave verum corpus*, Op.2, No.1, and *Ave Maria*, Op.2, No.2), and 'The Spirit of the Lord', from *The Apostles*.

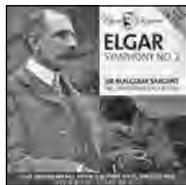


Hyperion  
CDA675943

The standard is very high. Diction, ensemble, tuning and attention to dynamics (and to detail generally) are all impeccable, and James O'Donnell presides over his finely drilled forces in a manner that reveals a thorough acquaintance with this music, and suggests a great admiration for it: those now-retired cathedral organists responsible for bringing it out of the shadows (one thinks especially of Christopher Robinson and Harry Bramma) will I am sure be delighted that a new generation has it so beautifully in hand. Elgar's organ accompaniments are notoriously ungrateful, but the difficulties crumple before the virtuosity of Robert Quinney, whose playing is a masterpiece of deft synchronization and sensitivity. A major factor in the success of this recording is undoubtedly the Abbey organ, which continues to be the great engine fashioned by Harrison & Harrison in 1936-7. Its tonal scheme is very close to Elgar's thinking, and its impressive array of colours is brilliantly demonstrated: one is bound to single out the finely engineered strings, heard in *The Spirit of the Lord*, and the noble reeds of the Solo and Pedal organs, used to splendid effect in the psalm-settings. Although an orchestral accompaniment would of course be subtler, the Abbey organ brings us as near to that subtlety as we are likely to get, and the orchestra has nothing entirely comparable with the dark grandeur of the Double Ophicleide's DDDD at the end of *Great is the Lord*.

Lewis Foreman's liner notes are characteristically helpful and workmanlike, but I must take him gently to task for stating that 1880 was the year in which Elgar succeeded his father at St George's, Worcester. It was 1885, as Alderman Leicester's history of the church confirms. Very warmly recommended.

Relf Clark



**Symphony no 2 in E flat**  
BBC Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent

BBC MM 280.

When Sargent conducted Elgar's Second Symphony in Sydney in 1946, Neville Cardus in the *Sydney Morning Herald* called it: '...a noble, strong and deeply moving interpretation. Dr Sargent rose to the height of his theme. I have never heard him conduct anything so eloquently and simply ... Here was truly interpretative art. As an Englishman who heard the first of all performances of this work thirty-four years ago, I confess to having listened last night with fresh ears and a quickened appreciation'.

The disc under review is from a broadcast in the Colston Hall, Bristol on 29 January 1964. When I saw the wintry date (of a

live recording with audience) I feared the worst, and indeed the coughing level reaches consumptive proportions at times in the pauses between movements. There are one or two occasional coughers during the music but they only momentarily annoy. The sound generally is rather boxy, but the recording wears its years well, and there is good deal of detail to be heard which is obscured in studio recordings. The brass dominate in the *tuttis*, which makes for exciting listening in the very loud passages; for example, the semiquaver triplets in the trumpets after fig. 56 (first movement) are exceptionally clearly enunciated, and the first trumpet relishes his top B at fig. 149 in the finale. There are two horrible errors, however: a split note on the horns just before fig. 42, and the third trombone holds on to the quaver at the hiatus in the second bar of fig. 65 (8 bars before the end of the first movement) after everyone else has stopped playing – in the player's defence it is marked 'ten[uto]'.

Having said all that, this is a remarkably fine account. Sargent's knowledge and love of the work shines through, and he possesses that sense of pulse so vital when conducting Elgar. The opening maybe lacks the emotional turbulence and 'ebb-and flow' of the finest versions (including the composer's own): Sargent tends to ignore most of the little fluctuations in tempo. But his interpretation is still exhilarating and there is a strong sense of forward movement. He also brings out as well as anyone I have heard the contrast between the great surge of the opening and the quieter interludes, such as the second subject at fig. 8 and again at fig. 11. These last are often played much too loudly, but Sargent draws out a beautiful *pp* from his players. His long acquaintance with the work shows in the effortless way he moves from the quieter passages to the big *tuttis* – the *poco animato* at fig. 14 to the *Impetuoso* at fig. 16 being a good example.

Perhaps the *Larghetto* is the heart of the piece for Sargent, and he beautifully elicits the sense of anguished lament in the music. The development of the opening theme (at fig 68) is played with great expression, as one would expect from a foremost interpreter of *Gerontius*. Sadly, the poignant oboe solo, *espressivo* and *molto rubato*, though sensitively played, is not as effective as it might be as the oboe sound is rather recessed. But otherwise this is a *Larghetto* to treasure. Maybe the outburst of coughing at its end was due as much to a release of emotional tension as to winter illness!

Sargent drives the Rondo along at a good pace, with once again great attention to detail. In the 'hammering' section, where the 'Ghost' theme from the first movement returns, Sargent holds back at the *ff* at fig. 120 so that the *fff* in the third bar of 121 is significantly louder: on some recordings there is little if any difference at this point. The final movement maintains

the high standards of the previous movements. Sargent moves the work effectively to its conclusion; the great peroration of the second 'Richter' theme at fig. 163 conjured up for me images of Sargent, the dapper little man with the carnation, whom I once saw at the Proms. Like Cardus I had listened to the work with fresh ears and a quickened appreciation.

The E flat Symphony always held a high place in Sargent's estimation. Once, during a rehearsal of the Larghetto, he said of a certain string passage: 'It is so ravishing and beautiful that it's unrehearsable'. He courageously gave the Vienna premiere of the work in 1947, comparing Elgar favourably with Bruckner; and it was played at his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday concert in 1965. Yet sadly Sargent never made studio recordings of either symphony – in fact, despite being one of the best-known advocates of Elgar's music in the concert hall, his recordings of the major works are remarkably few. Apart from the two accounts of *Gerontius*, and one of each of the concertos (with Tortelier and Heifetz), there are only the Variations (three versions), the Serenade for Strings, and the *Wand of Youth* suites. After Elgar's death Fred Gaisberg saw Boult as the torch bearer for Elgar and arranged for him to record those works the composer had not done – *Introduction and Allegro*, *Imperial March* and *Sospiri*. After the Second World War Boult and Barbirolli continued to be the conductors chosen by the record companies for the standard Elgar repertoire: Boult recorded this symphony four times, and Barbirolli three. But I shall now treasure Sargent's version alongside theirs.

The recording was included with the June issue of the *BBC Music Magazine*, and can be obtained from the Back Issues Department on 0870 444 7014 (UK), and +44 (0)1795 414749 (Europe and rest of the world), or via e-mail: [bbcmag@dovetailservices.com](mailto:bbcmag@dovetailservices.com). For those in North America the toll-free order line is 1-800 234 6706; e-mail: [bbcmag@neodata.com](mailto:bbcmag@neodata.com).

Geoffrey Hodgkins



YCLTCD01

**A Celebration of Children's Music**  
Including Nursery Suite (two versions)  
conducted by Elgar and Mark Elder

Here is a strange thing: a double CD of the Band of the Welsh Guards playing a variety of themes from musicals, films and children's songs, coupled with a CD of two versions of the Nursery Suite. One is Elgar's own classic recording, which was made in 1931, just after the Suite was written, and the other is conducted by Mark Elder with the Royal College of Music Junior Department

Symphony Orchestra. Let me dismiss the first CD at once. Having dutifully sat through it I know that I shall never return to it. Excellent though the Band of the Welsh Guards undoubtedly is, selections from Mary Poppins, Bob the Builder, Thunderbirds and Harry Potter fill me with gloom and despair rather than the opposite.

The second CD is a different matter. Elgar's own performance of the Nursery Suite needs little comment from me, except to say how well the sound quality comes up in this new transfer. Elgar, as usual, moves briskly, and brusquely, through his music as though he was in danger of missing the last train back to Worcester. And yet, the playing is affectionate and idiomatic; the essence of the music's feeling is all there. The real revelation was Mark Elder's performance. I think this is one of the best performances I have ever heard, and now certainly the best recording. The Aubade has a fresh, early morning feel; the solo flute in 'The Serious Doll' is exquisite; and just listen to the virtuosity displayed by the young orchestra in 'Busy-ness'. The string playing in the final movement is also a joy, as is the leader's violin cadenza. The recording is full but very clear, allowing all the wonderful orchestral effects to make their mark. The CD is completed by Elgar conducting a live performance in 1928 of that splendid mini-cantata which is his setting of the National Anthem. Apparently these CDs, inspired by the Queen's eightieth birthday celebrations, were produced with the help of the Elgar Society. What now seems to me to be essential is for the Nursery Suite CD to be issued separately, or certainly Elder's performance of it.

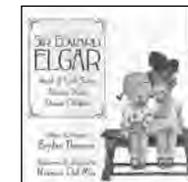
Barry Collett

**Wand of Youth Suites Nos. 1 and 2; Nursery Suite**

Ulster Orchestra  
conducted by Bryden Thomson

**Dream Children**

Bournemouth Sinfonia  
conducted by Norman del Mar



Chandos 10422 X

Elgar's 'children's music' is really a misnomer. Apart from three tiny unison songs from the very end of his life, Elgar, unlike Schumann, Debussy, Fauré, Britten and others, did not write any specific music for children to perform. Rather, his vision is of childhood recollected through the wisdom and maturity of adulthood, which gives the works that nostalgic yearning which is such an integral element in his style.

These thoughts are prompted by listening to three recent recordings of the *Nursery Suite* (see above). The experience has

reminded me what a splendid work it is. Surely it is time to stop calling the Cello Concerto Elgar's last major work. The *Nursery Suite* does not possess the Concerto's earth-shaking gravitas, but it is not a miniature either. This mid-price Chandos CD is a reissue from earlier LP recordings. I have to say that I have never been an admirer of Bryden Thomson's Elgar. His recordings of the Symphonies seem to me interminably slow and lacking in dramatic tension, and I fear some of the same lethargy creeps in to this recording. The *Nursery Suite*, for example, begins with a fresh, spring-like Aubade. Thomson's tempo is nothing like Allegretto, and the spring in the rhythm is never realized. It comes in at two minutes longer than Elgar's own performance, and also the new Elder version. Thereafter things improve, and the rest is fine, with 'The Wagon Passes' rumbling by most effectively. The unnamed flautist in 'The Serious Doll' and equally anonymous violinist in the final 'Envoi' are both excellent, and the Ulster Orchestra plays well, although as a whole I prefer the recording with Charles Groves and the RLPO. The two *Wand of Youth* Suites are again well played, but I miss the crackling vitality of Boult's recording. Norman del Mar handles the two *Dream Children* most effectively, bringing out the wonderfully evocative brooding orchestration in these two profound 'miniatures'. The recording, in true Chandos house style, is rich and full, if slightly reverberant, but this does not cloud the clarity of the harp and percussion writing. Children of all ages will enjoy this music, and to have them all on one CD is a good idea, but personally I would look elsewhere for more vital performances of the main works.

Barry Collett



**Rutland Boughton: Symphony No.1 Oliver Cromwell,**  
A Character Symphony for Orchestra Op.19

**Edgar Bainton: Symphony No. 3 in C minor**  
Roderick Williams (baritone)  
BBC Concert Orchestra  
conducted by Vernon Handley

Plaudits first to Paul Adrian Rooke, whose performance of Rutland Boughton's first symphony, subtitled *Oliver Cromwell*, was effectively the first in public. It was given by the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra in November 2005, and I was fortunate to be among those present. It clearly aroused enough interest for the work subsequently to be recorded by that doyen of British conductors devoted to the promotion of British music, Vernon Handley. Sadly Boughton's biographer Michael Hurd could not be there to give the pre-concert talk nor to hear the

performance, even sadder still that he is no longer with us.

First some background facts. Rutland Boughton was born in 1878 and died in 1960. His first symphony was completed in 1905 and destined for a premiere in Liverpool under Bantock. But the inclusion of a baritone in the finale proved too expensive. Yet when Frangon Davies offered to step in *gratis*, the city orchestra's committee declined it as being too long at forty minutes; so one suspects there was more to its original decision than met the eye. At the Royal College of Music it was put up for performance at one of the Patron's Fund Concerts, including paying copying costs. A panel of three composers studied the work in February/March 1907 and divided two to one in favour of this trial rehearsal. Eaton Fanning appreciated that 'much serious thought appears to have been extended on the work. Shows originality and force, orchestral writing too thick sometimes' and gave his approval. So did Frederic Cliffe, his 'Yes' double-underlined followed by ('if practicable'), having commented 'Rather a remarkable work. An extremely clever sample of modern (Strauss-like) scoring. Shows undeniable talent in many directions. It is long and difficult and requires a very big orchestra! (Some of the technical details are extravagant if not impossible!)'. It was Stanford who, some might say predictably, gave it the thumbs-down, 'Sorry that I cannot recommend this work for the great expense of copying it. I can find no invention in it, only the usual colour mixing, and it is thoroughly noisy and on the very lines which [are] not to be encouraged. It has ability, in the orchestral way. But it is no use'.

Judging by what is heard, Cliffe was near the mark. The work has rich textures, the scoring includes triple winds, usual brass with a third trumpet, and a reasonable percussion force. The symphony's first movement is a character study. Soon after its start Cromwell's upward rushing *leitmotif* (recalling Strauss' *Don Juan*) establishes itself in the first of many appearances. The four movements reflect many mood changes such as (second movement) Cromwell's grief and his resolve expressed in a letter written to his wife after the Battle of Dunbar. The third movement is entitled 'March of the Puritans'. Finally Cromwell's death scene is based on his prayer, taken from Carlyle's *Letters and Speeches*.

Tracing further its performance history (or rather lack of it), the London Symphony Orchestra was favourably disposed towards a performance, subject to Nikisch's approval, but regrettably this was not forthcoming. Richter might have been tried, though the track record here was not good after an earlier approach by Boughton on 30 October 1902 clearly got nowhere. 'Please pardon me for bringing to your remembrance the fact that you have a score of mine [?one of *A Summer Night, Imperial Elegy, The Chilterns, Britannia, Variations on a Theme of Purcell*]

Dutton  
Laboratories:  
CDLX 7185

which did not displease you when we ran it through earlier in the year. May I hope for the pleasure of hearing it under your baton in London, do you think? Such pleasure would be all the greater to me inasmuch as I have had very serious troubles and disappointments these last few months. Of course I would gladly wait, wait, wait, if ultimately your previous opinion of a possible performance could be brought to fruition'. So with no performance in prospect Boughton withdrew the score, though he plundered its themes for Herakles in *Alkestis* in 1922. Perhaps it was the right thing to do, but even if inexperience is manifest, his skill as an orchestrator shines through. Whatever the rights and wrongs of its composer's actions, it is right to rediscover it now.

Edgar Bainton, more or less an exact contemporary of Boughton (1880–1956), cuts an equally enigmatic, even elusive figure in British music during the first half of the twentieth century, largely because he spent the last two decades of his life away from these shores. He was a Stanford pupil and, appropriately for this disc, a great friend of Boughton, who put on his opera *Oithona* at the 1915 Glastonbury Festival. His RCM contemporaries included Dyson, Dunhill, Bridge, Ireland and Rootham. In 1901 Bainton was appointed piano professor at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Conservatory of Music, becoming its Principal in 1912. Largely through the pioneering efforts of Bainton, William Gillies Whittaker, George Dodds, H. Yeaman Dodds, violinist Alfred Wall, conductor (and Kathleen Ferrier's first singing teacher), John Hutchinson, and the organist William Ellis, much new British music by Holst, Bax, and Vaughan Williams was now introduced to the area.

In the summer of 1914, while en route to the Bayreuth Festival, Bainton was arrested as a British civilian in wartime Germany and interned for four years at a prison camp at the ironically named Ruhleben ('peaceful life'), near Berlin. Surprisingly it became a period of creative, practical musical activity for him and a number of other musicians interned there, such as Carl Fuchs (principal cellist in the Hallé orchestra), Benjamin Dale, Frederick Keel, Percy Hull (assistant to George Robertson Sinclair at Hereford Cathedral), Ernest Macmillan (who, under Bainton's tutelage, successfully sat a DMus. from there!), and Edward Clark (a Schoenberg pupil in Berlin from where he wrote for the *Musical Times*). All of these played some part in Bainton's later career. This became a period during which composition took on a therapeutic function in his daily life, but illness forced a removal to Holland in 1918, where, after the war, he became the first English musician ever to conduct the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra, his programme characteristically being British music (by Balfour Gardiner, Bridge, Coleridge-Taylor, Delius, Elgar, Grainger and Stanford). A post-war examining trip to Australia led to his emigration there

in 1934 as Director of the New South Wales Conservatorium at Sydney. His daughter Helen wrote of her father at this time:

In 1934, a year remembered for the deaths of Elgar, Delius and Holst, my father came to this country. He was steeped in the traditions of the English Schools of Music, with their choral, orchestral, operatic, chamber music and general scholastic training. He came filled with enthusiasm and an abiding love for the work he was to do, and whatever he undertook was done with his whole mind and heart. His vitality was unbounded; his thoughts simple and direct. He was highly strung and very sensitive but possessed great self-control, due to his sense of discipline and rigorous physical training..He never strove for success nor wished for power, but was deeply aware of the need for spreading the understanding and appreciation of an artistic inheritance.

He gave several first performances in Australia, including Elgar's second symphony (1934), *The Dream of Gerontius* (1936), and *The Apostles* (1940). His arrival in Sydney coincided with plans to establish a permanent professional orchestra there by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and it was Bainton who conducted its inaugural concert. He introduced Bax's third symphony, Vaughan Williams's *Job* and *Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus*, and works by Delius, Walton, Debussy and Sibelius among many others, as well as music by Australians such as Arthur Benjamin, Percy Grainger and Alfred Hill. In 1944 his opera *The Pearl Tree* was a huge success when it was staged at the Conservatorium, but two years later he reached compulsory retirement age, after which he composed, conducted and examined until he died while taking his morning swim on 8 December 1956.

Bainton's orchestral music was championed in the early years of the century by Henry Wood in London and Dan Godfrey at Bournemouth. In stylistic terms it is not easy to pinpoint. He revered Bach yet studied the works of the mould-breakers at work around him, such as Schoenberg. He was, however, more a consolidator than a great innovator. His orchestral music reveals sumptuous melody and harmonic fluidity; it is written with careful attention to detail, and above all it is inspired by a wealth and depth of imagination. As Helen Bainton recalled, 'he felt deeply and emotionally, but it was hidden behind a somewhat reticent exterior. His music does not readily reveal itself'. The third symphony had a troubled genesis. Bainton began it in 1952 and two years later was working on the slow movement when his wife died unexpectedly. His distress caused him to stop work. Gradually he came back to it and, in a last cathartic act, released his grief, despite an agonising delay in producing the final sixteen bars. He considered it to be among his finest works

(‘the epitome of his whole life and thought’, wrote his daughter), but he neither composed anything else after it, nor lived to hear its first performance in 1957. Bainton *filie* also described it as ‘a model of rich and immaculate orchestration, almost Renoiresque in its searching out of orchestral colour’. With much Delius and Debussy around, the impressionistic opening could be a depiction of a pastoral dawn, but stormy moods soon arise which produce a continual shift of contrast. After the ‘chuckling’ (says Helen Bainton) scherzo, the emotional slow movement reveals a Mahlerian intensity which imbues the work with an *angst* born of a troubled soul. It includes a passage marked *tempo di Pavane*, in which the violas play above the violins, an effect which, according to Michael Jones of the Edgar Bainton (UK) Society, he had tried some three decades earlier in his *Hymn to God the Father*, where violas and cellos play an octave higher than violins. The finale is built on ‘a heavily marked and rhythmical motif’ with powerfully scored climaxes, complete with reminiscences of material used earlier in the symphony (a pentatonic melody unifies the whole), leading, after an epilogue reminiscent of Vaughan Williams’s *London* symphony, to a triumphant apotheosis in C major.

Vernon Handley needs no introduction to lovers of British music. He provides more than a safe pair of hands when it comes to performing such works, having already recorded symphonies by both composers, Bainton’s second and Boughton’s third (particularly fine); while the BBC Concert Orchestra, of which he is Chief Guest Conductor, sounds more than comfortably at home in these byways of the British orchestral repertoire, despite a demanding schedule of only two days to achieve ‘a wrap’ in Watford Town Hall last summer. Both works are stylishly played, with distinguished contributions from sections and individual players alike, among which shines Cynthia Fleming’s front desk violin solos. Bainton’s finale is a wonderful showcase for this orchestra, especially in those troublesome last sixteen bars. Boughton’s symphony gets off to a thrilling start, after which there are plenty of opportunities seized by brass and winds alike to showcase their talents. The second movement’s flute quartet above violas adds a colourful and finely balanced touch to a movement which, instead of teetering on the edge of pastiche, is music of singular character, quintessentially English, with beautifully phrased solos and hushed instrumental choirs. After a March of Elgarian sweep, the finale offers a patchwork of material in alternating tempi leading to Cromwell’s touchingly personal prayer which, at its Hitchin performance sung by the composer’s grandson Ian and now taken by Roderick Williams, immediately called the more penitent moments in *Gerontius* to mind. Williams sings movingly and with wonderful sensitivity while the orchestral *ritornello* and particularly the calm conclusion are beautifully paced by Handley.

This is a fine disc from Dutton, sumptuously recorded in luxuriant sound by Dexter Newman, backed by the research and vast knowledge of the ubiquitous Lewis Foreman in the vanguard of the team: in short, a disc that becomes an invaluable addition to the catalogue of recorded British music, worthy of a place on enthusiasts’ record shelves throughout the world.

Christopher Fifield

**Cello Concerto in E minor  
Variations ('Enigma'), Op. 36  
Pomp and Circumstance Marches Nos. 1 & 4**

Jacqueline du Pré, cello

The Philadelphia Orchestra; London Philharmonic Orchestra  
conducted by Daniel Barenboim



Sony Classical  
82876787372

The main item of interest here – an interpretation by Jacqueline du Pré of a work with which she will always be associated, the Cello Concerto – is a re-issue of a recording which has never been out of the catalogue since it first appeared in 1970. It goes without saying that the most famous version she made of this work was with Sir John Barbirolli and the London Symphony Orchestra in 1965. This later version, with accompaniment by Daniel Barenboim and the Philadelphia Orchestra, has always sat somewhat in its shadow. (A dig into the vaults only fairly recently brought up a third, again with Barbirolli, this time with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and issued on the Testament label). Despite Sony’s attachment to it of the label of a ‘great performances’, it has never been quite in the same league as that much-loved, passionate version with Barbirolli..

Du Pré was justly lauded for the sincerity and emotion she brought to her playing, but in this Philadelphia recording, it feels just *too* emotional, especially as it contrasts with generally careful accompaniment by Barenboim. His choice of speed in the first movement is ambulatory, and at variance with du Pré’s phlegmatic playing; and at about eight minutes into the movement, things go what I can only describe as strange and broken. The second movement fares better, the will-o’-the-wisp rises and falls infectiously, and there are some beautiful woodwind touches. The Adagio, a movement which calls for some dignified restraint at least, is prone to some strange upward swooshes on the cello at about nearly two minutes into the movement, and then again as it comes to its sad conclusion. As for the finale, it feels *something like* (as an old music master of mine used to say) a journey home, but I found it an unnerving experience, with some peculiar rasping from the solo instrument once things have got going; while

the final bars of the performance are a most peculiar scramble.

The recordings is 'hissy', probably due to its age, and from the fact that it is taken from a live performance; while the orchestral sound comes across as paradoxically muddy and shrill. The amount of extraneous noise is also a distinct drawback, with the Philadelphia audience doing its best to interrupt the performance with consumptive coughs.

In the other main work on this disc, the Variations, recorded in the EMI Studio No. 1 in 1976, things start well, with the theme being taken quite properly in an understated way, as though Elgar is asking a tentative question. Sadly, despite some exceptions (notably 'H.D.S.-P' and 'Troyte'), the rest of the variations go in a 'beating time' sort of way, with 'B.G.N.' here coming across as a very dull fellow. The ninth variation sounds, I am afraid to say, less a celebration of friendship and Beethovenian consolations than a general nod in the direction of pallyness, with a spirit of only vague homage to the Viennese composer whom Elgar regarded as one of the gods. A few minutes later, what should be the lingering regret of the Romanza, complete with the muffled throb of ocean-liner turbines from the timpani, here sounds akin to the clatter of a paddle-steamer.

Barenboim's reading of the Variations is workmanlike, but in the end rather dull: it lacks the spark which elevates a memorable performance above a merely good one. Here one misses the insight and vigour of various conductors before and since, beginning with Elgar himself, through to Elder and the Hallé in much more modern times. The disc's fillers, the first and fourth *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches, are a bit of a mad dash, the former being fairly characterless, while the latter gives the impression as though everyone concerned just wanted to get through it in an embarrassed way. If you want to catch du Pré playing this concerto in all her passionate glory, you are far better off spending your money on either (or both) of the versions with 'Glorious John' mentioned above, fruits of a very special partnership indeed.

A note about this disc's presentation. Since the opportunity was taken to package these recordings afresh, Sony might well have found it useful to have a sub-editor cast a glance over the sleeve-notes: 1976 was obviously not a good year for commentaries on Elgar as far as they were concerned. Here, for example, we learn that 'Nimrod' is a depiction of someone called Arthur Jaeger, that 'Dorabella' was a Mrs Dora Penny, and that Variation 13 is unequivocally 'about' Lady Mary Lygon (no mention of other possible identities, but then it is only within recent years that other names have been thrown into the ring to challenge the accepted view that (\*\*\*) = 'LML'). But if one looks on the bright side about this piece of vintage musical commentary, one can note how much has changed generally for the better in our appreciation of Elgar's music. Its author, while marking out the Variations – with *Falstaff* – as the

very pinnacle of Elgar's achievement, quotes the composer Virgil Thompson, who apparently had it that while the Variations are 'mostly a pretext for orchestration', the work is 'a very pretty pretext and a graceful one, not without charm and a modicum of sincerity...' Somehow I hear the ghost of the late E.J. Dent rattling his chains in approval at that exercise of damning with the faintest of praise.

Dominic Guyver

### Stanford

#### **Symphony No. 4 in F major, Op. 31**

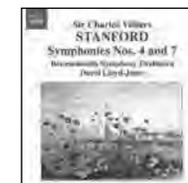
#### **Symphony No. 7 in D major, Op. 124**

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by David Lloyd Jones

'... neither fish, flesh, fowl nor good red-herring!' So wrote Elgar about the music of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924). And in retort, 'it stinks of incense', said Stanford of *The Dream of Gerontius*. Whatever the facts of their relationship, it is true to say that for many years no love was lost between the two of them. But things had been different. Indeed, it was Stanford who had initiated an Honorary Music degree for Elgar at Cambridge University. And it was Stanford at the University and at the Royal College of Music, together with Parry, also at the RCM and at Oxford University, who supervised the musical education of a whole host of English composers of the next generation, including Vaughan Williams, Holst, Coleridge-Taylor, Boughton, Bridge and Howells. Notoriously irascible he may have been – and perhaps also responsible for Boughton's shelving of his *Oliver Cromwell* Symphony (reviewed above), following Stanford's adverse censure of it in 1905 – but all his pupils were grateful for his criticism and guidance.

Born only five years earlier than Elgar, Stanford could have been his musical elder brother. As it is, they are in effect a generation apart, Stanford a conservative, unsympathetic to more modern developments, and Elgar hailed by Strauss as 'the first English progressivist', and, recently, by J.P.E. Harper-Scott as 'modernist'. I must admit that, knowing little of Stanford's orchestral music, I got a surprise when I played this CD. Ignorantly expecting something nearer to Elgar, I was astonished to hear how far apart they are. Gradually though, I warmed to this music. It is beautifully crafted and immensely charming, yet not without depth of feeling, passion even. These two symphonies, the fourth and last of Stanford's orchestral output, are gems; and I am truly grateful to have come to know them.

Each symphony has four movements, the Fourth opening with a sonata-form structure, complete with repeated exposition. It begins with a bright, fresh diatonic theme counterpoised by a more drooping



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second subject. This has an innocent chromatic appoggiatura motif which, however, near the end of the movement, becomes menacing. The second movement opens wistfully and could almost be by Elgar in that mood. It sings the length of its way, beautifully. The third movement covers a wide range of emotions. Beginning hesitantly, it gradually assumes a nobility and depth of utterance which reveal an undercurrent of heartfelt emotion. It is an impressive movement, adding to the symphony a gravity which so far had not been present. It is not a world away from the slow movement of Elgar's Second Symphony. The last movement is energetic, often folk-like, always rhythmically invigorating. It dances the symphony to a powerful and vibrant conclusion. The work is very much in the Dvořák, Brahms, Mendelssohn and Schumann mould, but none the poorer for that. It is beautifully orchestrated, totally without Elgar's extraordinary flair, but very craftsman-like nonetheless. The material is treated with great resourcefulness. There is real organic growth and development.

Whereas the Fourth Symphony lasts over forty minutes, the Seventh is under thirty. Here the spirit of Mendelssohn holds sway. Composed in 1911 (the year of Elgar's Second Symphony and Coronation March), it lives in a world in which Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*, Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, and Stravinsky's *Petrushka* – all given their first performances in the same year – might not exist. The first movement, in the minor, has a restless, rather agitated quality and often rises to climaxes of great power. Its occasional turns into the major mode are short-lived and do little to quell the generally sombre tone. The second movement is marked 'Tempo di minuetto', a deliberate archaism. It begins archaically enough with a gently undulating theme, but there is soon more restlessness and agitation in the second theme. The slow movement is a set of five variations on a tender and expressive theme. Here above all sits Mendelssohn's ghost in the corner of Stanford's study, giving him inspiration. It is a charming and mellifluous set, which via a strenuous transition, leads straight into the final movement. Here the music begins in diatonic assurance, though a lyrical second theme provides the necessary foil. Indeed, this latter theme becomes the core of a crescendo which leads into the coda and to the symphony's lively and assured ending.

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, under David Lloyd Jones, plays finely in these two works. The overall recorded sound is excellent and the booklet notes by Richard Whitehouse are informative. As the first in a series, this issue bodes well. I for one will be looking forward to discovering more about Stanford from subsequent issues.

Finally, regarding the subject of Stanford and Elgar, one has to admire the sense of humour of the parents of Elgar Howarth, the musician, in naming their children: Elgar Howarth has a brother called Stanford.

Paul Adrian Rooke

## LETTERS

### From Carl Newton

David Owen Norris makes some interesting points about the Elgar songs in the Journal for March 2007. Unfortunately in respect to *Sea Pictures* he falls into a trap that has swallowed several previous writers on the subject. The view, often promoted, that Elgar carefully chose the poems for psychological reasons, and even made semantic changes to their text in order to personalise them, is ridiculous.

In the summer of 1899 Elgar was under pressure. The premiere of the Variations had just taken place and the *éclat* from that, plus his well-known post-premiere malaise, would have been one element. Another was the fact that he was in the midst of composing several songs and salon pieces. A third was the looming deadline on the major work for the Norwich Festival for which he was being pestered by Clara Butt herself. As early as February 1899 he had written to Nicholas Kilburn desperately asking if he had any ideas for the new work. There was no mention of anything to do with the sea. Never a compulsive worker, these pressures must have had a depressing effect on him.

Then, providentially, into his hands came the solution in the form of an anthology of sea poetry edited by 'Mrs Fiona Macleod' (the wife of William Sharp, the minor Scottish litterateur who wrote under that alias). In it Elgar found four poems exactly to his requirements and proceeded to set them as they were printed. Add a fifth by his wife and 'Hey Presto!'

How do I know this? Because I have a copy of the anthology in question.<sup>1</sup> (The British Library catalogue suggests a date of 'c.1900' but this too can now be made more exact, as the anthology must have been published in 1899.) Entitled *Sea Music*, the poems are in edited form, omitting the same verses as are omitted in *Sea Pictures*. But the clinching piece of evidence is in 'The Swimmer' where the ridiculous error of 'strifes' for 'straits', sedulously copied by Elgar, appears. This is the only edition of the Gordon poem which contains that error and is therefore conclusive. Elgar did not edit the poems; he probably did not even know that other verses existed, and they have no significance in assessing his psychology. Even his title was probably derived from the anthology; it would have appealed to his quirky sense of humour that while he was writing 'sea music' the poems were 'sea pictures'.

Can we please stop treating Elgar as a neurotic, every bar of whose music must be interpreted into some 'dark saying'?

### David Owen Norris responds

Carl Newton is to be congratulated on his discovery. The alteration of 'straits' to 'strifes' in *The Swimmer* must indeed stem from this anthology, rather than from

<sup>1</sup> *Sea Music: An Anthology of Poems and Passages Descriptive of the Sea*. Edited by Mrs William Sharp (London: Walter Scott Ltd, n.d.). The title is part of the Canterbury Poets series, general editor William Sharp ('Fiona Macleod').

Elgar. This conjures up a most interesting problem. Elgar thought the word was 'strifes', set the word as 'strifes', and only ever heard it sung as 'strifes'. What should we sing? I shall encourage singers to stick to 'strifes'. I find the words applied to the error by Professor Brian Trowell and Mr Newton ('nonsense' and 'ridiculous') a bit over the top.

Mr. Newton's other contentions are more dubious. It may be that he has in his hands a second or subsequent edition of the anthology. I have read through the copy in the British Library, which is credited simply to Mrs William Sharp, and is clearly dated 1887. It contains well over a hundred poems, so although it may have simplified Elgar's selection, he still did have to exert a choice. My suggestions as to the psychology behind his choices are not affected by Mr Newton's discovery. Nor does Elgar's likely amusement at the titles *Sea Music/Sea Pictures* preclude the influence of Payne's engraving.

The British Library copy does not contain four of Elgar's poems, but only two. The Hon. Roden Noel has four poems included, but not the *Sea Slumber Song*. Mrs Browning is represented by only two lines. I had thought at first that Mr Newton's discovery might devalue Patrick Little's fascinating speculations on Elgar's abbreviation of *Sabbath Morning at Sea*, but in fact it does not. Mr Newton tells us that his copy contains the poem as set by Elgar. If so, Occam's razor would suggest that the British Library date (c.1900) correctly refers to a second edition; the poem could have entered the collection *via* Elgar (1899), rather than the other way round. We need not assume that Elgar worked from the (re-dated) second edition, since the 'strifes/straits' problem already occurs in the first (1887).

As to the question of Elgar the Neurotic, I gladly range myself with Mark Elder, who used this very word to sum up his admiration at the end of the recent Radio 4 series on *Enigma*.

A foot-note on *Sea Pictures*, if I may. Sir Edward German's 1934 tribute to Elgar refers to their meeting at the Norwich Festival where, he says, Elgar's 'Four Sea Pictures' were given. I begin to wonder whether Clara Butt ever sang the last one at all!

#### **From Dennis Clark**

When a collection of Elgar memorabilia is disposed of by a previous custodian – often to be acquired by the Birthplace – we are perhaps entitled to wonder whether the odd item has not been retained as a keepsake. The possibility occurred to me when I read that the Birthplace had acquired Elgar's letters to Dr C.W. Buck, spanning the period 1883 [*sic*] to 1931, since this correspondence actually began at least a year earlier. I am happy to report that on a recent visit to the Birthplace I saw the display of these letters and they do appear to have the early (1882) letters.

A similar worry applies to the 'Dorabella Bequest', the subject of Sylvia Bennett's recent Journal article [November 2006/March 2007]. A certain Mrs Thompson of Sheffield always claimed, quite vehemently, that this material was a personal gift from 'Dorabella' to her husband Stanley, when he was chairman of the Sheffield Elgar Society. Others knew that the Society was the intended recipient, with Stanley merely acting as custodian. The Sheffield Society's records reveal that in 1975 a full inventory was drawn up of the 'Dorabella Bequest', but this does not seem to be have

been in evidence when Claud Powell, Dora Penny's son, eventually reclaimed the material. Given her views on its ownership, and Claud's ignorance of what should actually be there, it must have been very tempting for Mrs Thompson to salt away a few choice items. We may never know if she did.

#### **From Richard Redmile**

Better late than never, I have just noticed the comment on page 6 of the November issue of the Elgar Society News about the lack of a really good modern recording of *The Dream of Gerontius*. It is also of great interest to me that none of Andrew Green's top five recordings had been issued more recently than 30 years ago and that his favourite, justifiably, was recorded 60 years ago.

The New Queen's Hall Orchestra is the *only* orchestra which the Elgar Society should even consider if it is to promote an excellent modern recording. Our last performance of it in the Royal Festival Hall was a sensation, not only filling the hall but revealing this great work as Elgar would have expected to hear it, for the first time in over 60 years. William Yoeman concluded his review by saying:

For me, however, the most significant aspect of this performance was the way in which the unique sound of the orchestra, when read against that of many of its more standard brethren, managed to bring to the surface the utter strangeness and abstractness of Gerontius's (the soul's) experience. Very powerful, very moving, and a most auspicious Royal Festival Hall debut for the orchestra.<sup>2</sup>

The need for the NQHO increases all the time. On Saturday, I heard the Nottingham Philharmonic Orchestra, an excellent amateur orchestra, but one which imitated the professional symphony orchestra, with its overpowering brass and percussion swamping a very large string section. This is ruinous to Elgar's music in particular as was revealed in the 'Enigma' Variations. I longed for the perfect balance and character of the NQHO, which resolves all these problems, allows all Elgar's inner part-writing to be heard, and makes the listening experience so much more fascinating and enjoyable.

The Elgar Society has never paid much attention to the New Queen's Hall Orchestra, presumably because it believes the use of appropriate instruments is not important, but I can assure you that the instruments are all important. Elgar's music, on the instruments which he knew and wrote for, assumes a delicacy, transparency, complexity and communicative power completely unknown otherwise today. The Society pays great attention to getting the notes on the page right but completely ignores Elgar's sound. The New Queen's Hall Orchestra is the only orchestra today to play on Elgar's instruments. Its sound is now unique, but it is what Elgar expected to hear everywhere. If a really good recording of *Gerontius* is to be made now, it has to be with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra. None other will do!

*Richard Redmile is Chairman of Trustees of the New Queen's Hall Orchestra and a long-time Elgar Society member.*

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.classicalsource.com/db\\_control/db\\_concert\\_review.php?id=2040](http://www.classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id=2040).

## 150 YEARS AGO

In 1856: Edward Elgar became a gleam in his parents' eyes ...

Robert Schumann died, as did the poet of *Dichterliebe*, Heinrich Heine; Otto Jahn published the first fully researched biography of Mozart, in the centenary of his birth.

In 1857 on 2 June, Edward Elgar was born, four months after the death of Mikhail Glinka.

The main opera premiere was at La Fenice, Venice on 12 March: Giuseppe Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*. Richard Wagner, exiled from Germany, was living in Zürich; he wrote the libretto of *Tristan und Isolde* and, after completing the music of Act II of *Siegfried*, abandoned *Der Ring* and set to work on the music of *Tristan*. Hector Berlioz was half-way through composing his epic opera *Les Troyens*.

On 31 January, Franz Schubert should have celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday; but he was 29 years dead and there were few who would have remarked the occasion. 1857 was also the tenth anniversary of the death of Felix Mendelssohn.

Johannes Brahms was going through a difficult period, releasing little music into the public domain, but working on the D major serenade for orchestra and the first piano concerto; in this period his friend Joseph Joachim was more prolific than he.

Major-General Henry Gee Roberts was heavily involved in what became known, at least in Britain, as the Indian mutiny, a rebellion against British rule that broke out in May. His daughter Alice was, probably, nine this year.

The age of German Romantic Poetry was ending; in 1857 died Joseph von Eichendorff, poet of Schumann's *Liederkreis* Op. 39. In 1857 Charles Dickens completed *Little Dorritt*; William Makepiece Thackeray began serial publication of *The Virginians*; Alfred Tennyson was approaching work on *Idylls of the King*; and Charles Baudelaire published a collection of translations of Edgar Allan Poe and some prose poems.

## 100 YEARS AGO...

Elgar had been back from America for only four days before he and Alice went to Morecambe for the Festival on 1 May. Canon Gorton was still recuperating in Capri. 'E. rather tired of it all', wrote Alice on 2 May. His *Evening Scene* was once again a test piece, as were two of the *Greek Anthology* songs. Back home: '...E. trying air guns & shooting very well'. On 10 May he wrote to Ivor Atkins that he now had 'a "death-dealing tube" (Pope), otherwise an air rifle which is sport to us & death to nothing but bottles ... Now you must come & drink to make targets'. He had composed virtually nothing since finishing *The Kingdom* almost a year before. 'I find millions of things to do & a tangled heap of letters to weary through', he told Atkins.

However, on 21 May 'E. busy writing'. He was revising two early anthems he had written for St George's, *Ave Maria* and *Ave Maris Stella*, sent to Novello on the 24th. Then on his 50th birthday, while the rest of the family were at evening church, he wrote a short part-song, *Love*, which he dedicated to Alice. On receiving it she felt 'very unworthy & deeply deeply touched'.

On 28 May he had written to Jaeger (still recuperating abroad): 'I take no interest whatever in music now & just "edit" a few old boyish M.S.S. – music is off'. In fact he was turning older ideas into *The Wand of Youth*. That same week he was completing a fourth *Pomp & Circumstance* March, dedicated to Sinclair. Alice told Jaeger it was 'one to rouse every spark of martial fire'. Elgar told Jaeger: 'The first pt of the 4<sup>th</sup> march is good: the middle *rot* but pleasing to march to'.

The Elgars went to Cambridge for a performance of *The Kingdom* in King's College Chapel on 11 June, and then spent three days in London, seeing Lady Maud Warrender and Julia Worthington. Work continued on the 'Children's Music' as Alice referred to it, and then four days later: 'E. much music. Playing great beautiful tune'. This was to become the motto of the First Symphony.

On 5 July the Elgars went to Birmingham for the degree ceremony, at which Elgar was awarded an honorary MA. They met Neville Chamberlain (whom Alice found 'delightful') and Elgar wore his 'pitty [pretty] new hood'. The following week Elgar cycled to Stoke Prior to stay with his sister for a few days. On 16 July Ernest Walker came to interview Elgar for his forthcoming book on English music, and for programme notes for that autumn's Leeds Festival. They took him for a 'lovely drive', but their guest was 'not mad about Nature I shd. say'. Alice's comment was 'not a thrilling visitor'. From 22 July proofs of the new march arrived and the following day John Austin came over from Worcester to help with them. On the 31st Elgar wrote to Richter in depressed mood: 'My eyes are not allowed to work much so I devote myself to small & uninteresting things: I think my work in the world is over'. Yet two days later he wrote 'lovely river piece', later incorporated into the Scherzo of the Symphony. The first Suite of pieces from *The Wand of Youth* was completed on 11 August, and Alfred Littleton was 'delighted' with it. Alice's suggested holiday in North Wales was not a success initially: they left on 12 August but almost returned home after one night as the accommodation was 'old, poky & fusty ... It seemed a wretched nightmare & all A's fault', she confessed. However they stayed for ten days, moving on to Harlech. On the journey home on 22 August Elgar and Carice 'had riotous games & E. fell full length along the bottom of the train! – A. laughed so much she cd. not even urge him to rise before some one came down the corridor'.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

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