

The Elgar Society Journal

ROYAL COVENT GARDEN OPERA,
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Dr. EDWARD ELGAR

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THE ROYAL OPERA, COVENT GARDEN,
ON

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The Elgar Society Journal

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Front Cover: The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden as it appeared at the time of the 1904 Elgar Festival which took place one hundred years ago this month. The prestigious event, attended by the King and Queen along with the cream of London society, took place over three evenings and marked a watershed in Elgar's career. Arthur Reynolds' article marks the centenary of the Festival by painting a full picture of the event itself within the cultural frame of early Edwardian London.



Ellicott & Fry's portrait of Elgar taken during the Festival and inscribed 'to his friend Ed. Speyer' with the date of April 1904.

The Elgar Festival at Covent Garden — March 1904

Arthur S. Reynolds

Exactly one hundred years ago a unique three-day festival of Elgar's music took place at London's Covent Garden opera house in the midst of a media feeding frenzy and in the presence of the King and Queen. As well as describing the Festival and critical reaction to it, the author examines its social and political context, arguing it was an event which marked a turning point in Elgar's career as a musician and a public figure.

Tipped into a scrapbook, now at the Elgar Birthplace, is a one-line note from Leo Francis Schuster to Alice Elgar dated October 1903: 'Why not an Elgar Festival?' Frank Schuster, wealthy patron of the musical arts in general and Elgar's music in particular, was responding to an idea Edward Elgar's wife had put to him in Birmingham after the Apostles première on 14 October, when she marched up to him and said:

Frank, dear, we are always going to Gloucester Festivals or Leeds Festivals and so on. Don't you think we might have an Elgar Festival some time?

Frank Schuster wasted no time proposing the idea to his friend Harry V. Higgins, chairman of the Covent Garden Grand Opera Syndicate, proprietors of the Royal Opera House. Now Harry Higgins was a formidable figure, tall with an imperial white moustache. Defective surgery had left him voiceless, so he would whisper commands to Covent Garden personnel, summoning them to attention with a reptilian hissing sound at a decibel level sufficient to echo around the opera house. Doubtless Sir Adrian Boult was not alone in finding the effect exceedingly frightening.

Schuster had introduced Higgins to Elgar at the 1901 Leeds Festival where Elgar had conducted the 'Enigma' Variations. Subsequently, the Syndicate chairman asked the composer for a new work to be performed at a gala concert he was planning to celebrate King Edward VII's coronation scheduled to take place in June 1902. Elgar responded with the Coronation Ode.

Imagine Higgins's dismay when Elgar's commission had its première in Sheffield instead of London because the coronation had to be postponed owing to the King's sudden attack of appendicitis. Later, Higgins suffered a second Elgarian setback, when his expectations were raised for a proposed pantomime-ballet based on Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel. Elgar prepared sketches, the opera house designed costumes, but the project went no further. The prospect of an Elgar Festival at Covent Garden offered an opportunity to assuage the Syndicate's disappointment. There would be little financial risk, thanks to Schuster's offer of a silent guarantee.

The Elgar Festival took place at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden on 14, 15 and 16 March 1904. Its significance was two-fold:

First, no London concert hall had ever before devoted three consecutive nights to the performance of the works of a living native composer. 'Dr. Elgar is the man of the hour in the musical world,' proclaimed the Westminster Gazette. 'It is not too much to say of the three days' festival... that it is the most remarkable tribute which has ever been paid in this country to a composer of national birth.' The Times waxed lyrical too, calling the event 'the first tribute of the kind that has ever been paid to an English composer during his lifetime'.

Second, the Festival would take place not in one of the London concert halls patronized by the ordinary garden variety of music lover, but at the Royal Opera House, inner sanctum of 'all the rank and fashion of London society' according to the Westminster Gazette, who extolled the fact that the Festival was 'drawing all smart society to Covent Garden. The whole enterprise is supported by the subscribers of the opera and thereby made a fashionable affair.' Here was a new audience for Elgar's music. The Westminster Gazette wrote afterward: 'it is probable that a large proportion of those who attended the Festival knew virtually nothing of his compositions beyond Pomp and Circumstance Number One and Sea Pictures which Madame Butt has done so much to popularize.'

Elgar had his acquaintances among the aristocracy, but they were chiefly amateur musicians or enthusiasts who happened to hold the patent of nobility, as distinct from the Covent Garden crème de la crème who were pleased to see and be seen nightly filling the Royal Opera's boxes, each of which cost the equivalent of a parlourmaid's annual wages for a single evening.

What was it about Elgar's music that attracted such lofty attention at that moment? For some it was curiosity kindled by the taunts of the London press with regard to the praise heaped upon *The Dream of Gerontius* in Germany. Although the work had been performed in Westminster Cathedral the year before, a typical contemporary news report expressed chagrin that, 'It is one of the few works by a modern British composer that has been accorded the honour of production in Germany before we in London had any chance of hearing it, the



The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

fact that it was not performed here until last year being a real disgrace to our senior choral societies.' Bear in mind that the images of Britain and Germany were then the reverse of what they later became. In 1904 seekers after beauty in art looked to the Fatherland as the arbiter of musical culture, while barbarous Britain—das Land ohne Musik—had lately won the opprobrium of the civilized world by resorting to dum-dum bullets and concentration camps to vanquish two small independent republics in South Africa.

But perhaps beneath the surface of the press campaign lay a deeper explanation. Coursing through the upper reaches of London society at the moment of the Festival was a *Zeitgeist* newly liberated by the recent passing of the two personalities who had ruled British political and social life for two generations: Queen Victoria and Lord Salisbury. Victoria, who had reigned as Regina for two decades by the time Elgar was born and remained on the throne for the first forty-three years of his life, died in January 1901. Her last Prime Minister, Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, third Marquess of Salisbury, breathed his last on 22 August 1903. Lord Salisbury had been a Member of Parliament since before Elgar was born and served as Prime Minister for nearly fourteen years before he retired in July 1902.

The respective successors were Edward VII and Arthur James Balfour. The succession appeared to bequeath stately continuity. Edward was Victoria's son; Balfour was Salisbury's nephew, subject of the phrase 'Bob's your uncle'.

But in fact changes were afoot. Historians have summed up Lord Salisbury as 'the last grand aristocratic figure of a political system that died with Victoria'. The High Tory viewpoint shared by Salisbury and his sovereign stressed the perils of change. 'The use of Conservatism,' said the third Marquess, 'is to delay changes 'til they become harmless.' His Lordship had neither time nor taste for aesthetics. When London's theatre managers petitioned the PM for a government department devoted to the advancement of the arts, Salisbury refused citing his belief that such a step would open up 'an indefinite vista of expense'. When pressed to suggest a way to stop the Athanasian Creed from being read out in churches, Salisbury produced this solution: 'Why can't it be sung? That way no-one would know what it was about.'

The Marquess perceived at once that he could never serve the new King with the degree of esteem he had accorded the old Queen. Tension was evident from the outset of Edward VII's reign. When His Majesty made clear to his PM a wish to include Sir Thomas Lipton on the list of coronation peerages, Lord Salisbury snapped that the elevation would be 'impossible' because Lipton's fortune derived from his career as a Glaswegian grocer. The Prime Minister opposed the King's proposal to found the Order of Merit, believing the country already had enough orders and decorations. So the establishment of the OM had to be discretely delayed until after Salisbury's retirement.

What they did agree on was the proposition that the next Prime Minister should be Arthur Balfour. The Marquess's nephew was by no means the Conservative Party's first choice to follow his uncle into Number Ten Downing Street. Joseph Chamberlain and the Duke of Devonshire were far more popular candidates amongst the governing body of Tory MPs. But 'the King is the trump card,' concluded Schomberg McDonnell, Salisbury's private secretary.

Why did Edward VII insist on Balfour? The answer is suggested in John Singer Sargent's full-length portrait recently arrived at the National Portrait Gallery. Until the 2002 acquisition, only High Tories could have viewed the work because, apart from the occasional outing to join an exhibition of Sargent's works, the picture had hung in the Carlton Club since the members commissioned it in 1908. Here we see Balfour standing tall in his flowing morning coat, one hand clutching a lapel with the standard statesman's grip, the other outstretched in the languid pose of the aesthete. The King wanted his first PM to be a man of culture as well as a man of government.

Arthur James Balfour combined ruthlessness in politics with a deeply sensitive interest in literature and music. Having entered Parliament in 1874, he earned the sobriquet 'bloody Balfour' by the steps he took to suppress the Irish Land League agitation shortly after becoming Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1887. While Balfour the MP was climbing the greasy pole of political office, Balfour the philosopher produced two tomes of

metaphysical speculation: his *Defense of Philosophical Doubt* was published in 1878; *The Foundations of Belief* appeared in print in 1895.

Moreover, Balfour the connoisseur of culture produced a volume of *Essays and Addresses* published in 1893 that included a seventy-three-page panegyric on the music of George Frederick Handel, at the end of which he concludes, 'In art as well as in life, it must be given to us sometimes to judge as lovers, and not with the chill impartiality of more intimate acquaintance.' His love of Handel's works was such that in 1873 Balfour had organized and financially guaranteed a full performance of *Belshazzar* in the Royal Albert Hall. His interest in music was by no means confined to Handelian sonorities. Balfour and Elgar may have crossed paths when both attended performances of Wagner's works at Bayreuth in 1895, and they certainly met at the 1898 Leeds Festival where both attended a Lord Mayor's luncheon. The Covent Garden Festival happened to take place at the moment Balfour was hitting his stride, having finally lifted himself out of his uncle's shadow.

The new Prime Minister did not change the course of culture unsupported. His ascent ushered into prominence a close-knit coterie of intellectual aristocrats known as the Souls, so named by Lord Charles Beresford, subsequently Elgar's friend and the dedicatee of *The Fringes of the Fleet*. 'No history of the times would be complete until the history of the Souls is written,' said Balfour, who had been at the centre of their circle since the Souls first banded together in the late 1880s to initiate a rebellion against the unrefined amusements and vapid materialistic preoccupations of their social contemporaries. With their own language and in-jokes, the Souls would have provided an alluring haven to their contemporary Edward Elgar had he been born into their rank. In the Covent Garden audiences gathered for the Elgar Festival, the Souls came out in force.

In the days surrounding the Festival, Edward and Alice stayed with Frank at his London house in Old Queen Street. By the time they reached London on 12 March, Schuster's front door was crowded with representatives of the press agog at the news that the King and Queen would attend the opening concert. So intrusive were they that Elgar found himself obliged to enter and leave the house by the wicket gate that gave onto Birdcage Walk.

On the 13th, Schuster gave his houseguests a magnificent dinner party in a dining room decorated with the initials E.E. and the names of Elgar works picked out in flowers. Alice's copy of the menu card, now at the Birthplace, lists eleven courses including 'Chaufroi de Volaille à la Hut', 'Salade à la Festival', 'Poires à la Elgar' and 'Gâteau Carice'. Alice's diary records that Schuster proposed Elgar's health 'with his heart in his voice'. Elgar's gift to Schuster was the dedication of *In the South*, a new work that would have its first performance on the Festival's last night.

As the audience took their seats in the hall on the night of the 14th, they marveled at the specially produced interior decorations and modifications. The following day the *Manchester Guardian* reported breathlessly that, 'with the lower boxes removed, and rows of stalls occupying their place, the auditorium was much larger than usual, while the stage was completely filled from front to back with the orchestra and singers, nearly four hundred strong... The partition that separates the floor of the house from the orchestra was taken down, and a space in front of the stage was railed off with banks of flowers. There was a blue canopy over the stage, and there were Venetian masts and festoons of roses in which glowed electric lights. The back of the stage was arranged to represent a baronial hall.'

Ticket holders received a single handbill that announced the programme for all three concerts. In addition, a booklet of explanatory notes for the last night's Vocal and Orchestral Concert was on sale for a shilling. Elgar had entrusted two friends, Percy Pitt and Alfred Kalisch, with the task of producing the analytical notes. In 1904 Pitt was a young composer who had held the post of organist at the Queen's Hall since 1896. He had been musical advisor to the Covent Garden Opera since 1902. Kalisch was the music critic for *The World* who had helped Elgar locate a Jewish melody for his setting of Psalm 92 in *The Apostles*.

The first concert consisted solely of the work Londoners who had not attended the 1903 Westminster Cathedral performance were eager to hear. Hans Richter massed the forces of the Hallé and the voices of the Manchester Choir to produce a victorious account of *The Dream of Gerontius*. The *Evening Standard*

John Singer Sargent's portrait of
Arthur James Balfour, Prime
Minister at the
time of the Elgar Festival.



proclaimed that the performance 'will assuredly be long remembered by those who were present... John Coates's reading of the name part is itself sufficient to place him in the foremost rank of leading vocalists... Madame Kirkby Lunn happily balanced dignity and tenderness in her delivery of the words of the Guardian Angel; and it would be difficult to imagine a more impressive utterance of the words of the Priest and of the Angel of the Agony than that given by Mr Ffrangcon-Davies.'

While the press was universal in its praise for the work and the performers, there were complaints about the acoustics. According to the *Evening Standard*, that heavy canvas canopy above the heads of the chorus diminished their resonance to the point where 'dramatic effects were impossible and not a real ringing fortissimo was once heard.' Edward Baughan observed in the *Daily Graphic* that while 'the Festival made a most impressive start... The *Dream of Gerontius* is a little out of place in Covent Garden, being unsatisfactory as a concert room. The construction of the theatre is wholly disadvantageous for oratorio; the chorus necessarily placed at the back of the stage seemed last night to have difficulty in making itself heard.'

The King and Queen had been expected to attend the first night only, but they appeared on the second

night as well. Richter devoted this concert to the first London performance of *The Apostles* with the three Gerontius soloists plus Agnes Nicholls, Andrew Black and Robert Kennerly Rumford. There had been much speculation in the press about whether or not Dr Elgar had been able to match Gerontius with a second choral work of genius on a comparable scale. Press reaction to the first performance in Birmingham five months previously offered confusing clues.

'I feel a quite exceptional difficulty in sorting out my ideas as to *The Apostles*,' declared the Morning Leader. '...The chief note of the music is one of devoted mysticism which we have come to regard as characteristically Elgarish.' Critics then as now complained about what they perceived to be the lack of a unified structure. They were expecting another seamless tapestry à la Gerontius; but for *The Apostles* Elgar had wrought a mosaic. Baughan's review of the première in the *Daily Graphic* concluded that 'the Resurrection music is exquisitely limpid and melodious and the Ascension chorus at the end is a marvelous piece of writing, climax being piled on climax with stupendous effect.' But he regretted that 'the work is not one picture but a series and the mind wanders from one to another until the impression created by one cancels out the impression created by another.' No wonder the London critics and the rest of the audience approached the Festival performance on 15 March 1904 with held breath, 'the stillness of the house during the progress of the music being remarkable' according to the *Evening Standard*.

The work won the day. The *Times* concluded that 'the success of the enterprise was as undeniable as on Monday' and 'the soloists merit the most generous praise'. The critic of the *Daily Illustrated Mirror* pronounced *The Apostles* to be superior to Gerontius but seemed unable to get over the fact that the London première was not the world première: 'The greatest work of Dr Edward Elgar came to Covent Garden Opera House last night by way of Birmingham and Germany, a decidedly round-about journey'.

Press praise for the first two nights was nothing compared with the effusion of enthusiasm for the last night that 'was by far the most successful in the artistic point of view' according to *The Times*. The Queen was again in attendance, this time without the King. Richter began the programme with *Froissart*, followed by selections from *Caractacus* and ending the first half with a resounding rendition of the 'Enigma' Variations. Ever mindful of the need for cost-effectiveness, Harry Higgins had hired the chorus for the first two nights only, so that the *Caractacus* selections on the last night had to be limited to pieces that could be sung by a trio of second-tier voices: the American soprano Suzanne Adams, tenor Lloyd Chandos, and baritone Charles Clark.

Sea Pictures began the second half of the programme. No money-saving strategy applied for this work since only Clara Butt's voice would do. Afterward, the press had difficulty making up their minds about which was more memorably splendid, Madame Butt's dress or her voice.

Then came the new work. The previous November, Elgar had gone to Italy in hopes of returning with the longed-for symphony. What he produced was another overture, but this one came closer to symphonic proportions than any orchestral piece he had composed thus far. At 900 bars, *In the South* is twice the length of Elgar's earlier two overtures, *Froissart* and *Cockaigne*. Since the scoring was not complete until late February, there had been insufficient time for Hans Richter to study it; so after *Sea Pictures*, Edward Elgar mounted the conductor's rostrum. He handed back the baton to Hans Richter for *Cockaigne*. Then they switched again so that Elgar could conclude the programme, bringing the house down with *Pomp and Circumstance* Nos. 1 and 2. When the applause finally abated, the composer was presented with a laurel wreath 'of inconvenient proportions'. The *Pall Mall Gazette* summed up:

Thus a very extraordinary and very admirable week of music has come to a close, extraordinary because in this cold country of ours there has been so little public patronage given to what may almost be called esoteric genius, admirable because it has been proved that on every side the good wishes and sympathies of all that is best in English art have gone to make an unexampled triumph... it will be chronicled by historians that the King lavished his personal favours upon a great English composer because His Majesty sought to encourage that which is most perdurable in English musical art.

August Jaeger gave his verdict in a letter to console fellow variation Dora Penny (whose clergyman father had forbidden her to attend 'musical entertainments' taking place during Lent):

They played you beautifully & the audience liked you hugely. They liked me too... The new overture is beautiful & new, & shows a surer touch than almost anything else I know of E.E.'s. The Apostles impressed me tremendously though nothing "came off" as the composer meant it. The acoustic defects of the theatre were too great... Elgar had a rare time and everything was splendid. Ask dear little Mrs. E. She must have been in the 7th Heaven of Happiness. Such swells they met, from the Queen downwards. A great time for E.E., & some of us who have believed in him & fought for him (I had to fight hard for him at Novello's) are happy...

Two days after the Festival ended, Elgar met Balfour at a dinner party given by Lord Northampton. The fifth Marquess of Northampton was a keen amateur pianist and singer. As a young man he had sung for Elgar in several Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society concerts. While the composer took the opportunity to harangue the Prime Minister about the inadequacies of the Musical Copyright Bill, the Prime Minister responded by asking the composer if he would accept an honour. As a consequence of the Covent Garden Festival, Dr Edward Elgar, provincial musician, became Sir Edward Elgar, national composer, in the Sovereign's June 1904 Birthday Honours.

During the post-Festival years prior to World War I, Sir Edward Elgar would confirm his stature with masterpiece after masterpiece, touching British hearts with an effect admirably expressed by Dr Percy Young in his 1953 biography of Vaughan Williams:

The years before the first Great War belong to Elgar in point of public esteem. The warmth of his style, the amplitude of his vision, an unashamed sense of traditional patriotism, combined with a magnificence of technique untainted by academic propositions were an invitation to the English to regard affectionately, and in idealized form, the values which then appeared to support national greatness...

But for most of the noble and noted Festival attendees, Elgar's music proved to be an occasion of momentary emotion. Even those who felt moved by his compositions would lift their noses at the prospect of seeing Elgar socially. It was an attitude, at once admiring and patronizing, that found general expression in this passage from *A Room with a View*, a novel E. M. Forster had begun to write in 1904:

The kingdom of music is not the kingdom of this world; it will accept those whom breeding and intellect and culture have alike rejected. The commonplace man begins to play and shoots into the empyrean without effort, whilst we look up, marveling at how he has escaped us...

The ensuing years of success did little to alter Elgar's insecurity or London society's attitude towards him. Eighteen years after the Festival, Siegfried Sassoon would speak for his class when he wrote in his diary after hearing a performance of *The Apostles*, 'When I think of the Elgar I met at The Hut, I wonder how that little provincial music-master... has produced so much nobly-constructed choral and orchestral music.' Sassoon's host at The Hut would one day speak for those beyond the reach of rank and fashion. When Frank Schuster died in 1927, the dedicatee of *In the South* left the significant sum of £7,000 'to my friend Sir Edward Elgar OM who has saved my country from the reproach of having produced no composer worthy to rank with the Great Masters...'

Not long after the Festival, the *Zeitgeist* deserted the Souls and their leader. Less than a year later, Balfour lost the King's confidence and the leadership of his party. Obligated to resign as Prime Minister in 1905, Balfour then faced the humiliating loss of the East Manchester seat he had held for twenty years when the general election of January 1906 swept the Liberals into power. Though he remained active in politics for another quarter of a century, Arthur Balfour's tenure as PM is summed up in G. K. Chesterton's faint-praise response to

the Sargent portrait: 'in its presence we feel the sober truths about the English governing class, its wide and ruinous skepticism... the tones of the picture are grave with grey and silver, as of the end of the day not wholly either of failure or victory.'

After Balfour's departure from Number 10 Downing Street, the Souls, who had made intellectual life fashionable at the time of the Festival, were dismissed as self-indulgent dilettantes. E. F. Benson, brother of the Land of Hope and Glory wordsmith, mimicked them in *Dodo*, where one of the characters says, 'I would not mind being acutely unhappy if I could dissect my own emotions and have them photographed and sent round to my friends'.

Why is it that Balfour and Salisbury hardly figure in the annals of British history, while their predecessors, Gladstone and Disraeli, provide the subjects for countless commemorative busts, plays and exam questions? Professor A. J. P. Taylor attributes this disparity to the fact that the Conservative policies of Salisbury and Balfour were chiefly negative, failing to present a message of 'uplift'. It was left to Edward Elgar to deliver that message.

Would Elgar have received his post-Festival knighthood had Salisbury's leadership lasted as long as Gladstone's? The Prime Minister's passing in 1903 was perhaps fortunate for both men. Had Salisbury achieved Gladstone's longevity, he would have lived to see five of his nine beloved grandsons perish in Flanders' fields.

It was Elgar's good fortune that Balfour, though as incapable as his uncle of giving expression to the aspirations and emotions of his times, was prepared to honour those who could. Music was where he found his uplift. Consider this deathbed passage from Kenneth Young's biography:

While he was still just able to express a desire he asked that Charles, the talented son of Reginald McKenna, should be brought to his bedside to sing. Charles McKenna sang Purcell's 'Evening Hymn' and Handel's 'Where e'er you walk' ... Arthur Balfour could no longer speak but 'gurgled' his appreciation.

1904 was the best of times for 'the man of the hour in the musical world' who only a few years previously had scraped a tradesman's living teaching the violin in a provincial girls' school and selling sheet music from behind the counter of his father's music shop. Yet he misunderstood the future.

Edward Elgar paid dearly for those ill-fitting worldly honours that flowed from the 1904 Covent Garden Festival. In Greek theatre, tragedy is triggered by a loss of connection. The price of fame for Sir Edward Elgar was the loss of connection with Ted Elgar. Henceforward that sense of loss would burden Elgar with what William S. McNaught, editor of the *Musical Times* termed 'his constant and perverse belief that the hand of the world was against him'. An indispensable element of Elgar's post-Festival music would be the never-ending attempt to restore the connection with his boyhood via the search for the means of recovering childhood innocence in the hope of reversing the worlds of actuality and dream. 'He was not a happy man,' wrote McNaught in his April 1934 *Musical Times* obituary. 'His work taxed him body and soul. Perhaps it was in self-confession that he wrote at the head of one of his works: "Rarely, rarely comest thou, spirit of delight".'

Rare indeed but what delight! Who among us would disagree with McNaught's concluding epitaph: 'let the enjoyment that he has given to the world be the measure of what it cost him'?

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Jane Abdy and Charlotte Gere, *The Souls* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984).

Sir Adrian Boult, *My Own Trumpet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973).

Rupert Hart-Davis, *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981).
Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1984).
Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Spirit of England*, (London: Heinemann, 1984).
Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury, Victorian Titan* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999).
Kenneth Young, *Arthur James Balfour* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963).
Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956).

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Henry and the Gräfin/Grinder: Elgar and The Starlight Express

J. P. E. Harper-Scott

The *Starlight Express* is widely regarded as a 'piece of whimsy', Elgar in retrospective mode retreating into simplicity and childhood innocence. But a close reading of the texts of both the original Blackwood novel and its stage adaptation (for which Elgar provided his incidental music) reveals the same dark existential themes which are explored in much of the composer's symphonic and choral music.

Elgar's commission to write music for a theatrical adaptation of Algernon Blackwood's 1913 novel *A Prisoner in Fairyland* came only after several links in a loose chain were shot out by war. Having completed her adaptation, renamed *The Starlight Express*, Violet Pearn turned for help in staging it to the actress Muriel Pratt, who was trying to establish her own theatre company. Pratt thought that the director should be Basil Dean, who in turn recommended that his friend Clive Carey ought to write the music. And so with the fall of this final domino, collaborative work began. But Carey must at some time in his life have done something very disagreeable to someone, because fate dealt him a hideous blow. He went on composing, but the other links in the chain came apart, and nobody seems to have told him that he was writing music for no good purpose.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, Dean lost all interest in the work, and indeed in theatre more generally. He enlisted in the army in October, and effectively ended his collaboration with Pratt. Her young stage company could not survive the vicissitudes of wartime England, and it was disbanded for ever in May 1915. She returned to acting, and during her second show met Lena Ashwell, the proprietor of the Kingsway Theatre. During this production, hearing of Pratt's now defunct plans to put on *The Starlight Express*, Ashwell decided to stage it herself that Christmas. It was the middle of November and time was short.

Music played a central role in Ashwell's productions. She felt a responsibility to do whatever she could for the war effort, and this most often meant using music to lift the spirits of the troops.¹ It is entirely fitting, given her deeply-held views on the nature and worth of music in such times, that an invitation should extend, through the Telegraph critic Robin Legge, to the composer who had scarcely written a note since the outbreak of war which was not intended somehow to aid England's exertions in it. After only a short period of consultation with Legge, Elgar was able to accept a commission with the proviso that, given the time restraints, he would probably have to borrow much music from earlier works, including the *Wand of Youth*. A. E. Keeton hears several more self-borrowings in the score.

The *Music Makers*, op. 69, has been cited as the score in which Elgar gave the freest rein to his love of self-quotation. I should say, though, that *The Starlight Express*, in proportion to its length, is even fuller of self-reminiscences. ... The first germ can be traced back to 1871, [and] *The Wand of Youth*. ... In other parts of the score there are distinct echoes from the Spanish serenade, *Stars of the Summer Night*, Op. 23; from *Caractacus*, Op. 35; and from Op.[.] 42, the incidental music to George Moore and W. B. Yeats's play *Grania and Diarmid*. There are also decided flashes from two of Elgar's finest groups of unaccompanied part-songs, *Opp.* 45 and 53.

In the shimmering 'landscape' music of the second act of *The Starlight Express*... there are clear suggestions of the *Falstaff* dream interlude music, Op. 68. Still closer than any of these reminiscences is the lovely *Dream*

The second strain from 'The Little Bells' in the second Wand of Youth suite is important in *The Starlight Express*, where it becomes the ubiquitous 'star music', used prominently in the songs 'To the children', 'Curfew song', and the finale, as well as in the score's short instrumental pieces. Elgar also borrowed 'Sun Dance' and 'Fairy Pipers' from the first suite (the former played complete as an interlude before Act II, Scene i) and 'Moths and Butterflies' and 'Fountain Dance' from the second. But there was new music too—that in the nocturnal scenes of Act II being especially touching.

But Elgar's involvement put Clive Carey in an awkward position. Although he had joined the army in November 1914, he had continued to write music for *The Starlight Express*. Three songs, one each for the Organ Grinder, Dustman, and Gardener, were published as his Op. 18, but they would never accompany the stage version. He was surprised and disappointed when he heard of Elgar's involvement (in December 1915), and wrote to Blackwood, demanding an explanation. Pearn replied on Blackwood's behalf, explaining that Carey's connexion with the play had been severed at the same time that Dean, the man who involved him in the first place, had ended his own association with it.

If this imbroglia had been brought to Elgar's attention it would have led to a repeat of an earlier upset. He had spent the early part of 1915 working on *The Spirit of England*, but had stopped writing when he discovered that another composer, Cyril Rootham of St John's College, Cambridge, had already completed a setting of the final poem, 'For the Fallen'. Rootham's setting was to be published by Novello. Ever the *preux chevalier*, Elgar decided that he could not continue with his work. He wrote an apologetic letter to the poet Binyon, who was not impressed. He begged Elgar to

think of England, of the English-speaking peoples...; think of the awful casualty lists that are coming, & the losses in more & more homes; ...think of what you are withholding [sic] from your countrymen and women. Surely it would be wrong to let them lose this help and consolation. ...I am sure that Rootham would agree with me.³

Elgar was still unconvinced; but he thought again after receiving a forthright letter from Sidney Colvin, which is suffused with the indomitable fustian that only a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge has license to muster.

[W]hat has the poor British public done now which it had not a month ago, when you were full of the project and raised all our hearts with the anticipation of a great and worthy expression & commemoration of the emotions of the hour, such as you alone are capable of giving them? Honestly I think you take far too censorious & jaundiced a view of your countrymen... And surely, granted that the majority of them are not very sensitive to the appeal of art, you cannot in your heart fail to realise that there is a big minority passionately sensitive to it, to whom your work makes all the difference in their lives, & whom—forgive me—you have no right to rob of such a hope as you were holding out to them a month ago. ...Do the work you had promised & begun... do it for your country & the future & to honour and justify the gift that has been given you. ...P.S. The above is not to be answered except by deeds.⁴

The word of an Oxbridge don is rarely gainsaid or disobeyed by any but the most stout-hearted, and Elgar did not waste much time before he picked up his pen again and completed *The Spirit of England*.

Plainly Elgar had a great deal of respect for other composers, at least as human beings. The first man to get to a poem or play had, in his view, an inalienable right to set it to music, and the only honourable thing to do when competition arose was for the latecomer to withdraw gracefully. But his hand was forced in the case of *The Spirit of England*, and its completion was therefore marred by ignominy. Rootham insisted that Elgar's promise to withdraw had been final, and that his renegeing on it was thoroughly dishonourable. Robert Anderson notes that 'Rootham's widow still remembered the matter with bitterness in the late 1940s.'⁵

So if Elgar had been told of Carey's prior involvement with *The Starlight Express* he would doubtless have withdrawn his own, especially since the news broke very late, at the time of the dress rehearsal. Thankfully,

Elgar appears to have been shielded from the facts, and in any case, Carey was rather more mature in his handling of the situation than Rootham had been (he harboured no ill-feelings toward Elgar). A potential disaster was averted.

The most important musical ingredient to have been prescribed by Pearn's stage script was the use in the finale of *The First Nowell*. Steeped as it is in the star-imagery of the play, and pregnant with Christian implications, it reminds the audience—a little clumsily—that good things often come in small bundles, especially when 'wumbled' innkeepers are so inhospitable that they can force a woman in labour to give birth in a stable. Children are special, says the finale: so there! One can see why Anderson calls the work 'pretentious and naive'.⁶ Yet this is not all Blackwood's fault. Pearn is culpable for 'an overloaded, oversymbolized stage script... [which] inevitably swamped Elgar's music. ...[W]hat should have been an epoch-making success proved a wretched fiasco'.⁷

The play sometimes is pretentious, naive, overloaded, and oversymbolized—and the symbolic use of the Star of Bethlehem, which is entirely Pearn's fault, is a little misjudged. Nevertheless, there is in the story much that was attractive to Elgar, who called it 'pure and simple'.⁸ Indeed, he even said to Algernon Blackwood that he had been waiting a generation for the chance to set a story such as this to music.⁹ Precisely what was it that Elgar found so attractive?

By the time the Blackwood–Pearn *Starlight Express* was performed at the Kingsway Theatre in 1915, the original story had undergone significant modification from its original incarnation, but before outlining the story in its two forms it will be useful to give a biographical sketch of its author.¹⁰

Blackwood spent his early childhood in a manor house in Kent, surrounded by such a host of servants, nannies, tutors, and gardeners as is not nowadays found outside of a novel by P. G. Wodehouse; but his idyll was disrupted by his father's sudden and permanent religious conversion, which took the family away from its comfortable home and onto a world-wide mission of evangelism. The whole experience was formative for the impressionable Algernon. His chocolate-box childhood existence had been taken away from him, and he had been thrust immediately into the harsh new world of an alien society. Little wonder that he considered childhood to be magical, and the transition into adulthood painful and ultimately 'wumbling'. After his father's conversion, Blackwood had his reading prescribed for him. And along with Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* he was handed the works of Lewis Carroll. This introduction to *Wonderland* and the Romantic Child who visits it therefore came at a critical time, and it was doubtless more affecting for that reason. It is a tradition which Michael Allis has recently placed Elgar alongside.¹¹

Elgar's 'retrospective aesthetic' places him firmly in 'a widespread phenomenon in nineteenth-century English society'.¹² Changes in law and in subjects for scientific study revealed a growing sympathy with children,¹³ but it was in the arts that the sea-change can be seen most clearly. Rousseau's *Émile* had already established childhood's 'special nature', and Victorian literature was full of the exploration of it. Old-fashioned moralizing works for children remained the special bailiwick of fastidious ladies, but at the same time books were injected with a greater sense of fun and enjoyment, specifically to awaken the imaginations of children.

Novels for children began to be about children, especially in fantastic situations. Whatever his motivations may have been for writing about Alice Liddell, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872) represent a high point for children's literature, from where it could engage with children as they are, not as a sententious society would like them to be—with all their silly fantasies and their comically anarchistic world-views, which were now properly seen as creative attributes to be nourished, rather than perversions to be suppressed.

This artistic exploration of childhood, which gave birth to what we might call the 'method author', involved in many cases a great investment of emotional energy in an imaginative return to the author's own childhood—an empathetic leap which often led to nostalgia. The theme of regret at the passing of childhood begins to infect the art-work itself, as J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904) shows singularly well. And so stories cease merely to be about children and for children; the pain of growing up is itself woven into the fabric of the tales, and becomes the real

focus. It was into this climate that Blackwood would enter in his early adulthood. Its power to bite into his perception of the world was probably enhanced by a heartbreaking personal experience.

Around the time of his twenty-first birthday Blackwood left England for Canada and the United States. His ten years there were challenging, and homesickness eventually brought him back to England, but it was not to prove the restorative draught he might have hoped it would. During Blackwood's very trying sojourn in America, his father had died. His childhood's innocence was lost, and the man who had shaped it was dead. Very soon Blackwood began to write deeply nostalgic stories in which children played a literally vital part.

In these stories, the fantasy world of children is misunderstood or unnoticed by most of the adults—except for one. In a sequence of three books—*The Education of Uncle Paul* (1909), *A Prisoner in Fairyland* (1913), and *The Extra Day* (1915)—a triumvirate of visionary little children works together with a single grown-up man who is always an Uncle (and therefore known to them, but not too closely) to unlock their fantasy world. In helping them to find the answers to their questions, this grown-up also finds the answers to his own, and these lie in an imaginative engagement with his latent childlike feelings and yearnings. The theme of the stories is a middle-aged man's reconstruction of the limited vision of adulthood, and the fulfilment of the desires of his by now dominant inner child. The first grown-up to find fulfilment in this way is called 'Uncle Paul'—and that is the name Blackwood liked his close friends to call him. It is not difficult to spot the autobiographical inspiration in these stories. This manic triumph of the ego over the superego all seems very exciting, if a little inadvisable, but there is a disturbing twist in *A Prisoner in Fairyland*, the novel which was adapted as *The Starlight Express*.

Blackwood's novel is part whimsical tale of childhood, part adult love story with Classical allusions. On the face of it, the story is about a 'wumbled' businessman, Henry Rogers, and his 'unwumbling', namely his personal journey to self-realization, love, and happiness. His cousin, John Campion ('Daddy'), is an author who has lost his Muse. Campion's children—Jinny, Jumbo and Monkey—long to 'unwumble' his nonsense poems and stories. The strange words which dapple the novel come from the children, who are fond of such compound neologisms (cf. 'exaccurate' and 'Cousinerry').¹⁴ As such 'wumble' is probably a mixture of 'wonder' and 'mumble'; but since the novel's thesis is that adulthood's spiritual gag is obscurantist, the mixture smacks strongly of the latter. Even those few grown-ups who can perceive beauty (Daddy, for instance) cannot communicate it or be changed by it. Their beautiful ideas are wumbled (confused, distorted, and worryingly vulgarized) on the way out, and since they are not stored in a form that either speaker or listener can remember, are forgotten and lost.

Henry is very wumbled. He has a soul-killing job in the City, but fancies himself as a hero. (In one amusing scene, he gazes aspiringly at an equestrian painting of Napoleon which hangs on his wall while his adoring wife showers burning kisses on his upturned face.) Quite suddenly one morning the name of a small village in a newspaper reminds him of his youth. It is 'Crayfield', where both Henry and Blackwood had lived as boys. Immediately he is pulled by what seems like fate (but turns out to be something else) in a quite unexpected direction. Deciding to take a rest cure he makes his way to the Manor House, and after an exploration of the old ancestral pile, he enters the garden. Together with an assortment of bizarre fairy-tale characters who inhabit it—screaming delightedly, 'He has come back!'—he rushes onto the *Starlight Express*, a magical train that flies through the night. Memories of his childhood rush back to him, and he recalls his childhood hiding-place in the Star Cave, where with these fantastic creatures he had stored lost starlight, and used it for unwumbling. The Blue-eyed Guard (blue is an important symbolic colour in the novel) asks where to take the train, and Henry suggests Bourcelles, largely because (by chance) he had seen the name of the place on a letter from his cousin that morning. The rest of the story takes place there.

The revelation that comes when grown-ups are coaxed 'out' of their bodies is represented by starlight. This is a symbol of sympathy—the coming together of separate minds, and their holding in a single truth. Starlight sticks minds together like glue. Together the children and adults gradually unwumble themselves and their village, and Daddy writes it all up as a story. Finally, a mysterious amber-eyed woman who is mystically present but—significantly—mostly invisible throughout comes to Bourcelles: the Countess, 'die kleine Gräfin'. She

reveals that the story in all its details was her creation, implanted in their minds. Henry falls immediately in love with her and in the closing pages they leave Bourcelles to marry.

One could read the story simply as a whimsical fantasy, and the early chapters support the interpretation. A Dustman, Lamplighter, Demon Chimney-sweep, Woman of the Haystack, Laugher, and Tramp join the boyish Henry and the (exclusively blue-eyed) children on bodiless nocturnal adventures with 'sticky' starlight whose magic can unwumble adults. Adventure and fantasy predominate. But as the story goes on, its mythical dimension is increasingly played up. The Pleiades have always been the main celestial focus, and most of the star dust is collected from them. Daddy writes Henry into his story as Orion (as the Countess had done years before), and the human hunter is possessed by the image of a goddess with amber eyes—a colour which is set over against the symbolic blue of 'youth and distance, of sky and summer flowers, of childhood'.¹⁵ This is the Countess, in the mystical form in which she suffuses the story (but the first-time reader has no clue who she is). There is enough in Blackwood's elliptic mythical imagery to suggest that the Countess is Elektra—literally, 'amber-coloured'—the lost Pleiad whose star is invisible to the naked eye. The mythical focus is thus on stars, which stand for persons, ahead of starlight, which stands for sympathy; and so in this concluding section the story obtains a decisively adult identity. It is a love story about Henry's nescient lifelong pursuit of die kleine Gräfin.

The introduction of the Countess after the story appears to be over is, it must be said, something of a dirty trick on Blackwood's part, and it utterly changes our reading of all that has gone before. The unsullied magic of the main body of the novel becomes tainted, and the whole story is refracted through the corrupted prism of this self-serving woman. Everything that has happened to Henry has happened only because she willed it. We can no longer be sure that he would have returned so powerfully to his childhood without her interference, nor—more importantly—that he would even have wanted to. She has hypnotized Henry by circumstance to fall in love with her. By anybody's reckoning, that surely counts as bad sportsmanship, and as a reader one feels hornswoggled.

So there are complications Blackwood perhaps did not intend. Most significantly, the dynamic between hunter and hunted is fundamentally skewed. A hunter is always dependent on his prey to some extent (since he requires it but it does not require him), but such 'dependence' does not usually lead to the withholding of his free will: a poacher can do just as well with pheasant B as pheasant A, and may choose between them. But in this story the prey is in total, determining control of her hunter. It seems that Henry has never had an individual thought. His 'Scheme for Disabled Thingumabobs' (the structure he imposed on his waking life) and his 'Net of Stars' (the structure he imposed on his dreams) were both creations of the Countess, implanted in his unsuspecting brain. He has always been her puppet.

The Countess's various revelations have serious ramifications. First, since he has no free will Henry is incapable of moral action. Even if his Scheme was a success he could not have acted for 'good', since he made no informed individual choice and his acts were—for him—morally neutral. Second, since she has controlled all his life by telepathic suggestion, she has not only been wicked and self-serving but has also made it impossible for Henry to find himself. In fact, the whole existential thrust of the novel—Henry's attainment of his 'authentic' self through a reconstructive return to 'innocent' childhood—is undermined. Henry does not find himself: someone else presents him with only one of countless possible ways of being. If his wumbled adult existence had heretofore been 'inauthentic' because consumed by the 'degrading influence of the lust for acquisition'¹⁶ that characterizes the masses and dictates a way of life that might not be appropriate to an individual, then the existence Henry has at the end of the novel is no better. He has escaped Heidegger's *das Man*, the socio-historically situated public approval which circumscribes an individual's capacity to become himself or herself, and makes existence 'inauthentic'. But on the whimsical interpretation he has been imprisoned in Fairyland by the children, and substituted *das Kind*; or, on the mythical interpretation, he has been imprisoned by and substituted *die Frau*: in neither case has he shaped his own life 'authentically'.

In her stage adaptation, Pearn removes the Countess and with her the story's mythical dimension. She is

replaced by the Organ Grinder (Pearn's creation). He is more amiably disinterested than the rather selfishly utilitarian Countess, but still acts as manipulator. In the final, Elgarian version of the play, his becomes the most musical part, with narrative songs guiding the stage action, starting with an introductory piece in front of the stage curtain. Meanwhile the action is—for sound theatrical reasons—shifted entirely to Bourcelles, and Henry is moved a little to one side. Whereas for Blackwood, the essentially autobiographical significance of Uncle Henry, of Crayfield, and of the return to childhood and childlike things was always the motivating force of the story-line, for Pearn the greater interest lies in the parts of the children. Adults are less important.

So the love story is extinguished, and the Pleiades (pagan) are replaced by the Star of Bethlehem (Christian): only unwumbling childish whimsy remains. But the existential and moral problems I have drawn attention to are actually compounded by Pearn's ostensible simplification. In Blackwood's novel the Countess had drawn her Orion to herself (presumably) to love him. She is a little like a mother who, loving her son too much, sets a course for his life which she believes—perhaps wrongly—is in his best interests. One should always allow loved ones to find their own way, and act merely as facilitator, not manipulator. Nevertheless, the Countess and the mother may, in the end, just about be forgiven; but the Organ Grinder has no motivation. In Pearn's play Henry is still without free will, and he believes baselessly that his unwumbling was morally good and existentially authentic. His misprision is almost pathological, and he rejoices in his absurdity.

As I have already noted, Elgar said he had waited for a generation to set this kind of story, and in conclusion we must try to establish why he said so. He doubtless identified with a wumbled artist who had lost his Muse, since he had had a difficult year artistically (recall the Rootham anxiety). And because Pearn's alterations made Daddy the central adult character, the story's appeal might have been even more immediate: through an imaginative return to his childhood, the artist is unwumbled and made whole again—but as a child. This final qualification is crucial, and Elgar works sombrely with it. The story might seem to offer Elgar an easy and pleasant escape from his own troubles and the troubles of all of Europe, but I believe there was a more deep-rooted fascination. The shape of the story of the play and novel parallels closely one of Elgar's central musical and narrative concerns.

When Elgar's music stages a return to an earlier state—it might be an opening tonic key, earlier music from his oeuvre, or the cyclic restatement of a symphonic theme—the listener is often left wondering whether it represents a victorious affirmation or a pusillanimous retreat. Is the spirit as delightful at the close as it was at the opening of the Second Symphony, or does its quiet remembrance hint that ambitions must be modest? Are the brass syncopations in the return of the First Symphony's 'motto' at the end of the finale jubilant or dyspeptic? The conclusion of *The Dream of Gerontius*, which restores the key of the opening (in the major mode), seems happy till we realize that the Soul is not actually in the presence of his God, but merely in the waiting room. And in *Falstaff*, doesn't the new King's E major make Falstaff's final chord of C major sound completely out of place, and not a little ridiculous? How ill old chords become a fool and jester, one might say.

The Starlight Express was written in Elgar's third main compositional phase, which is characterized by harmonic simplicity and easily understood forms. His first phase, whose early masterpiece was *Froissart*, op. 19, culminated in the *Variations*, op. 36 and *Gerontius*, op. 38, and stretched on into the incomplete oratorio trilogy. Here Elgar's post-Wagnerianism found a distinctive tone. A second phase followed, typical of the early-modernist period in music c.1890–1914 (which Elgar joined late), and reaches roughly between *In The South*, op. 50 and *Falstaff*, op. 68. It was during this second phase that Elgar's style reached the height of its complexity and formal daring. But by the end of it, audiences were '[sitting] there like a lot of stuffed pigs',¹⁷ and it is perhaps significant that much of his war music was intended for the theatre, not the concert hall. By now the developments in musical language on the continent were already being heard and digested even in insular England, and Elgar was confronted with a hard artistic choice: either to hop on the band-wagon or to go his own way. He opted for the latter, and pared away the complex chromaticism and modernist structures of his second-phase music. The features of his third and last phase (although in the Third Symphony we may sense the beginning of a fourth) are focused clearly in *The Starlight Express*. In no sense does he stage a return to Eden.

The central concern of the story, and therefore of the music, is dreams. It is in dreams that adults come out of their bodies and rediscover their childish innocence. And the language of some of the music in the work is reminiscent of Falstaff's dream interludes, especially the short cadenzas that accompany the transition between normal sleep and disembodiment. But these backward steps—into diatonic language and simple forms, and into childhood—do not offer to solve the problems that inspired them. Returning to a nineteenth-century musical language is no 'solution' to the problems of musical modernism (although it is a response perhaps just as valid as the more vivacious experiments of the New Music), and a return to childhood is not a solution of the problems of adulthood: since childhood inevitably leads back to adulthood, the circle is vicious.

The grown-ups in *The Starlight Express* do not find their adult realities enhanced by their dream experiences; rather those realities are abandoned or discountenanced. And because Pearn removed the only connexion with the adult world at the end of Blackwood's story, namely the marriage of Henry and die Gräfin, there is absolutely nothing adult about the end of the play's adventure. The message seems to be that problems—musical or existential—cannot be solved, but merely repudiated. *A Prisoner in Fairyland* allows for a little hope, but *The Starlight Express* is more disturbing. There is just a hint in this tale, and in Elgar's style at the time of its writing, of Nietzsche's notion of the Eternal Recurrence. The story and the music say 'yes' to the experiences of childhood, but that 'yes' also contains an acceptance of the confusion and misery that will follow.

The play ran for only a month, and is rarely performed. The 300-page score was not published, but an attractive suite of songs survived as Elgar's Op. 78. *The Starlight Express* is a simple and charming work, although nowadays it might be difficult to stage without causing a scandal (the entirely innocent nocturnal relationship between Henry and the children would doubtless be misinterpreted by our insanely fearful society). But beneath that charm Elgar hides a troubling message. Although we might hope (perhaps massively), there are no grounds for believing our hope will come to anything; and nothing can rescue us from this predicament, not even the innocence of childhood. In this sense at least the work is typical of its composer.

1. See letter, quoted in K. E. L. Simmons, 'Elgar and the Wonderful Stranger: music for *The Starlight Express*', in *Elgar Studies*, edited by Raymond Monk (Aldershot: Scolar, 1993), pp. 142–213 (p. 161). My narrative of the play's gestation draws heavily on this article.
2. A. E. Keeton, 'The Starlight Express', in *An Elgar Companion*, ed. Christopher Redwood (Ashbourne: Sequoia, 1982), pp. 230–5 (pp. 231–2).
3. Letter of 27 March 1915, in *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime*, ed. Jerrold Northrop Moore (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 288–9.
4. Letter of 13 April 1915, in *Letters of a Lifetime*, p. 290.
5. Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), p. 125, footnote.
6. Anderson, *Elgar*, p. 268.
7. Keeton, 'The Starlight Express', p. 233.
8. Letter to Sidney Colvin, 20 December 1915, in *Letters of a Lifetime*, p. 292.
9. Letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, 30 December 1915.
10. The material on Blackwood's life is drawn from Simmons, 'Elgar and the Wonderful Stranger'.
11. Michael Allis, 'Elgar and the art of retrospective narrative', *The Journal of Musicological Research*, 19 (2000), pp. 289–328.
12. Allis, p. 292.
13. Allis cites 'progressive legislation where the freedom of adults was gradually eroded in favor of the child', and Darwin's *A Biographical Sketch of an Infant* (1877).
14. 'Wumble' is precisely the sort of word Elgar and his wife would use in their childish private language.
15. Algernon Blackwood, *A Prisoner in Fairyland* (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 42.
16. Blackwood, p. 18.
17. Anderson, *Elgar*, p. 102.

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Ann Elgar, date unknown

(George Evans, Tallow Hill, Worcester)

Elgar's Remarkable Mother

Michael Trott

The story of Ann Elgar begins in a small village not far from Ross-on-Wye during the reign of the dissolute George IV and ends eighty years later in Worcester, having encompassed the entire Victorian era. A visit to the house where Ann spent her early years is the starting point for this exploration of her remarkable life.

On a hill in the south-eastern corner of Herefordshire, near the village of Pontshill, is a house called Handley. It is an enlargement of a cottage that was the childhood home of Elgar's mother, Ann Greening (1822–1902). (Some Elgar biographies spell her name with an 'e', and Dr Percy Young gives evidence for this,¹ although she signed herself 'Ann'.) The house faces south towards the wooded, broken plateau of the Forest of Dean. The garden allows easy observation of the delightful landscape below: fields, hedgerows and trees as far as the eye can see. How could a sensitive child grow up here impervious to the beauty of nature? To the east the land rises up to May Hill with its distinctive clump of trees on the summit. On the northern horizon the Malvern Hills seem to point to Worcestershire, a prospect that was to beckon the Greenings in their rustic seclusion. Richard and Mary Watts, the present owners of Handley, happily enjoy a modern lifestyle that has understandably necessitated major changes to the old Greening cottage, but how remote it must have been and how Spartan the existence here in the early nineteenth century.

Ann was the third child of Joseph Greening (1780–1848) and Hester or Esther Apperley (1784–1852). The parents had come to Handley from Elmore and Westbury-on-Severn near Gloucester. As their first child Elizabeth was baptised in 1808 at Weston-under-Penyard, a mile or so from Handley, it is to be assumed that Joseph and Esther had moved to the district soon after their marriage in 1806. John arrived next in 1815, and Elizabeth was already thirteen or fourteen when Ann was born in 1822; she was baptised at Hope Mansell Church in the Forest of Dean. A younger brother, William, died in infancy in 1829.

Joseph Greening came from a family of labourers. As Dr Louie Eickhoff has established, they were poor and largely illiterate, although Joseph married into the literate Apperleys.² Whether he farmed his own land at Handley or worked for a local farmer, it must have been a basic existence. A later occupant of the cottage left a memoir of rural life here, recalling going into the forest with his father in a donkey cart to collect coal for heating.³

Ann Greening was a remarkable person. Growing up in a family of farm labourers with minimal educational opportunities, she became a voracious reader and acquired a love of poetry and the countryside. Books must have helped fill the void of seclusion at Handley. Ann was known for her grace of movement, and her eldest daughter Lucy wrote of her 'unmistakable air of good breeding' and of her being 'truly one of Nature's gentlewomen'.⁴ Dr Percy Young throws some light on her remarkable development by citing a poem composed at age nine as 'pointing to a sound tradition of scholarship in the parish school at Weston-under-Penyard and also to some support for letters at home.' According to Lucy, Ann's mother had brought her up in 'sweet pious simplicity', and this reveals something of Esther Apperley.

Eventually the members of the Greening family all migrated to Worcester. The Elgar biographies do not make it easy to track their movements, and we are indebted here to the thorough research done by K. E. L. and Marion Simmons.⁵ The Greening children came to Worcester in the 1830s, John becoming a boot- and

shoemaker and marrying in 1841 Maria Kelly at St John the Baptist, Claines, to the north of the city. In 1834 Elizabeth married Francis Simmonds, who ran The Shades eating-house and commercial inn (later a tavern) at 16 Mealcheapen Street from about 1843 till his death in 1861. Ann came to Worcester to help the Simmondses, probably in the late 1830s, when she would have been in her teens.

As is well known, William Elgar (1822–1906) arrived in Worcester in 1841 to tune pianos in the district, and he met his future wife Ann through his lodging at The Shades. We know from a newspaper advertisement he placed in 1845 that he later stayed with, or at least used the address of, a Mrs Greening of Claines, but this person is unlikely to have been Ann's sister-in-law, Maria Greening. Maria was preoccupied with young children at the time and most probably lived near her husband's business in Worcester. The Simmondses argue convincingly that Mrs Greening of Claines was probably Ann's mother, since Joseph and Esther Greening had come to Worcester by 1841 at the latest and, according to a census, were living at this time in the neighbourhood of Claines.

(The Simmondses record Joseph dying at Lowesmoor, Worcester in the year of his daughter's marriage, and Esther four years later at 2 College Yard East, now known as 2 College Precincts, where she was living with William and Ann. Joseph and Esther were buried in Claines churchyard; a decade or so on, a grandson Edward would sit and study musical scores by their graves.)

We may picture the young piano tuner's situation at The Shades: far from home, this sensitive, somewhat dreamy young man of Kent was probably captivated by an attractive girl, whose demeanour and artistic interests must have set her apart in the noisy, humdrum environment of The Shades. We may reflect on what their chance encounter and subsequent union led to in the world of music!

William and Ann married in 1848; they were both twenty-six. From this year to 1864, Ann had seven children, of whom five survived to adulthood. Each of them elicited a charming couplet from her. A few years' stay in the country at Broadheath outside Worcester coincided with the birth of Edward in 1857. The world of books again consoled her in her isolation, and her new son inherited this enthusiasm. Ann's poetic nature and love of literary romance must have fostered the artistic growth of her children, not least in Edward. We have no evidence that she was especially musical, though she seems to have enjoyed musical evenings at home. Musical influence in the Elgar household came from the father, a fine complement to Ann's literary leanings and enthusiasm for the natural world. According to Lucy, she would say to her children: 'Be always busy, doing something that is useful or interesting.' It was Ann who brought Roman Catholicism to her family: she became a convert around 1852, a brave decision for a tradesman's wife with no Catholic background, as Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore has observed.⁶

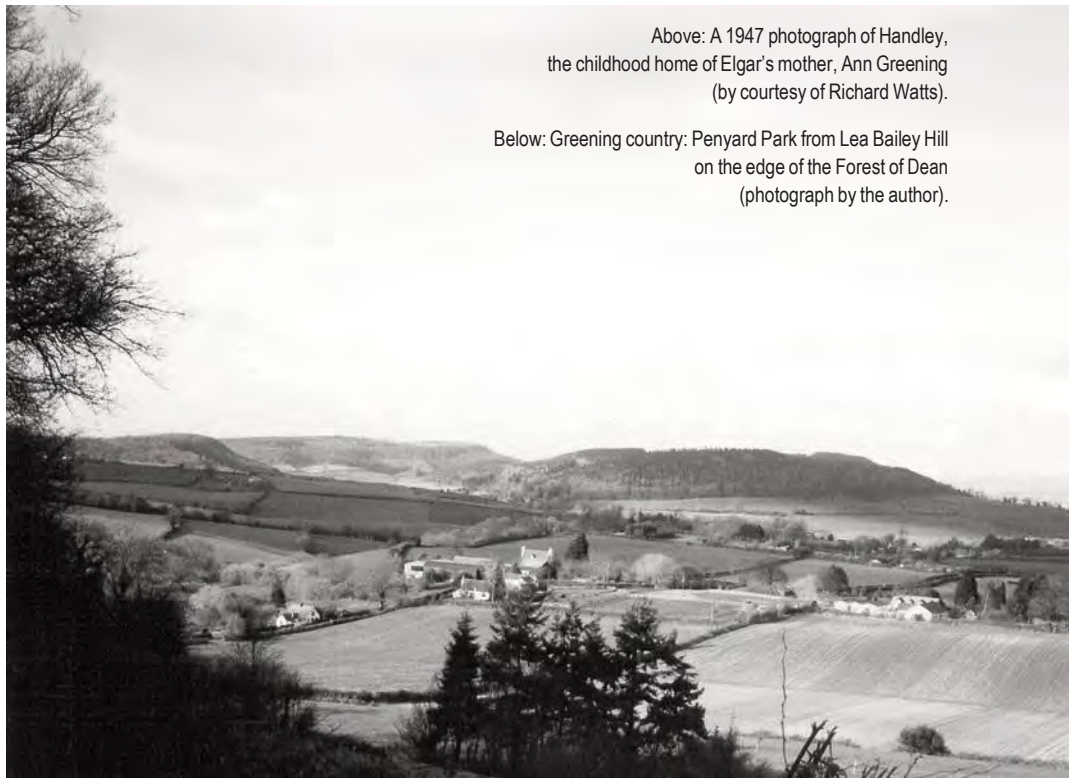
Some inkling of Ann's character can be discerned in a photographic portrait probably taken in her forties. It is not a face of great beauty, as her adoring Edward believed with filial partiality, but nevertheless a handsome face. In a later photograph taken with her husband around 1900, it is easy to imagine her as a woman of perfect sweetness: small wonder that Edward idolized her. Her calm temperament and level-headedness were a good counterbalance to her volatile husband, but behind the good nature was an inner strength. When the Elgars' eldest son Harry died of scarlet fever aged fifteen, Lucy noted tellingly that 'this grief nearly cost my Father his reason, but by Mother's bravery and fortitude, the awful calamity was averted.' If the isolation of Handley had taught Ann anything, it was self-reliance.

Ann lived till her eightieth year and was buried at Astwood Cemetery in Worcester, next to her two sons who had died in childhood. William Elgar's last four years as a widower must have been lonely indeed. During the last months of her life, Ann wrote of her now famous composer son: 'What can I say to him, the dear one?—I feel that he is some great historic person—I cannot claim a little bit of him now he belongs to the big world.'⁷ The natural modesty of this statement obscures the fundamental influence that Ann must have had on Edward's development. Needless to say, he felt her passing acutely.



Above: A 1947 photograph of Handley, the childhood home of Elgar's mother, Ann Greening (by courtesy of Richard Watts).

Below: Greening country: Penyard Park from Lea Bailey Hill on the edge of the Forest of Dean (photograph by the author).



1. Percy M. Young, *Elgar, OM* (London: Collins, 1955) pp. 19, 24.
2. Louie Eickhoff, 'Elgar: What Lay Behind', *Elgar Society Journal*, vol. 4 no. 6 (September 1986), 5–9.
3. Charlie Cole (1899-1991), *My Life at Dancing Green* (Ross Public Library).
4. Lucy Elgar Pipe, *Reflections* (MS, 1912, Worcester County Record Office).
5. K. E. L. and Marion Simmons, 'A Walk Around the Elgars' Worcester (Part II)', *Elgar Society Journal*, vol. 4 no. 3 (September 1985), 18–26.
6. Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 6.
7. *Elgar, OM*, p. 105.

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Bernard Herrmann's Admiration and Appreciation of Elgar

Ian Lace

The memorable slashing string discords in the shower scene of Hitchcock's classic movie *Psycho* may seem a million miles from anything ever written by Elgar or his English contemporaries. In fact, their creator the American composer and conductor Bernard Herrmann was a great enthusiast for English music in general and Elgar in particular.

Bernard Herrmann (1911–75) is best remembered today for his film scores—particularly those for Alfred Hitchcock's most celebrated Hollywood thrillers of the late 1950s and 1960s. But Herrmann was also a very keen Anglophile, coming over to England on many occasions from 1937, and even living here towards the end of his life. His knowledge of English literature and music (notably that of Elgar) was prodigious, a fact acknowledged and appreciated by the many of our leading composers and conductors numbered among his friends, including Vaughan Williams and Finzi in particular, as well as Bliss, Barbirolli, Constant Lambert, Anthony Collins, and others.

In 1932 Herrmann studied advanced composition and orchestration with Percy Grainger at New York University. Grainger encouraged him to be imaginative and experimental in his orchestrations; together, for instance, they explored the sonorities of the tenor tuba for Herrmann's orchestration of MacDowell's 'Celtic' Sonata. As a young man Herrmann had been bowled over by his discovery of the score of the original version of Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony* in a New York library, and was moved to try to persuade RVW (unsuccessfully) to withdraw his cuts from the second movement. Vaughan Williams was a major influence on Herrmann; so too was the career of Sir Thomas Beecham, especially his championship of Delius, whom Herrmann adored. Interestingly, Herrmann made what was in 1975, and still is, the only recording of Cyril Scott's *Piano Concerto no. 1 in C* (with John Ogden and the London Philharmonic Orchestra on Lyrita SRCS 81, no longer available).

The following includes extracts, reproduced by kind permission of the University of California Press, from Steven C. Smith's biography of Bernard Herrmann, *A Heart at Fire's Center* (1991), recently reprinted in paperback.

Bernard Herrmann was born in New York on 29 June 1911 of Jewish émigré parentage. A few weeks before, on 24 May, Elgar's *Second Symphony* was first performed in New York. Even in his youth, and then into his adulthood:

...many of Herrmann's colleagues were perplexed by his passion for the conservative Elgar and his championing of Elgar's works unknown in America. It was acceptable to admire Elgar's *Enigma Variations* or the popular overtures—but the symphonic study *Falstaff*?

Yet for Herrmann, the performance of any Elgar piece was a spiritual experience, an evocation of the vanished Edwardian culture he adored. 'To have lived with and studied Elgar's music has been more than a great musical experience,' he wrote in 1957. 'It has been an enriching of one's whole life, for it brings in its train not only melodies and harmonies that remain permanently in one's memory, but also a great tranquillity and solace, and at the same time the joy and excitement of being on a mountain peak. For Elgar's music is, in the end, an affirmation of the miracle

of life and never a negation of it. This accomplishment certainly places him with the very greatest of the masters of music.'

Edmund Rubbra once wrote to Herrmann of his conducting:

'[Your] Falstaff was splendid and revealed things that I had never heard before...' Falstaff had been one of Herrmann's favourite compositions since childhood. He once described it as, 'Elgar's supreme orchestral work, in spite of the special difficulty it presents of relating the music to the understanding of the audience... [for] besides the arduous and exacting musical demands that it makes upon the conductor and performers, the audience must bring an understanding of the play to it.'

To American ears especially, Elgar's Shakespearean portrait was as foreign as Ives's barnyard dances and hymns were to the English, and from his first conducting days with the New Chamber Orchestra, Herrmann had tried to convince his countrymen of what they were missing. His passion for the work may be better understood through another remark, describing Falstaff as 'a portrait in many ways of the composer: his deep sense of the country scene and pastoral tranquillity, his enjoyment of ceremony and pomp, his intellectual cynicism and, at the same time, emotional unity with his fellow-man.' The eighteenth-century Briton in Herrmann had found his anthem.

Throughout Smith's biography, there are references to Herrmann's fondness of Elgar's music and his eagerness to conduct it, particularly Falstaff and the 'Enigma' Variations, in America. His conducting of these works often drew favourable reviews.

In 1957, in response to a request from English music publishers Novello & Co. for a short essay on Elgar, to offer 'an American's impressions' on the composer's work, Herrmann wrote the following essay in which he provided 'not only a lasting tribute to his idol, Elgar; but also a nicely articulated perception of the conductor's role as interpreter':

Throughout my musical career the music of Elgar has been a constant source of joy and inspiration. For, in conducting his music, one was left with the feeling of exhilaration and excitement that only great music can bestow. And as a composer, the study of his music has been a deep and satisfying experience, and at the same time has served as a lesson from a superb master. It is from these two points of view that I should like to put down my impressions and observations.

I have always felt that one of the reasons why the bulk of Elgar's music is so little performed outside England lies in the mysterious sense that a conductor must have of the flexibility and nuances of tempo which it demands. His works almost seem to perish if a rigid tempo is imposed on them. This seems to me to arise from the essential nervousness, and at the same time the utmost poetic feeling, with which his music is so generously imbued. The tempo variations that arise in the course of an Elgar work are so subtle and elastic that they demand from the conductor and performer an almost complete infatuation with the music. For Elgar's music will not play itself; merely to supervise it and give it professional routine playing will only serve to immobilise it.

It may well be, in Enigma Variations, that the problem is more readily understood by conductors of different nationality and musical background owing to shortened musical form, while his music of extended length, such as the symphonies and Falstaff, has remained a closed book. If conductors would only realise that these works, too, demand the same fluidity that the Enigma demands, there would be no difficulty at all in achieving a more universal audience for Elgar's music.

It is... in the Second Symphony that Elgar achieved, perhaps, his most intimate and personal expression, particularly in the first movement, which I feel is unlike any other opening movement of any other symphony ever written. For this movement, with its vibrancy and ecstatic flood tide of sound and the great urgencies of its innumerable lyrical themes, brings to mind the Spring landscapes of Van Gogh and Samuel Palmer. Its embracing joy and delight which he wished to capture, have certainly resulted in a most unique and personal vision.

One could go on to describe the transparency and pliant quality of his orchestral technique, and one could devote

Bernard Herrmann c.1960 with his dog
Twi in a pose modelled after Elgar.



many pages to the skill and ingenuity of his counterpoint and harmonic subtleties, but to me one of the most splendid things about this music is the pleasure and joy that sweeps over the faces of the players as one of the great climaxes of his music is reached. This certainly is one of the finest tributes that can be paid to a composer.

Herrmann was a great supporter of Sir John Barbirolli during his period as chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (1936–42):

Barbirolli was for [Herrmann] the most poetic of conductors. Twelve years Herrmann's senior, Barbirolli shared with him a passion for the English music of Delius, Vaughan Williams and Elgar (as a young man Barbirolli had played in the cello section in the première of Elgar's Cello Concerto under Elgar's direction). Barbirolli also shared some of Herrmann's excitement for new music and, with the Philharmonic premiered several American works, usually against much opposition.

In fact, had it not have been for Herrmann's championing of the retiring Charles Ives, Ives's music may well have languished in obscurity. On his return to England and to his taking up the baton with the Hallé, a grateful Barbirolli invited Herrmann to conduct that orchestra; and so Benny came over in the fall of 1946 and conducted three highly successful concerts that included works by Liszt (the Faust Symphony), Schubert and Copland. 'The visit was one of Herrmann's most rewarding, not only because of the superb Hallé playing but because of the opportunity to see the North England countryside he had spent three years imagining' (including a very enthusiastic trek through Brontë country, as research for his ill-fated opera *Wuthering Heights*). Herrmann also contributed an article to the *New York Herald Tribune* in which he remarked,

The British musical renaissance, first manifested during the war years, still flourishes. The public's almost feverish interest in concerts has survived the blitz, and seems destined to outlast the post-war austerities. Music-making continues unabated, before vast new audiences who have an insatiable appetite for a wide range of tastes.

In conducting the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, it was my privilege to encounter one aspect of this phenomenon... On a Sunday afternoon in Manchester we played a concert three miles from the centre of the town, during a bus strike that tied up the entire transportation system. The rain came down in torrents, yet an audience of over 5,000 people filled the hall.

This audience is intense, it is fresh. It is a young audience mostly. Steel-workers, cotton-spinners, clerks, shop-keepers and students form its bulk. And what is most exciting, it is open-minded. It wants to hear new, contemporary music, not only of England but of Europe, and it has an enormous curiosity about American music...

Herrmann went on to write,

In general, I would say that the younger generation of English composers falls into two categories. Britten, Walton, Rawsthorne and Lambert are writing more universal modernism. Their music is eclectic and brilliant, and stands exporting well. Rubbra, Finzi, Tippett and Moeran continue the tradition of Vaughan Williams and Elgar. They prefer to find in the English musical past the roots of their texture and their message. English music therefore stands at a most interesting cross-roads. Never before has it had so much variety. Never before has it grown in such an atmosphere so conducive to it. It will be interesting to see what comes of this exciting musical environment of the '40s. Will music in England grow more personally English, more insular as time goes on? Or will this new musical virility flower into creations that will have the universality of the greatest English literature?

Alas, as the years passed, Herrmann was to experience a falling-off in the enthusiasm of British audiences; his notorious volatile temperament did not endear him to orchestras, and so his conducting engagements dwindled.

Benny befriended film composer David Raksin, who recalled:

Despite his rotten manners, he was, in some ways a gentleman. Benny modelled himself after Englishmen like Samuel Johnson and others, which led me to call him Sir Shamus Beecham. It's interesting; a lot of the English poets we hear about as having been so beautifully accoutred, were physically something you wouldn't want in your living room. Sam Johnson, for instance, had scrofula and was generally a mess. Benny was like that; he was a man who, if he had become an angel, would have soup stains on his jacket after the first lunch.

Towards the end of his life Herrmann lived in London. One of his homes there had been the domicile of Christine Keeler! In London between 1968 and 1975 Herrmann recorded a number of fine albums for Unicorn-Kanchana and Decca, including some of his own works for the former and a whole series of his own and other's film scores for the latter. (Unicorn-Kanchana released Herrmann's own recording of his opera *Wuthering Heights*.) His Decca album of 'Great British Film Music' (CD 448 954-2), for instance, comprised: Walton's *Richard III* and *Escape Me Never*, Constant Lambert's *Anna Karenina*, Bax's *Oliver Twist*, Arthur Benjamin's *An Ideal Husband*, Vaughan Williams's *49th Parallel*, and Bliss's *Things to Come*. Lewis Foreman attended the recording of the Bliss piece and remembered: 'Benny... was getting old and slow... Trudy [Bliss] was there and tried remonstrating with him during the takes. Trudy: "Mr Herrmann, it's too slow." Benny: (pulling himself up to his full height on the podium, putting on strong Brooklyn accent) "Lady Bliss! Whose conducting dis—you or me!" He must have been the only musician who ever reduced Trudy to silence. Problem was, she was right.'

In the 1970s, after years of alienation from Hollywood producers and directors, not least Hitchcock, Herrmann was once again in demand, this time by a new generation of directors: Brian De Palma and Martin Scorsese. But Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, which drew an embittered jazz-based score from Herrmann, was to be the composer's last. After the completion of its recording in Hollywood on Christmas Eve 1976, Herrmann dined out with friends. 'During their conversation Herrmann proudly demonstrated a new digital watch with a battery light: "They'll have to put one in my coffin so I'll know what time it is in the grave," he chortled. During the night of that Christmas Eve Bernard Herrmann died.'

To close—one final anecdote, a tale that emanated from his work on American TV's *Twilight Zone*.

Herrmann found 'a flea-ridden stray pup that he adopted and named "Twilight" (Twi for short). As even his wives acknowledged, Benny's passion for animals often seemed to dwarf his relations with humans. No pet received more of Herrmann's childlike love than Twi, with whom he posed in a portrait modelled especially after a photo of Elgar and his pet...'

IAN LACE has been a member of the Elgar Society since 1975. He was elected an honorary member for services to the Society as Secretary, then Chairman of the International Subcommittee and as Publicity Officer. He has written a number of articles for the Society's web site. Ian is also a founder member of the British Music Society and managing editor of Film Music on the Web. He lectures extensively on many aspects of music, and has reviewed recordings for international publications such as the BBC Music Magazine, Classic CD and Fanfare.

BOOK REVIEWS



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Somewhere Further North: Elgar
and the Morecambe Festival by
Geoffrey Hodgkins

This book is effectively two closely intertwined stories in one. It traces the history of the Morecambe Festival and through it that of much of the competitive festival movement, concentrating on Elgar's connection with Morecambe and at the same time giving us in detail, and with the help of previously unpublished correspondence between the Elgars and the Gortons, the development of the close friendship between the composer and Canon Charles Gorton, Rector of Morecambe and founder and president of the Festival. This is the first time these topics have been covered in such detail.

Elgar's direct connections with Morecambe and competitive festivals generally and with Gorton lasted little more than a decade up to Gorton's sad death in 1912. The competitive festival movement had its roots in the age-old Welsh *Eisteddfodau*, then, more recently, from the 1850s onwards, in the fiercely fought brass band contests (I am surprised Geoffrey does not give these a brief mention) and in the tonic sol-fa movement. The first competitive festival was Mary Wakefield's at Kendal in 1885, and the movement was at first particularly associated with the North-West. The other side of the Pennines followed suit before long; one festival there which I have myself researched in a modest way was Mexborough (South Yorkshire) which still flourishes ninety-two years after its inauguration in 1912 and which on (at the very least) twenty-three occasions used Elgar compositions as test pieces.

The Morecambe Festival, encouraged by Miss Wakefield and with Canon Gorton as its driving force, was founded in 1891 and, helped by the availability of a fine hall, easy rail connections and a local musician of renown, Robert Howson, developed swiftly and by 1899 was already being dubbed the best in the North. Unlike Mexborough and countless other competitive festivals, the North-Western leaders in the field developed their festivals to include also concerts in which professionals were often invited to participate. Blackpool led the way in this in its first festival (1901) and Gorton was determined to emulate or indeed outshine it, and his answer was to enlist the assistance of Elgar, first through an intermediary, Dr W. G. McNaught, then personally by visiting Birchwood. Elgar played 'hard to get' at first but in the end he attended the 1903 Festival as adjudicator, conductor (of *The Banner of St George* at the closing concert for combined choirs and orchestra) and composer of the specially composed *Weary Wind of the West*. He was delighted with the standard of singing he found and said—initially in a letter to Canon Gorton, but his remarks were soon to be public property—that the Press should recognise that 'the living centre of music in Great Britain is not London but somewhere further North.' This salvo created a furore among the leading music critics, mainly, of course, London-based—but Elgar had some right on his side, especially as regards the performance of choral music. Whatever the truth of the matter, his remarks naturally endeared him to musicians in the North-West.

Elgar returned to Morecambe in 1904, giving up a prestigious dinner engagement to adjudicate and conduct Brahms's *Song of Destiny* and other things, including an excerpt from *King Olaf*; now Sir Edward, he took the trouble later in 1904 to attend a conference of Festival conductors in Morecambe and to make suggestions, well received, as to the future. In 1905 *King Olaf* with Elgar conducting was the major work in the Festival's concert side. Gorton hoped to progress to *Gerontius* but this, partly due to Howson's death and Gorton's failing health from around 1906, was not to be. Elgar was unable to be present in 1906, though his partsong *Evening Scene*, dedicated to Howson's memory, was performed to acclaim; but he was back, for what was to be the final time, in 1907 to adjudicate and conduct. At the 1909 Festival *There is Sweet Music*, dedicated to Gorton, and *Deep In My Soul* were premiered. And surely Elgar's other superb choral songs from this period owed much to his Morecambe experience and some of them indeed were sung there.

Of course, the Elgar-Gorton friendship covered other matters beside the Morecambe Festival. Gorton visited the Worcester Three Choirs Festival in 1906 and after ill-health had compelled his retirement, he moved to Hereford where the Elgars were still living at Plas Gwyn. Gorton wrote commentaries on the libretti of *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* and also made English translations of countless partsongs of Brahms and lesser non-British composers up to almost the time of his death. The two strands of this story touchingly show that, moody and prickly though he could be, Elgar had a gift for friendship and also the ability to touch the hearts and minds of ordinary, often quite humble, practising musicians. Geoffrey Hodgkins' painstaking research puts us in his debt. Not only has he shed fresh light on a lesser-known, but still very significant, episode in Elgar's career, but he has also told us much about the competitive festival movement at arguably the peak of its fame. Musical competition may have its drawbacks—and they are rehearsed in these pages, which draw strongly on the contemporary musical press—but, particularly where amateur musicians (chorus, orchestras and, I mention again, brass bands) are concerned, they have surely driven up standards to a remarkable degree, particularly in a technical sense but musically as well, to a level which most—even Elgar—would not have thought possible. I found this book stimulating and enjoyable (there are fourteen black and white photographs, not all of them very clear in definition, to illustrate the text, and an appendix giving Morecambe winners and test pieces between 1899 and 1914) and I am happy to recommend it to all those interested either in Elgar or in the history of British musical institutions.

Philip L. Scowcroft

Plotting Gigantic Wox: the story of Elgar's *Apostles* trilogy
Michael Foster

This book first appeared in 1995. When I read it then, I was dismayed. What I read seemed to indicate that Elgar—in composing *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*—was a fumbling, bumbling composer, floundering about in chaos and producing two 'failures' which fell far short of his ambition. This jarred with my understanding of these two compositions in that I regarded both as masterpieces, and *The Apostles* as his greatest

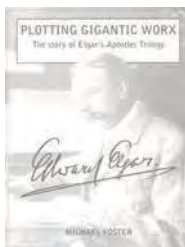
work. I took solace some time later in reading Geoffrey Hodgkins' review of the book (JOURNAL, November 1995) which concluded, 'it is not really possible to recommend [this book] to members. Elgar and his "Gigantic worx" deserve better than this.'

With the centenary in October 2003 of the première of *The Apostles*, Michael Foster has taken the opportunity—as the cover note will have it—to produce a 'fully revised and expanded version' of his book. Now, should that read 'fully revised and (fully) expanded'? If so, I shall have to disappoint readers: it is neither. In essence, it is the same book. Yes, there are many more photographs, strategically placed amongst the text rather than all together (as before) in the middle of the book. Yes, there are additional chapters—I shall return to these later—but, in effect, there is nothing substantially new. I have read the texts of both versions side by side and, though certain words are altered—'which' now becomes 'that', and 'Gerontius' mercifully becomes 'The Dream of Gerontius'—and though certain paragraphs have been shuffled into new positions, there is nothing in the text that would merit the term 'fully revised'. Expanded? Maybe. The libretto is now presented in attractive boxes and—as I said—there are some nice photographs (all well known from other publications), but it is the same flawed book.

GH was rightly concerned about 'Chinese whispers' (errors which can occur through using secondary sources), factual errors, unsubstantiated and unjustified opinions, signs of haste. Now, the author has had eight years to redraft his book, so there can no longer be any excuse for the last of these. What errors remain—and some do—must now be regarded as signs of carelessness, or something worse. For instance, 'sabachtani' is still there (p. 77), irritatingly enough only nine lines below its correct spelling; and 'prophesy' is still used as a noun (p. 54). New errors have crept in: George Johnstone seems to sport an 'e' at the end of his name only intermittently (p. v and p. 5) and we have 'Soloman's Porch' (p. 98). I regret, therefore, to have to say that GH's comments made in his 1995 review still hold, and I will now proceed to my 'fully revised and expanded' version of it.

Incorrect facts remain. The reference to Canon Gorton as 'Elgar's main adviser so far [up to 1903] on Anglican doctrine, [who] invited the composer and his wife to adjudicate at the Morecambe Competitive Music Festival towards the end of April 1903' and the statement that 'the Elgars came away from the Lancashire seaside town very much unimpressed by their experiences' are both repeated verbatim and are both, I believe, untrue. These points were queried in 1995. I would also refer to GH's paragraph beginning, 'Sadly, there are many similar passages throughout the book...' The large majority of errors highlighted there remain uncorrected. One not mentioned by GH, however, puzzles me: 'Familiar themes are delicately woven into the orchestral texture, including the "Watchers on the Temple Roof" from *The Apostles*, and the quotation from *The Light of Life* that points up the miracle of the lame man from Acts 2' (p. 94). Now, I cannot find any quotation from *The Light of Life* at this point in *The Kingdom*, nor does Jaeger mention it in his analysis. And the healing of the lame man appears in Acts 3.

Unsubstantiated opinions remain. I must admit it is these that alarm me most. Here are a few from the many: 'Some of the music that was being written [in May 1903] reflected Elgar's lack of inspiration and appeared almost meaningless'; 'Elgar is not always seen at his best in really simple music of this kind [the alleluias at the end of *The Apostles*]'; 'Why does [Peter] never achieve any real status musically [in *The*



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Kingdom]?’; ‘Judas haunted Elgar for the whole of his creative life’; ‘a rather strangely created “Fantasy”—a rather unsatisfactory episode’. These statements beg so many questions. And there are so many others which are similar.

As I said earlier, there are extras. There is now a bibliography, and a chapter containing reviews of the complete recordings of *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* which, unless I am wrong, consists of reviews lifted from Gramophone. And there is still no index, a grave omission, in my view.

Worst of all, is the specious discussion of Elgar’s leitmotiv method. The author bases his analysis on Jaeger’s—an analysis which in my view is suspect in any case. (It is time we had a new one.) Themes are ‘untitled’ and ‘titled’, and meaningless statistics are produced, ending up with the completely useless information that Elgar uses a ‘theme’ once every five bars in both *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. No definition of a ‘theme’ is given; no discussion of the musical quality of the themes is put forward; no comment on which themes appear most and which least—and why—is propounded. It is an Orwellian analysis, in which ‘all themes are equal’.

Like GH previously, I have not enjoyed writing this review, but more importantly, neither have I enjoyed reading a book which repeats so many flawed approaches when an opportunity existed to correct them. I cannot recommend the book; it does service to no-one—not Elgar, even less to the author, and none either to the CBSO, in partnership with whom the book was published and whose Music Director Sakari Oramo has fallen for the ‘chaos’ theory (see his preface on p. vi). However, he significantly redeemed himself on 14 October 2003 in Symphony Hall, Birmingham by conducting a completely outstanding centenary performance of *The Apostles*, thereby convincing a huge number of people, both in the hall and listening world-wide on radio and internet, that the work is a strong contender for the title of Elgar’s greatest work, with *The Kingdom* not far behind (pace Boulton).

Paul Adrian Rooke

Barbirolli: Conductor Laureate
the authorised biography by Michael Kennedy

When Michael Kennedy’s biography of Barbirolli appeared in 1971 it was received with justified acclaim. The overriding impression when reading it at the time was the author’s personal affection for and intimate knowledge of the man about whom he was writing (indeed occasionally Kennedy enters the story in the first person). Nothing has changed over thirty years later. I saw the primary task of this review as comparing new with old and nothing more, but instead and to my great joy I found myself reading it from cover to cover, relishing both style and content as much if not more than I had done three decades ago. In the mid-1960s I was fortunate enough to catch the last few years of JB at the Hallé during my own student days at Manchester University and the old Royal Manchester College of Music, often attending his rehearsals and, when I could afford it, his concerts. Kennedy’s book vividly awakens and recalls those visual and aural experiences, for to watch Barbirolli conduct was as fascinating and enthralling as it was to listen to him. As the singer John Goss perceived of the young Barbirolli way back in 1926, ‘He has infinite delicacy. He has style’.

The short answer to any reader wishing to know whether or not the book is worth buying for its differences alone is an unequivocal yes. All seventy-eight photographs are completely different from the thirty-five in the first edition, and apart from some blocks, they are also chronologically and conveniently placed for the reader at the relevant point in the biography. Malcolm Walker's comprehensive discography (1911–70) has been dropped in favour of one listing only those CDs released by the Barbirolli Society, but there is a promise that a complete discography will be published in 2004. Typo spotters will have a hard time of it, though Marjorie Barbirolli (JB's first wife, singer Marjorie Parry) needs a further index entry for p. 159, Emmie Tillett has none despite being mentioned on p. 193, the date April 20th is missing for the letter beginning 'Rather a lovely concert tonight' on p. 158, and an extra 'i' extends the year to a thirteenth month on p. 153. Readers may also like to know that the unnamed fourth person in the upper photograph on p. 205 is Kathleen Ferrier's doctor Reginald Hilton. Publishers MacGibbon & Kee insisted on cuts back in 1971. Presumably all these have been restored, and while the bulk of them tend to be letters, there is also material which is missing from the first edition, as the rest of this review will describe.

According to Jelka Delius, her husband thought Barbirolli's performance of his Cello Sonata was 'not very well played' in a 1922 broadcast, while a notice of the same event in the Daily Telegraph provided a detailed description of his rendition of Elgar's Cello Concerto accompanied by pianist Harold Craxton. Barbirolli's activities as a chamber musician are also restored, with Phyllis Tate's quartet in 1923 and as a member of the Music Society String Quartet on a tour to Spain in 1926. His activities at BNOG (British National Opera Company) are covered in more detail such as repertoire and venues in 1927. As for new letters, there are some to the critic Charles Parker containing illuminating references to Nikisch and Meistersinger at Bayreuth (1933), and to Evelyn Rothwell, such as one from early in their relationship (June 1934), a poignant description of Alexander Mackenzie's funeral (April 1935), and an account of the problems of wind intonation and ensemble encountered in a recording session with Edwin Fischer of Mozart's Piano Concerto K.482 (1935). New material on the love-hate relationship with Toscanini begins with a letter of the same time (summer 1935) describing a two-hour meeting with the combustible maestro, but on this occasion Barbirolli was touched by the Italian's reaction to the details he provided of Elgar's death the year before. According to writer and critic Richard Aldrich, while Toscanini was not very good at programming his New York Philharmonic concerts, Kennedy is revelatory on how the hugely influential American agent Arthur Judson had a considerable input into Barbirolli's initial concerts with the NYPO, with hardly any of the new appointee's ideas getting past the first hurdle. On the other hand, Judson drew the line at telling Toscanini what or what not to do. If, as revealed above, John Goss astutely spotted the young Barbirolli's talent, so did Yehudi Menuhin in America according to a letter from his father Moshe to Fred Gaisberg in 1936.

The whole American episode with its musico-political cauldron, his homeland soon to be at war, and the question of the compulsory taking of American citizenship if he wanted to stay, put Barbirolli into an impossible situation. As Judson himself said, 'I made two mistakes. I engaged you and you made a success'. But any notions that he lowered standards after Toscanini's reign, that he was overawed or cowed by a hostile orchestra are completely without foundation, as emerging recordings now testify. The letter about Elgar's 'practically unknown and certainly misunderstood' Violin Concerto



Barbirolli Society,
2003
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after Barbirolli conducted it with Heifetz ('played with not quite enough hurt') is now joined by a new brief but succinct one (2 March 1939). 'The Enigma created the greatest enthusiasm and I confess I had a little cry before I was fit to have the people come and see me after the concert. There are moments in this music which touch me beyond all words! He also had kind words a few weeks earlier for Vaughan Williams' Pastoral Symphony 'which moves me as I never thought possible'. Since Klemperer died after Barbirolli, the first edition missed the German conductor's extremely churlish comments in 1972 to his future biographer Peter Heyworth on his colleague's New York appointment: 'They treated him worse than he deserved. He wasn't so bad, even if he wasn't so good either'. Barbirolli and the NYPO episode is best summed up by the man himself (also new material) when talking of the orchestra: 'I am so proud of the great artists who under T[oscanini] and others had become so unkind and who seem now to glory in their talents and humanity. Posterity will perhaps judge of my value as a musician, but I am rather grateful that my coming has not only retained their standards of playing (I think it has) but given them a conception of kindness and happiness'.

Kennedy now includes more details of Barbirolli's programmes, particularly his third (1939–40) season and the inclusion of many new American works. As far as British works performed for the first time in America or elsewhere were concerned, those of Britten stand out, in particular the Violin Concerto and the Sinfonia da Requiem. On a lighter note, who among us knew that Judy Garland loved Delius, Mickey Rooney had a penchant for Ravel, or that Edward G. Robinson (he of the villainous face) enjoyed turning pages at private chamber music soirées at which Barbirolli played? Also amusing is an account by the widow of one of Barbirolli's four fellow passengers of the hazardous journey home on a Norwegian freighter in a convoy, and the Lake District walk to Dale Head during a week's working holiday preparing programmes for the forthcoming season.

We get new insight into the last unhealthy days of conductor Leslie Heward, a sad loss to British music-making, but someone who, had he lived, would have been ahead of Barbirolli in receiving the invitation—timely for Barbirolli—to take over the Hallé Orchestra. Neither did we know before that, imitating his esteemed predecessor Hans Richter, he hoped 'to make Manchester the Vienna of England, with the great symphony orchestra playing for opera as well as in the concert hall'. There are some extracts from Evelyn Barbirolli's recent book *Living with Glorious John*, which provide an interesting insight by two Hallé string players into their conductor's exacting demands as a string player himself.

Further new letters describe (to Evelyn in 1944) an attack of dysentery in Naples, and instructions sent in 1966 to Hallé leader Martin Milner on what to rehearse before Barbirolli took over. There are also some new ones written whilst on his travels in the 1960s to his close friend and correspondent Audrey Napier Smith when he was at last an international conductor, and one to Evelyn's aunt about his encounter with clothes and jewellery worn by King Charles I on his execution day. Since Robert Beale's *The Hallé: a British orchestra in the 20th century* appeared in 2000, we have new facts not only about the orchestra's finances but also revelations of Barbirolli's selfless demands on its budget. As Kennedy reveals, in 1950 Barbirolli earned less than Richter half a century before him (a meagre £50 per concert), and by 1967 this sum had risen to a meagre £300 for Manchester dates, £250 for those in provincial towns, and expenses only (which he usually waived) for tours abroad. Only at the end of his life did he have

financial worries, brought on by the shady activities of his manager, over two years of worry he could have done without, considering the serious effect it was having on his health.

This all makes a fascinating, absorbing read, and Michael Kennedy deserves all the praise and accolades he will undoubtedly get. He has improved upon what was already a fine book worthy of the love, admiration and respect he clearly has for his old friend.

Christopher Fifield

(Elgar Society members may obtain copies of *Barbirolli: Conductor Laureate* for £17 plus postage direct from the Barbirolli Society: see NEWS issue no. 21, November 2003)

CD REVIEWS

Siegfried Sassoon — Memorial Tablet

Readings by the author from his *The Weald of Youth*, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, *Siegfried's Journey* and poems including 'The Dug-out', 'At Carno', 'Attack' and 'Died of Wounds', plus abridgements from Elgar's *Violin Concerto in B minor*, recorded in 1916 by Marie Hall (violin), conducted by the composer.

CD41 Publishing is a small specialist publishing company based in Norfolk. This CD is the first ever audio collection of readings by the celebrated writer and poet Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967). The original recordings date from 1953 and are a treasure—although Elgarians will be disappointed that he did not record the poems 'The Elgar Violin Concerto' and 'Afterthoughts on the Opening of the British Empire Exhibition' in which his deep love for the music of Elgar is fully revealed.

The format of the CD is both understandable and frustrating. Rather than have an unbroken series of readings (and it must be said that Sassoon does not have a passionate, distinctive voice) the decision has been made to intersperse them with the original four 'movements' of the composer-abridged *Violin Concerto*. Not only is the performance broken up but the sections are given in this order—Andante, Cadenza, Allegro and Allegro molto—which has no relationship to the work's correct order. However, the principle motivation for the CD is the Sassoon content rather than the Elgar—it would therefore be rather churlish to complain of this decision, given the totality of riches made available to us.

The *Concerto* was recorded on 16 December 1916. Until this time HMV had made no commitment to any of Elgar's major works, but it was the fear of competition which forced them to finally do so. The great English violinist Albert Sammons, who recorded for the arch-rival recording company Columbia, had recently recorded his own abridgement under the baton of Sir Henry Wood (this followed his first public performance of the *Concerto* under Saffanof, at the Queen's Hall on 23 November

1914, a performance rapturously received which placed him immediately in the first rank of contemporary violinists.) Such a commercial challenge could not be ignored.

Carice records that on the day of recording the weather was bitterly cold and there was a frightful fog. In driving both to and from the HMV recording studios at Hayes they narrowly avoided serious accidents. Elgar, who had been unwell, did not enjoy the journeys and he arrived home very tired with a headache. We therefore must be grateful that this recording resulted. Commercial demands specified a limit of just four sides for the recording which resulted in a total of just over fifteen and a half minutes of music being recorded—about a third of the complete work, although the unique Cadenza is complete. The quality of the acoustic recording is quite acceptable with much reduced surface noise. Marie Hall, once briefly a student of Elgar's, was a very fine violinist (just play the Cadenza to sample her technical skill) who had a successful if short international career. It is fascinating to compare her performance with that of Menuhin in the 1932 recording and to note the changes in both the application of vibrato and portamento to both the orchestral and solo performances in the intervening sixteen years.

The joy in listening to this performance is that it allows us to hear the Concerto just as Elgar heard it and wished it to be. For Elgarians as well as admirers of Sasseon it is a precious document—a must-buy!

Ernest Blamires

(This recording is available from: CD41 Publishing, 1 Spinney Close, Beetley, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 4TB. Cost per disc is £10.00 including postage (£11.00 overseas), cheques payable to 'J. Nice' or Visa by telephone on 01362 861009.)

English Oboe Concertos

Elgar, orch. Jacob, Soliloquy, plus works by Gordon Jacob, Holst, Goossens and Vaughan Williams.

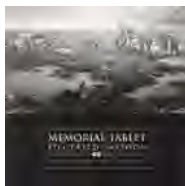
Ruth Bolister (oboe), Kate Hill (flute)

English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Stephen Bell

Here are five British works for oboe written in the twenty-year span 1923 (Holst) to 1944 (Vaughan Williams), beautifully played by Ruth Bolister, accompanied with warmth and sensitivity by the freelance Elgar Chamber Orchestra, whose leader Lynette Wynn contributes notably at various places with sweet tone and stylish phrasing. Jacob's work was originally written for Evelyn Rothwell but hijacked by the great Leon Goossens for its 1935 première at the Queen's Hall under Beecham. It is a wistful piece full of charm and lyricism, and surprisingly uncommon in the repertoire compared with Vaughan Williams's concerto. Elgar's Soliloquy is a work which was part of an intended suite for Goossens, and Jacob gave the movement (only discovered after Elgar's death) its title and scored it in accordance with indications and details on the manuscript piano score. For Holst's A Fugal Concerto Bolister is joined by flautist Kate Hill as duo soloist in this tautly knit work which alternates between Baroque pastiche and English folksong ('If all the world were paper' in the finale). Again Leon Goossens, that pioneering doyen of British oboists, was much involved (other composers who wrote for him but not featured here include Britten,

Bliss, Bax and Benjamin). He and all but one of his musically talented siblings are now dead, the exception being harpist Sidonie at 104 years old. Their older brother Eugene was not only a versatile conductor (he gave the first British performance of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*) but also a composer, and wrote a single-movement concerto for his brother, first performed at the 1930 Henry Wood Proms. Here the oboe has to contend with a full orchestral accompaniment rather than the more equal balance provided by only strings in all other works on the disc. Despite a few longueurs, there is also much effective music colourfully scored—it comes as no surprise to learn that he wrote for films (albeit the silent ones of his day)—and a strikingly virtuosic cadenza with exotic ostinato accompaniment. Bolister concludes this highly attractive disc with a beautiful account of Vaughan Williams's charming concerto.

Christopher Fifield



CD41 Publishing
CD41-008

Clarinet Kaleidoscope

Canto popolare (In Moonlight), plus miniatures by Gavin Sutherland, David Fanshawe, Reginald Hunt, Gilbert Vinter, Philip Lane, Frederick Kell and Terence Greaves. Verity Butler (clarinet) and Gavin Sutherland (piano)

This desirable disc puts Elgar's *Canto popolare* (extracted by him as a solo for clarinet—or viola—and piano from *In the South*, in which task he, according to the excellent booklet notes, took advice from the great English clarinetist Charles Draper) into the context of light, entertaining British music for clarinet and piano. A varied selection this is, too, including Gavin Sutherland's own jazz-inspired *Lounge Suite* and his specially made arrangements of light music 'standards', Reginald Hunt's rhapsodic *Meditation*, David Fanshawe's gently rhythmic *Serenata*, Philip Lane's pastiche *Spanish Dances*, a *Song and Dance* suite by Gilbert Vinter, Terence Greaves's *Clarinet Cakewalk* and four charming miniatures by Frederick Kell, one of them dedicated to his clarinetist son Reginald, the others to Haydn Draper, nephew of Elgar's favourite clarinetist, Charles Draper. *Canto popolare* is a fascinating example of a self-contained light music miniature enclosed in a more serious work (the interludes in *Falstaff* are other examples of this). With splendidly committed performances and a well balanced recording, this CD is sure to give pleasure.

Philip L. Scowcroft

Great Violinists — Sammons: Violin Sonata

Mozart, *Sinfonia Concertante* for Violin and Viola; Elgar, *Violin Sonata in E minor*; plus music by Schubert, Massenet, etc.

Albert Sammons (violin), Lionel Tertis (viola),

William Murdoch (piano)

London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Hamilton Harty

What is nowadays called the 'blurb' on the sleeve of this CD is so out of keeping with the sort of artist I believe Albert Sammons was that it is worth repeating, if only for the sadness a remark of this nature engenders: '...his [Sammons's] interpretation of Elgar's *Violin Concerto* is the benchmark by which all others are judged and found wanting.'

The point is, surely, that both pioneering recordings of Elgar's great concerto are indispensable. Perhaps Sammons was the more technically accomplished soloist, but Elgar's conducting and his partnership with the youthful Menuhin produced something both unique and rather wonderful. I have never liked Sir Henry Wood's conducting in his recording; it is Sammons who takes it to the level of the Menuhin/Elgar. These comments are not particularly helpful to Sammons, whose art we can appreciate to the full in this important reissue of Elgar's Violin Sonata recorded, in the opinion of sleeve writer Tully Potter, when Sammons was just past his best. Well, like great wine in a similar situation, it is still 'drinkable', and I doubt the average listener is going to notice.

The recording, the first of the Sonata, gives Sammons a brightness in contrast to the warm tone of William Murdoch's piano. However, the opening Allegro shows both artists to be in sympathy, sustaining the flow of the music, even at points such as Fig. 11 where there is a temptation to slow. The wistful Romance begins a little slower than we might have expected, but avoids the 'stop and start' feel that can creep in, allowing the second subject to flow naturally from the preceding material. It is this which links the following movement as it returns, passionately and sadly—this is exemplary—as the Allegro non troppo takes the Sonata to its conclusion: hope mingled with regret, two musicians who had lived through the War and the time of the Sonata's composition getting to the heart of Elgar and his world. For £5, this is a winner of a disc, beautifully re-mastered and with the added bonus of Lionel Tertis joining Sammons in the Mozart. There are a number of smaller fillers, the Massenet Méditation perhaps showing us what Tully Potter means.

Andrew Neill

W. H. Reed — Music for Violin & Piano

Rhapsody for violin and piano, On Waterford Quay, Reverie, Toccata, Fantaisie brillante, Two Chinese Impressions, Andante con moto, Rhapsody for viola and piano, Punjabi Song, Lento and Prelude, Spanish Dance, Luddi Dance, Andante tranquillo, The Gentle Dove.

Robert Gibbs (violin and viola), Mary Mei-Loc Wu (piano)



ASV
CD DCA 1173

W. H. 'Billy' Reed is a prominent and familiar figure in the Elgarian landscape—a close friend of the great man, and himself a talented violinist, composer, conductor, and author. At last here is a superbly played and well recorded CD of his compositions for violin (and one for viola) and piano. Ronald Gibbs plays this virtuosic music with passion, ably accompanied by Mary Wu with equal passion.

Reed was a member of the London Symphony Orchestra for thirty-one years—twenty-three as leader—and was inevitably exposed to many compositional influences. The CD contains fourteen works including two rhapsodies, fashionable at that time, one each for violin and viola. I particularly liked the Fantaisie brillante, the Two Chinese Impressions, and the Indian Luddi Dance. However, I have to say that I thought RVW a bigger influence here than the mystic East. A virtuoso technique is needed to play this music, and Ronald Gibbs is easily equal to the task—just listen to Toccata, a brilliant 'moto perpetuo'.

Billy Reed also wrote much orchestral music and was championed by Sir Henry Wood. In the affectionate anonymous obituary of 1942 in *The Times* (which curiously, like Grove's Dictionary, gets the year of his birth wrong!) we are told how these works 'met with deserved success'. We are also reminded that the Three Choirs Festival, 'that delightful but somewhat haphazard institution depended on him for life itself!

I hope this recording will lead to more.

Jack Slater

Highlights from Champion Brass

including the winning performance from the 2003 National Brass Band Championships of Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations performed by the Fairey FP (Music) Band conducted by Allan Withington.

For some six hundred brass bands within the United Kingdom, a curious but yet endearing occurrence is that concert programme details are rarely advertised—presumably so that a wide spectrum of musical taste may be accommodated, as shown here in a live recording made in the Royal Albert Hall in October 2003.

A day of contesting for the Besson National Brass Band Championship with Eric Ball's transcription of Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations resulted in the Fairey FP (Music) Band winning the trophy, and their amazing abilities have been preserved on this CD for we Elgarians to cherish.

As the complete work is too long for contesting purposes, the fourteen variations have been reduced to eight beginning with variation I (C.A.E.), then H.D.S-P. followed by R.B.T., variation VII (Troyte), VIII (W.N.), IX (Nimrod), XII (B.G.N.) and the finale (E.D.U.). The selection of movements is such that Elgar's original key sequence is not disturbed and one variation follows another in a seamless and sonorous manner that can only be realised by a brass band.

The varied programme that follows includes a sparkling account of 'Hora Staccato', once the domain of Jascha Heifetz, transformed for this concert into a cornet feature for the Buy As You View Cory Band. Other highlights include a well articulated fanfare of trumpets from the Royal Marines, and 'Ruby Tuesday' composed by a more recent musical knight, Sir Mick Jagger, played by the third featured band, the Scottish Co-op. Wagner's Introduction to Act III of *Lohengrin* is interpreted with great élan by the massed forces of all three bands. In all, twelve tracks, two solo artistes, and a total playing time of sixty-one minutes.

So, fellow Elgarians, keep a weather-eye out for a band of renown and if the programme content is not advertised, request the Elgar Opus 36 and take a handkerchief!

Peter Glasson



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LETTERS

From: Fr J. Noel Burke

In July's JOURNAL I came across the reference to a 'puzzling note' in the knowledgeable article by Geoffrey Hodgkins on Elgar's theological library. It referred to the note made by the composer in his New Testament: 'S. Michael, patron st of the church', and the author finds this a puzzle. Perhaps I can help.

St Michael Archangel has for a long time been considered the patron defender of God's people; the Jews in the Old Testament, and the Church in the New. Elgar would have been familiar with this angel-saint, for at the end of Mass there was the prayer (in English) 'Holy Michael Archangel, defend us in the day of battle', in use until forty years ago. It was first introduced by Pope Leo XIII after a spiritual experience. In 1884 after Mass one day he paused at the foot of the altar and lapsed into what seemed a coma. When he recovered he related a terrifying vision he had of a battle between the Church and Satan. Afterwards he composed the St Michael prayer and assigned it to be recited after every Low Mass.

At the time of its introduction Elgar would have been in his late twenties. To have an English prayer inserted into a largely unchanging Latin liturgy would have been very noticeable to him, and he may have had this prayer in mind when he made his note in his New Testament.

From: Ronald Taylor

It was good to see the article in the November JOURNAL on music in Northern Ireland, and particularly that E. Godfrey Brown received due credit for his long advocacy of Elgar's music. However, Brown has another claim to fame in that part of Ireland. He was the founder of the BBC Belfast Station Orchestra, and conducted that orchestra for many years, right from the opening night on 15 September 1924. The opening concert included Pomp and Circumstance No. 4, and the local paper on the following day said: 'Mr E. Godfrey Brown is to be congratulated on an excellent programme as far as choice of music and musicians is concerned... Mr Godfrey Brown made a few remarks which were also heard clearly. He has the right kind of voice and diction to carry well.' The official opening of the station took place over a month later, when some of the early technical problems had presumably been ironed out. On that occasion Brown conducted the Belfast Philharmonic Choir, the 'Augmented Orchestra' and an organ in an excerpt from Caractacus, 'Britons, alert!' (sic). Was Brown having a good-humoured dig at his hosts in Ireland with his choice? In a Northern Ireland publication of 1982, *From Yesterday with Love*, edited by Walter Love, a 1924 photograph of Brown with some members of his Station Orchestra is reproduced on p. 5.

Incidentally, Elgar's Philharmonic Society performance of Gerontius in October 1932 was broadcast in full from the Belfast station. Elgar was booked to conduct a further concert from the Ulster Hall in October 1933, but had been taken to hospital a few days before. The all-Elgar concert went ahead anyway, with Brown conducting.

From: Jerrold Northrop Moore

You publish in the November issue a claim, by Carl Newton, that my editions of Elgar letters are not

'comprehensive'.

Letters of a Lifetime is admittedly an anthology. Each of the others sets forth the entire corpus of surviving manuscripts in the field it covers. Ninety-nine per cent of those letters are printed in full and accurate transcripts. A handful of single-line acknowledgments and the like are summarised in the connecting text. If this is not comprehensive, the word has no reasonable meaning.

Your correspondent's letter shows either an unwillingness to judge, or a lack of interest in, what people are willing to read—or finance. The alternative he actually presents to the present comprehensive collections of Elgar's letters is to have nothing published.

His letter shows the continuing truth of the old adage that the librarian's and archivist's dream is to have every item in his own control and nothing whatever circulating: perfect power.

He also contradicts the traditional wisdom of both scholarship and the saleroom—that publication lowers a manuscript's financial value. It must do so in any civilised society, because publication renders a MS text and its information available to all. To claim the reverse, as your correspondent does, suggests a world of readers unable to judge for themselves the importance of anything—and totally dependent on publishers (or is it archivists?) to make up their minds for them.

From: John Norris

I cannot claim to be sufficiently well informed to contribute directly to the debate sparked by your editorial in the March 2003 issue of the JOURNAL over the sale of the Novello Elgar letters, but I feel that Carl Newton (JOURNAL, November 2003) makes a significant, if all-too-common, error in equating Novello's position on the sale with that of the Royal Philharmonic Society in disposing of its archives. The RPS is a charitable body whose constitution no doubt requires it to place the wider public interest above purely commercial considerations. In direct contrast, Novello is a commercial company whose shareholders expect the company to put their interest first. That is not to say that a commercial organisation cannot undertake charitable acts, as Novello have shown through their generosity in making scores, parts and a degree of editorial and managerial effort available to the Elgar Society Edition at no cost. But even where, as in the Novello/ESE relationship, the charitable act may be the prime motive, there is usually a sufficient commercial spin-off for the company to keep its shareholders happy. We forget this at our peril.

In the worlds of archeology and fine art, there has long been legislation in place to help redress the balance between commercial gain and the public interest, and I take it from Carl's letter that a realistic initiative to secure similar legislation governing the disposal of valuable archives is now on the cards. But I find myself asking "Why only now?" What has the archivist community been doing all these years, and in particular in relation to the Novello sale? As Carl notes, it would provide at least some compensation if the Novello sale were to help bring about appropriate legislation. But, as far as the Elgar letters are concerned, we are left holding the stable door—the horse has already bolted.

From: Darren Niman

Commenting to his friend W. H. Reed on the closing bars of the Third Symphony's slow movement, Elgar, with tears streaming down his face, said, 'Billy, this is the end'. He had written in a letter to Ernest Newman, 'I am fond enough to believe that the first two bars (with the F sharp in the bass) open some vast bronze doors into something strangely unfamiliar'. In the same letter, 'I think and hope you may like the unresolved estinto of the viola solo'.

I would like to suggest something which has until now not been mentioned by any other commentator

with regard to the Elgar-Payne elaboration, which in my opinion is a brilliant, lovingly crafted reconstruction. British music owes an immeasurable debt to Anthony Payne.

In light of Elgar's use of music from previous works, for example Arthur, I strongly feel that it is more than just coincidence that the moment of Gerontius' death in Part One of the Dream anticipates the opening of the 'vast bronze doors' in the Third Symphony. Just compare the melodic line of 'Into Thy hands' with the bass line of the ending of the slow movement of the symphony. Further, Elgar's use of the *estinto* marking justifies the comparison.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is for the Solo viola, and the bottom staff is for Tutti violas & cellos. The Solo viola part features a melodic line with a *pp* dynamic marking, followed by a *espr* (espressivo) section, and then a *estinto* section. The Tutti violas & cellos part features a bass line with a *pp* dynamic marking. Below the bottom staff, the lyrics 'in - to Thy hands' are written, with a line under 'hands' indicating a continuation of the phrase.

How 'strangely unfamiliar' was this? In using nearly identical intervals, Elgar may already have suggested his own parting in the Dream, and merely confirmed it in the Third Symphony, which really was 'the end'...
From: Carl Newton

My good friend Geoffrey Hodgkins takes me by surprise with his reference to myself in his riposte to Meirion Hughes's English Musical Renaissance and the Press (JOURNAL, November 2003). I feel I must enter the discussion to return the compliment. I do so with no particular brief for either side in the argument, for though I agree with Geoffrey that Hughes does not present a properly analytic review of the evidence and is too sweeping in some of his statements, I feel there is some special pleading in his own contribution.

He is quite right to point out that the composer initially did not have much influence with the critics, but this overlooks the fact that his publishers and Jaeger did. And they were nothing loath to use their considerable powers on his behalf, not least because it was in their own commercial interest to do so. It seems disingenuous to suggest that Elgar was unaware of this or in any way objected to it. Hughes is totally convincing about the enthusiasm which he showed for co-operating in the project. All his life he had a tradesman's approach to art. He never tired of pointing out that he was a tradesman's son, brought up over the shop, and the truth of this has to be recognised as a major element in his make-up. Even on his death bed he was fussing about the financial arrangements with the BBC. The correspondence with Jaeger reveals two hard-headed business men each trying to get advantage over the other. This is not to say that Jaeger did not recognise Elgar's worth as composer—of course he did, that was what made the effort of coping with his moods and infuriating insouciance worthwhile, both artistically and commercially. Elgar was a 'hot property' for Novello and was well aware of it, which is why he threatened at times to leave them.

Nor will it do to say that he was impervious to musical criticism. That was simply a ploy; part of his attempt to create the impression of being a great artist above the concerns of ordinary mortals. Just as he affected to despise the piano but used it frequently, he affected to despise the news reports so sedulously collected by his wife and Dora Penny. If he never read them, how was he able to refer to them in his letters? Ironically Hodgkins actually quotes examples of Elgar's knowledge of them in his own attempt to prove the opposite. The Birmingham lectures include one totally devoted to critics—hardly the action of a man who believed he could

ignore them or knew nothing about them. In it he made the extraordinary statement that he had read all of Johnstone's criticisms except those of his own works. The national press had a field day over that remark, rightly declaring it to be incredible. Hughes presents compelling evidence of how Elgar sought to influence representatives of the press whenever he had the chance, and after 1900 these chances were increasingly frequent. In truth the composer was a great manipulator—note how he tried to 'tune' the biographies—but he undoubtedly had allies in the task. The crucial question is what effect did the attempts actually have? Hughes does not really answer this and is wrong to suggest that Elgar was seeking to influence the critics all by himself, but so is Hodgkins to suggest that he was above attempting it.

From: David Bury

In his review of the Helios CD Elgar Cathedral Music (JOURNAL, November 2003) Christopher Fifield tells us that the date of the Ben Jonson setting 'I sing the birth' is unknown. Michael Kennedy asserts as much, too, in the booklet which accompanies the CD. They may be right.

However, Elgar forwarded the carol to the publishers on 30 October 1928, and a further letter of 1 November shows Elgar concerned about the spelling of the text. The première was at the Royal Albert Hall on 10 December 1928 with Dr Malcolm Sargent conducting. Dr Moore (*A Creative Life*, p. 777) notes that Elgar was writing a little music at Tiddington House in 1928 and quotes the Jonson setting—'slight but immaculate'—as an example. Michael Kennedy, too, seems to have changed his mind since *Portrait of Elgar* where we are told that 'I sing the birth' was completed on 30 October 1928 (2nd edition, p. 356).

Novello paid Elgar fifteen guineas for this little piece. Perhaps he had been sitting on the score for years, though it was not like him to miss the chance of a fee from his publishers. Is there, in fact, any good reason for not taking 1928 as the year of composition?



The Roman bridge at Alassio (see 100 Years Ago)

[Photo Sir Edward Elgar]

100 YEARS AGO...

The Elgars arrived at Bordighera on 28 November, moving on to Alassio twelve days later. The weather was poor, and they were 'both very depressed by it', Alice wrote on 15 December. Rosa Burley brought Carice out for Christmas, but Elgar was still low: 'E. feeling no inspiration for writing' was Alice's comment on 31 December. However, better weather in the New Year meant that they could get out more, and on 9 January they took a walk to the Roman bridge and saw a shepherd watching his flock. Two days later 'E. writing his Overture'. This was the beginnings of *In the South*. On 21st a letter arrived inviting Elgar to dine at Marlborough House on 3 February and meet the King. Edward and Alice left Italy on 30th, reaching London two days later. The dinner was a great success: 'The King talked music to E. & took him out 1st after dinner'. *Pomp & Circumstance No. 1* was played and encored.

Back in Malvern on 6th, Elgar continued his orchestration of the new work: two days later 'E. wrote splendid "Romans" in his overture'. On 11th Rudolph de Cordova arrived to interview Elgar for the *Strand Magazine*, to celebrate the forthcoming Covent Garden Festival. The Elgars had decided to leave Malvern for Hereford, and on 20 February Alice saw and 'liked Plas Gwyn'. *In the South* was finished on 21 February, and Elgar was busy correcting proofs at the beginning of March.

Frank Schuster gave a dinner party in Elgar's honour on 13 March, the day before the Festival began. The first evening was a performance of *Gerontius*, followed by *The Apostles* the next evening. The final concert contained *Froissart*, extracts from *Caractacus*, and the 'Enigma' Variations, all conducted by Richter. Then Elgar conducted the première of *In the South*. Supper at Lord Howe's followed this last concert. Edward returned to Malvern on 23rd, a day later than Alice, as he went via Leeds to arrange performances of *Gerontius* and *The Apostles* there.

He was in London again on 9 April for Weingartner's performance of *Gerontius*, the first time that Gervase Elwes sang the title part. The critic Robin Legge wrote to Elwes saying how much he had been impressed by 'the tremendous conviction and sincerity' of the performance. The following week Elgar was in Birmingham for a performance of *The Apostles*, when the Festival Chorus had been trained by Sinclair. 'Crowded & intense enthusiasm', Alice noted in her diary. By this time the move to Hereford was settled: Alice signed the papers on 18 April, before making her way to London to join Elgar. They were present at the final concert in the Weingartner Festival on 20th, when the Variations were performed. Alice was more critical than usual: 'Some of the Varns. fine, especially the last, but some too fast & not sufficient dignity'. The following day saw a performance of *The Apostles*, given by the Royal Choral Society. 'First part... most beautiful, then chorus went flat', Alice wrote. During this stay in London Elgar visited the Athenaeum several times, as he had been elected a member on the 13th. On 28 April the Elgars went to Morecambe for the Festival, having originally planned to miss the final day so as to attend the Royal Academy dinner; however, Canon Gorton's urgent pleading was successful, and they stayed till the end.

As the spring progressed, Elgar recommenced cycling, and went twice to Longdon Marsh—once with Charles Grindrod—at the beginning of May, perhaps to seek some inspiration for the next part of *The Apostles*.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

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