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• *May Song* • *Dream Children* • *Coronation Ode* • *Weary Wind*
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The Elgar Society **Journal**



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*The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily
those of the editor nor of The Elgar Society itself.*

Front cover: Lady Mary Lygon, whose sea voyage to the antipodes with her brother the Earl Beauchamp, recently appointed governor of New South Wales, is allegedly referenced in the thirteenth of the 'Enigma' Variations. Or is it? The ship illustrated is the SS Ruapehu which carried the émigrée Helen Weaver, Elgar's former fiancée, to a new home in New Zealand. Certain evidence points to her being the person actually hidden behind the three asterisks which head the variation. Ernest Blamires has dug deep to uncover the mystery of Variation XIII; the first part of his extensive investigation appears in this issue.

Disillusion and Dissolution: Elgar and the poetry of doubt

Dr John Pickard

In June 2004 the Elgar Society's Birthday Weekend celebrations included the biennial A. T. Shaw lecture, presented on that occasion by Dr John Pickard, senior lecturer in music at Bristol University and general editor of the Elgar Society Edition. In this article, a transcript of his lecture to the Society, Dr Pickard identifies and traces the development of a fundamental aspect of Elgar's creative personality of which those less familiar with his music remain largely unaware, summed up in a phrase Elgar himself quoted from Charles Kingsley: 'the poetry of doubt'.

A few months ago, near the beginning of the university academic year, I had a conversation with a first-year music student who had just joined the orchestra I conduct at Bristol University. A keen Mahlerian, and an admirer of late-Romantic music in general, he told me that one composer he particularly detested was Elgar. This was unfortunate for him, because I had already programmed two major Elgar works during the course of the year (the Cello Concerto and *The Dream of Gerontius*), so he was about to experience the object of his hatred at close quarters.

His admission did not particularly trouble me. We all have our blind spots: I am not very keen on Schumann, Fauré, Finzi or Delius—and I could quite happily live out my days without ever hearing another note of Franck, Donizetti or Bellini. It also goes without saying that such *bêtes noires* say far more about ourselves than they do about the objects of our dislike. However, on this occasion I could not help but ask: why Elgar?

Two interesting—and related—points emerged. Firstly, he admitted he didn't actually know much Elgar apart from *Land of Hope and Glory*. Secondly, he objected to what he termed the 'arrogance of manner' and the jingoism that he believed infected Elgar's work.

As all Elgarians know, this is a caricature, far removed from the whole truth about Elgar's music. One need only listen to the concertos, the symphonies and the late chamber works to recognise a common motivating force borne not of arrogance, but of doubt, anxiety and a restless, questioning spirit: 'not the style of a man who is at ease in himself or in Zion', as Tovey once put it.¹ And yet, if one is honest, as with any good caricature, the subject is recognisable beneath the cartoon exaggeration. Depending on what you listen to, some of Elgar's music could be viewed as an arrogant assertion of imperialist values. It is a part of his character: a small part, but a significant one—and, regardless of one's political beliefs, for many a committed Elgarian the sight of the flag-waving crowds yelling *Land of Hope and Glory* at the Last Night of the Proms is something of an embarrassment.

Far from being arrogant in manner, Elgar's music is fundamentally the opposite. In its essence, it is searching, uneasy, provisional. Certainly, it is also capable of massive assertion, but always, just below the surface, one senses it to be shot through with uncertainty and doubt. If we choose to account for this in biographical terms, it is perhaps a reflection of the public and private faces of the man we have come to know from countless biographies: the carapace of the abrupt-mannered major-general, concealing the shy, vulnerable, quirky inner man that family and close friends recognised as the essential Elgar; a man more at

home with children and animals than with the great and the good.

So my eighteen-year-old student, ignorant of the music itself—but soon to learn far more about it, from inside the orchestra (the same place that Elgar learned how to write it)—can hardly be blamed for unquestioningly absorbing a false image of Elgar, when the pervading culture apparently serves only to reinforce it. How then can I show him what this music is really about, without recourse to biographical special-pleading, and through the only thing that really matters—the music itself? This lecture is, at least partly, for him.

I would like to set aside the biographical dimension to some extent and concentrate on the music itself and, in particular, one aspect of it which, while little discussed, takes us, I believe, to the heart of the Elgarian matter.

In his analysis of *In the South*, Tovey revealingly compares the orchestral techniques of Strauss and Elgar. Strauss, he says ‘drives through his musical traffic like a road-hog’. By contrast, Elgar’s style is ‘meticulously pure’. Characteristically, Tovey then goes on to question his own choice of phrase, only to end up agreeing with himself: ‘Perhaps the word “meticulous” may be misleading, and “classical” might be a better epithet. But I think “meticulous” is right.’²

I feel Tovey did musical scholarship a great service by alluding to an essential, and still overlooked aspect of Elgar’s style: his indebtedness to the technical procedures of the Classical masters he revered—Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. I am not simply talking about the superficial aspects of Classicism—the use of formal devices like sonata design, or the use of certain types of tonal relationship (although these are fundamental to his music)—but about aspects of Classicism that affect the deepest fibres of the musical material.

One essential aspect of Classicism largely lost to late Romanticism, and which disappeared almost completely in the early twentieth-century breakdown of diatonicism, is the intimate and symbiotic relationship between harmony and rhythm. Lionel Pike has tellingly demonstrated how in Beethoven’s ‘Eroica’ Symphony ‘the first theme, which promises to be in the conventional E flat tonality, is dragged away from that key... and at this point the regularity of rhythm in the accompaniment is mildly upset by the intrusion of a syncopated pedal G... in the first violins: as E flat is regained, so the regularity of rhythm returns.’³

Ex. 1 Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 (1st movement)

Allegro con brio



The image shows the beginning of the first movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3. The title 'Allegro con brio' is centered above the notation. The music is written on a grand staff with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 3/4 time signature. The first measure contains a half note G3 and a quarter note B-flat3. The second measure contains a half note D4 and a quarter note G3. The third measure contains a half note E-flat4 and a quarter note D4. The fourth measure contains a half note C4 and a quarter note B-flat3. The dynamic marking 'p' (piano) is placed below the first measure. The notation is enclosed in a large brace on the left side.

This apparently minor incident is symptomatic of what happens at every level of the first movement of the 'Eroica'. To see how this principle maps out on a broader plane one need only consider the famous climax of the movement's development section, where a violent harmonic and tonal upheaval is mirrored by the comprehensive undermining of the basic rhythmic pulse.

Ex. 2 Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 (1st movement)



Through the widespread erosion of common harmonic practice in the later nineteenth century, phrase structure and rhythmic outline became deregulated. The erosion of tonal harmony and its impact on rhythmic structure is exemplified in Wagner's two most sharply differentiated music-dramas—consider the contrasting harmonic worlds respectively inhabited by the preludes to *Die Meistersinger* and *Tristan* and how these are reflected in their relative rhythmic profiles.

Ex. 3 Wagner: *Die Meistersinger* (Prelude)

Sehr mäßig b



Ex. 4 Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde* (Prelude)

Langsam u

Unsurprisingly, a more Classical approach to harmonic and rhythmic relationships is retained by that most Classical of Romantic masters, Brahms. Consider how, in his First Symphony, at the start of the first movement's main *allegro*, the relentless upward movement of the harmony provokes a rhythmic crisis where upbeat and downbeat functions momentarily become exchanged.

Ex. 5 Brahms: Symphony No. 1 (1st movement)

Allegro



Or consider this quietly extraordinary passage from the slow movement of the Third Symphony, where regular phrase structure, together with anything approaching conventional harmonic relationships are temporarily suspended, only to be reintroduced, once tonal stability is regained.

Ex. 6 Brahms: Symphony No. 3 (2nd movement)

Andante

dolce

o
v
c
t

6

3

Allegro, con molto fuoco



b. opening, rebarred to show off-beat accents as downbeats

Allegro, con molto fuoco



Elgar considered this a musical joke. In an account of a visit to the Elgars in May 1901 Dora Penny recalled:

When we returned E.E. heard us and called out to me: 'Child, come up here. I've got a tune that will knock 'em—knock 'em flat,' and he played the Military March No. 1 in D. I was thrilled; the whole thing carried one along so splendidly—and as to the coda, I thought it glorious.

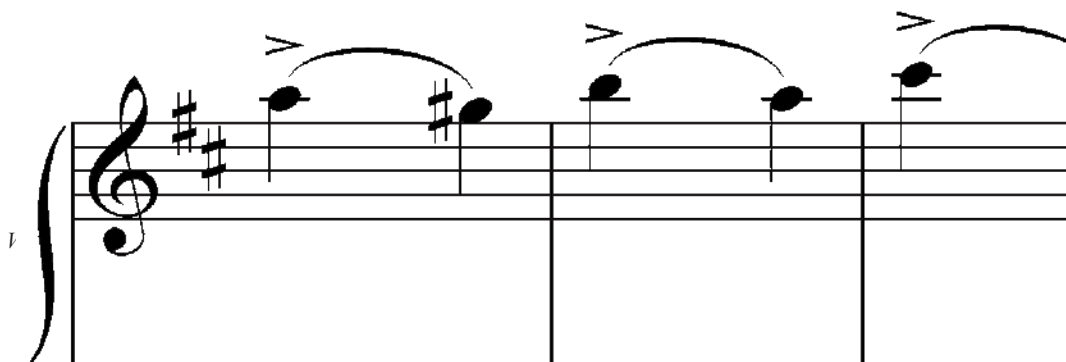
'Military March in D this is. What note does it begin on?'

'E flat.'

'Yah! there's a joke!' ⁴

Less frequently remarked (though arguably more immediately obvious to the listener) is the fact that until the appearance of the main theme (in the 'correct' key) and without either a score or sight of the conductor, it is difficult to tell on which beat of the bar the music begins. The fact that it actually starts on an upbeat is confirmed later in the 'exposition', when the fanfare returns—again in E flat, as the 'Neapolitan' of D.

Ex. 8 Elgar: *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1



Needless to say, this acts as a foil to the utter regularity, both of phrase and harmonic progression, of the famous Trio tune. Indeed, one could go further and claim that the harmonic and rhythmic turbulence of the opening section not only justifies the regularity of the Trio, but renders it structurally necessary. The result elevates what might otherwise be a relatively trivial work to something approaching the level of symphonic music, which at the time Elgar was writing it was widely considered the highest state to which music could aspire: certainly Elgar thought so, describing the symphony in the sixth of his Birmingham lectures as ‘the highest development of art’.⁵

At this point, it is probably necessary to define, or at least clarify, what I mean by the terms ‘rhythm’ and ‘harmony’. By rhythm, I don’t mean pulsation: the tapping of one’s foot. Rather I mean the grouping together of different durations to produce a larger unit or phrase. Rhythmic units can be of varying sizes, from the tiniest motif (think of the three short notes and one long one at the opening of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony) to much larger paragraphs—and even, in some cases, to the sequence of different tempi that make up the movements of a large-scale multi-movement composition.

By ‘harmony’ I do not simply mean the qualities of individual chords but the tension and release generated by areas of harmony. Again this can range from the smallest level—the resolution of one chord to the next—to the control of harmonic pace across entire movements.

In this sense it follows that harmony and rhythm are so profoundly related that they ultimately merge. Indeed, one will often come across the term ‘harmonic rhythm’ to signify the structural use of harmony.

Returning to the *Pomp and Circumstance* example, what is the expressive, emotional effect of the combined disruption of harmony and rhythm at the start? While it is always dangerous to descend into generalisations about musical expression, I would suggest that in this case it implies wilfulness, impulsiveness, impatience—in short, qualities far removed from the regularity, the regimentation of a routine military march. This interpretation tends to be borne out at the end, where the last word is given not to the regularity of the Trio tune, but to a return to the work’s opening, which breaks rank in a headlong rush.

Rhythmic and harmonic disruption, then, is associated with disturbance. In this case, we could call it a healthy disturbance—a show of exuberant high-spirits—but a disturbance nevertheless.

A more complex example of the same principle (both technically and emotionally) can be found in the Rondo third movement of the Second Symphony. Commentators regularly refer to the volatility and nervous energy of this movement, its ‘demonic ferocity’, as one writer puts it.⁶ Whatever adjectives you use, few listeners would fail to recognise that this music is not at ease in itself, to paraphrase Tovey’s observation quoted earlier.

The opening is harmonically unstable. It is also tonally ambiguous.

Ex. 9 Elgar: Symphony No. 2 (3rd movement)



The tempo is a fast 3/8 (one in a bar), but the cross-rhythms—especially the one in the second bar—distort the perception of where the downbeat actually lies. Although from bar 3 onwards the underlying harmony changes regularly with the downbeat, it is repeatedly challenged by the placing of important emphases on off-

Moderato e maestoso



Was Elgar conscious of this habit? Perhaps not: it is most likely something he absorbed instinctively from lifelong study of the Classical masters (and in this respect we should recall his early 'rewriting' of Mozart's G minor Symphony as a self-administered composition lesson). Ultimately, it is unimportant whether he was aware of it or not; it does not alter the fact that it is pervasively apparent in his music anyway. However, there is at least one sign that this was something more than a purely instinctive awareness, even though in this case the evidence is mediated through the words of another artist. I am indebted to Jerrold Northrop Moore for drawing my attention to a passage from Elgar's Birmingham lecture of November 1905 entitled 'English Composers' where Elgar deploras modern compositions in which 'old forms have in many cases been needlessly thrown aside without, it seems in my poor opinion, correspondingly good results'.⁷ The surviving notes for this talk are frustratingly sketchy, so it is difficult to establish the direction Elgar's argument took during the lecture, but the comment seems to have been the cue for a polemic against what he saw as a tendency among young composers to dissociate form from content. To support his argument, Elgar draws on the nineteenth-century writer, historian, cleric and moralist Charles Kingsley, who considered the abandonment in modern poetry of the strict Classical meters to be symptomatic of a degeneration of artistic expression and, by implication, a wider cultural malaise:

the utterance must be the expression... of the spirit which animates it... If the spirit be impatient of all moral rule, its utterance will be equally impatient of all artistic rule; and thus, as we are now beginning to discover from experience, the poetry of doubt will find itself unable to use those forms of verse which have always been held to be the highest; tragedy, epic, the ballad, and lastly even the subjective lyrical ode, for they too, to judge by every great lyric which remains to us require a groundwork of consistent, self-coherent belief; and they require also an appreciation of melody even more delicate... than any other form of poetic utterance. But where there is no melody within, there will be no melody without. It is in vain to attempt the setting of spiritual discords to physical music. The mere practical patience and self-restraint requisite to work out rhythm when fixed on, will be wanting; nay, the fitting rhythm will never be found, the subject itself being arhythmic; and thus we shall have a wider and wider divorce of sound and sense, a greater and greater carelessness for polish, and for the charm of musical utterance, and watch the clear and spirit-stirring melodies of the older poets swept away by a deluge of half-metrical prose-run-mad, diffuse, unfinished, unmusical to[o], which any other metre than that in which it happens to have been written would have been equally appropriate, because all are equally inappropriate and where men have nothing to sing, it is not of the slightest consequence how they sing it.⁸

Again, frustratingly, Elgar's notes provide no subsequent development of these points. All that follows is an

obscure Classical reference that simply conceals a platitude about composers of unpopular and incoherent compositions posing as martyrs to an artistic cause.

To me, the phrase that resounds from that quotation is 'the poetry of doubt'. Kingsley, the 'muscular Christian', clearly intended his comments as a warning to those who would indulge in the poetry of doubt: the articulation of uncertainties, the questioning of cherished values. It is ironic, and I think significant, that Elgar should have drawn attention to Kingsley's comments at the very moment that religious doubt was beginning to affect his own work and which was to make the completion of *The Kingdom* during the months immediately after his Birmingham lecture such a struggle.

To return to the Second Symphony: its première in May 1911 famously met with an indifferent reception, in marked contrast with the triumphant ovation that greeted its predecessor just three years earlier. Biographers tend to see this as the beginning of the critical backlash that Elgar's music suffered in the last two decades of his life: something had changed in the world and Elgar's music, it seems, no longer captured the mood of the time.

All this is true enough, but we must not forget that if Elgar's public was changing then so was Elgar: from the Second Symphony onwards the harmony becomes more complex, the discourse more elliptical; disillusion, which had long been a part of his musical character, now becomes increasingly pervasive. After the Violin Concerto of 1910, no major Elgar work expresses the unqualified triumph with which the Concerto, the First Symphony, *Caractacus*, the *Introduction and Allegro* or the overtures close, nor the serenity that is reached at the end of *Gerontius*, *The Apostles* or *The Kingdom*.

One of the most telling indicators of the change in Elgar's style is his treatment of marches in the later works. Processionals of all kinds pervade Elgar's music throughout his career: *Pomp and Circumstance* and the various other concert marches, the triumphal procession in *Caractacus*, the funeral-march slow movement of the Second Symphony. Even 'Go forth in the name of God' in *Gerontius* has a processional character and the list could go on. It almost goes without saying that rhythmic and harmonic regularity are fundamental to the character of a march; otherwise the march loses its essential function, which is to keep people physically and psychologically in step, and I have already shown the musical and psychological implications of Elgar excitedly breaking rank at the beginning and end of the ebullient *Pomp and Circumstance* No. 1.

The processional is no less pervasive in the later works, though increasingly shot through with uncertainty and consequent rhythmic and harmonic disruption. Here are a few examples:

'For the Fallen', the final movement of *The Spirit of England* is dominated by two marches: one slow, the other fast. The preponderance of marches is unsurprising as the subject is war. It was composed with immense difficulty during the Great War (a conflict over which Elgar showed profound ambivalence) and it is a masterpiece: a war requiem of extraordinary power, much admired by many Elgarians and still strangely neglected by performers. 'For the Fallen' begins and ends with a funeral march, but it is a strangely broken-backed march, with stresses on unexpected beats, a sudden pianissimo that breaks the regularity of phrases, harmony that continuously evades normal dominant to tonic functions (the recurring descending fifth in the bass, first heard at the opening, exploits the tension between an implied V-I perfect cadence and its true function in this context as a far less stable I-IV progression). Furthermore, the sudden pianissimo in the third bar is consistent with a harmonic slip that instantly implies a grief yet deeper and more intimate than the surrounding ceremonial would normally permit.

Ex. 12 Elgar: *The Spirit of England* ('For the Fallen')

Solenne

The cen
spectral
rhythm c

Ex.

Musical notation for 'Solenne' in 4/4 time. The score shows a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains a half note chord (G4, B4, D5) with an accent (^) above it. The second measure contains a half note chord (G4, B4, D5) with a 'c' time signature below it. The dynamic marking *pp* is centered below the staff.

Allegro (tempo di marcia)

The
commor

Ex.

Musical notation for 'Allegro (tempo di marcia)'. The score shows a common time signature (C). The first measure is a half note chord (G4, B4, D5). The second measure is a half note chord (G4, B4, D5) with an accent (^) above it. The third measure is a half note chord (G4, B4, D5) with an accent (^) above it. The fourth measure is a half note chord (G4, B4, D5) with an accent (^) above it. The dynamic marking *f* is centered below the staff.

Allegro

Falstaff is of co
young Hal bec
something of hi
than that, there
Straussian tone
senses, from th
harmonic struct
the character of

Musical notation for 'Allegro' in 2/2 time. The score shows a bass clef with a 2/2 time signature. The first measure is a half note chord (G2, B2, D3) with a bar line above it. The second measure is a half note chord (G2, B2, D3) with an accent (^) above it. The third measure is a half note chord (G2, B2, D3) with an accent (^) above it. The dynamic marking *f* is centered below the staff, and the word *sonore* is written below it. The word *ten.* is written above the staff in the second measure, and *te* is written above the staff in the third measure.

the harmonic and rhythmic elision of phrases, as shown in the following example. 15b shows the possible consequences if the elision were to be decoupled and the harmonic rhythm regularised.

Ex. 15 Elgar: *Falstaff*
a. elision of phrases

Con anima

b. 'regularised' phrasing

The most powerful close. Following the work, the orchestra's single pizzicato chord one thing, the previous incomplete and unfinished of whether one hears offbeat.

Musical notation for Ex. 15, part b. It shows a bass clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. The music consists of a single chord in the first measure, followed by a two-measure phrase. A slur covers the two-measure phrase, and a fermata is placed over the final note. A bracket above the staff spans the two-measure phrase, with the letter 'a' written above it.

Ex. 16 Elgar: *Falstaff*

(2-bar phrases)

Musical notation for Ex. 16. It shows a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. The music consists of a two-measure phrase. A slur covers the two-measure phrase, and a fermata is placed over the final note. A bracket above the staff spans the two-measure phrase.

This deeply unsettling conclusion, a musical manifestation of Kingsley's 'poetry of doubt', is hardly likely to have endeared the work to contemporary audiences. Its early performance history was apparently even less

distinguished than that of the Second Symphony and even today *Falstaff* is the least performed of Elgar's major orchestral works, even though, like *The Spirit of England*, it is especially highly regarded by many aficionados.

By the very nature of their media, the late chamber works show a further withdrawal from the world of public statement inhabited by the great orchestral and choral works. Their language is refined, sometimes elliptical, their emotional landscape often puzzling. Certainly the mood of, for example, the slow movement of the Violin Sonata strongly resists crude adjectival pigeonholing (cheerful, sad, angry, sombre, etc.). Whatever the prevailing mood (or moods) of this movement, they are difficult to pin down because the musical direction itself is hard to pin down: chromatic harmony, unexpected cadences, the downbeat undermined by important musical events on the offbeat, apparently free cadenza-like runs that threaten the establishment of a continuous pulse.

Ex. 17 Elgar: Violin Sonata (2nd movement)

Andante

pizz. arco

p

Earlier in this lecture I defined rhythm as something affecting not just the note-to-note details of a musical composition but its largest structural aspects as well. My final example of Elgar's integration of rhythm and harmony shows this large-scale dimension. The finale of the Cello Concerto, which might be described as an Introduction and Allegro of sorts, contains a huge slow interlude. It accounts for over a third of the movement's entire duration and represents the emotional core of the whole concerto. The brisk allegro march that precedes it is generally harmonically and rhythmically stable, but the sustained slow music into which it dissolves is the opposite of this. Rhythmically free, full of complex *rubato* and irregular phrase-lengths, it is also highly chromatic to the point where tonality itself is sometimes on the verge of collapse.

Ex. 18 Elgar: Cello Concerto (4th movement)

(Poco più lento)

ten.

f molto espress.

This is perhaps the ultimate example of rhythmic and harmonic dissolution in Elgar's output and it is of such significance that it becomes the focal point of the entire concerto. The dissolution is so comprehensive, and the private world of disillusion and pain it uncovers is so all-pervading, that only artificial respiration, by the radical means of beginning the concerto afresh, can bring it back to life. Although Elgar subsequently engineers a rousing conclusion, as if wiping a tear from his eye before setting off for the races, there can be little doubt that the return to rhythmic, harmonic and emotional conventionality has been irretrievably compromised by the painful truth to which we have just been exposed.

All of this I can explain to my first-year music student, showing him that the 'arrogance' he perceives in Elgar is an illusion: a mask concealing deeper emotional truths that are to be found in the notes themselves by anyone with ears to hear them. Will he listen to what I have to tell him? Perhaps he doesn't need to: as I said earlier, following our discussion he had no choice but to perform in both the Cello Concerto and *The Dream of Gerontius*. He experienced the music from the inside and heard it for himself. In an impressive *mea culpa*, for which I admire him, he told me after both performances that he now realised how wrong he had been about Elgar and that he had even been moved to buy recordings of both works. He was henceforth a committed Elgarian and I could not resist allowing myself a smile of satisfaction...

1. Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Symphonies and other Orchestral Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935–9, new edition 1981), p. 322.
2. Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Symphonies and other Orchestral Works*, p. 323.
3. Lionel Pike, *Beethoven, Sibelius and 'the profound logic': studies in symphonic analysis* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), p. 40.
4. Mrs Richard Powell [Dora Penny, 'Dorabella'], *Edward Elgar: Memories of a Variation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 35.
5. *A Future for English Music and other lectures by Edward Elgar* edited by Percy M. Young (London: Dobson, 1968), p. 207.
6. Christopher Grier, sleeve note to EMI recording of Symphony No. 2 (CD-CFP-4544).
7. *A Future for English Music*, p. 89.
8. *A Future for English Music*, p. 91.

DR JOHN PICKARD is a senior lecturer in music at the University of Bristol. He is general editor of the Elgar Society Edition and is currently editing Volume 28 (Overtures). He is also a well-known composer, particularly renowned for his orchestral and chamber music. His Gaia Symphony will receive its world première at the Cheltenham Music Festival on July 10 and his most recent work, Eden, has been commissioned as the test piece for this year's National Brass Band Championship (the same championship for which Elgar composed the Severn Suite in 1930). In January of next year his orchestral piece The Flight of Icarus will receive its U.S. première by the San Francisco Symphony. The same work will be recorded in Sweden by BIS records in 2007, along with his Trombone Concerto, played by Christian Lindberg. John is currently writing a large-scale choral and orchestral piece commissioned by the Huddersfield Choral Society.



SS Ruapehu, the ship which carried Helen Weaver to New Zealand. It took its name from Mt Ruapehu, a strato-volcano on the North Island of New Zealand which has erupted about fifty times since 1861, most recently in 1975. Courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

'Loveliest, Brightest, Best': a reappraisal of 'Enigma's' Variation XIII (Part 1)

Ernest Blamires

*One of the enduring mysteries concealed in Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations is the identity of the 'friend pictured within' the thirteenth variation, indicated in the score by '****'. Elgar's sketches and draft comments on the variation identify it with Lady Mary Lygon of Madresfield Court, 'a lady who was, at the time of the composition, on a sea voyage.' But other sources—including some close to the composer—suggest a deeper, more personal link with the fiancée of Elgar's youth, Helen Weaver. In re-examining 'The Case of the Three Asterisks', the author speculates on what might have been the true feelings and events that gave rise to the music of Variation XIII.*

Prelude

The most significant characteristic of the romantic temperament is the tendency to look back.

(Percy M. Young, *Alice Elgar: enigma of a Victorian lady*)

The year was 1884. It was the year in which an unknown composer, the 'thrice homeless' Gustav Mahler, aged twenty-four, unsuccessfully attempted to become the assistant to the great Hans von Bülow, and penned the first tentative sketches of his First Symphony. It was the year in which the son of a butcher and inn keeper, Antonin Dvořák, aged forty-three, brought the freshness of his Stabat Mater and his most recent Sixth Symphony to the September Worcester Festival. It was the year in which a twice-failed twenty-two-year-old man—as prospective piano virtuoso and as entrant to the prestigious *Prix de Rome*—tried again, and won! His name was Claude Debussy. Strangest of all, it was the year in which another failed young man—a man with a total incapacity for the family business and the despair of his family—persuaded his parents to provide him with enough money to allow him to sail to America, to purchase land in Florida, and to pursue the active outdoor life of orange growing! The man was Frederick Delius and he was just twenty-two years old.

* * *

But for Edward William Elgar, the year 1884 was just another time of increasing depression and prolonged sadness. Depression, because he was already twenty-seven (and that in an age in which the male life expectancy was less than fifty-five years), viewed himself—as through most of his life—as being inadequately rewarded (both monetarily and in terms of recognition), and was filled with self-doubt. But the real source of his depression was that in the spring of this year, Edward and his *braut* Helen Weaver had mutually agreed to end their engagement. In a letter to his Yorkshire friend Dr Charles Buck on 21 April 1884, he wrote:

...sometimes I conclude that 'tis want of ability and get into a mouldy desponding state which is really horrible.

His earlier dream of becoming a concert violinist had faded, his London violin teacher Adolphe Pollitzer having

recognised his talent—not as a future violin virtuoso, but as a composer. Edward spent his working days assisting his father in piano tuning, teaching violin to local students both in Worcester and Malvern, composing (until recently) trivial pieces for the band at the Worcester City and County Lunatic Asylum, Powick, and in helping in the Elgar Bros. shop when necessary.

Edward should have felt more fulfilled than he did. His presence in both Worcester and Malvern was becoming increasingly recognised; he had taken over most of the duties of his former violin teacher Frederick Spray, and he had become a joint founder and leading light of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society as well as leader of the Worcester Glee Club. Whilst these appointments allowed him to display his abilities as musician and leader, with his reputation enhanced in his own small Worcester circle, they absorbed most of his evenings in activities which were, as Dunhill suggests, 'more active than congenial, and more irksome than prolific'. Whether these activities added significantly to his financial position is quite another question.

But since the breaking of his engagement to Helen Weaver in the spring of 1884 his life seemed to him to have little purpose. The so-called 'engagement' had been a mixed blessing for Edward and Helen. We know that it had placed on them major (ultimately impossible) restrictions, imposed by both sets of parents. The engagement could not be made public and the question of religion had to be resolved. In Victorian times, then, Edward would not have been able to give Helen an engagement ring, there would be no celebration party, and the lack of the imprimatur granted by a formal (public) announcement would hardly have enthused either of the parties. This was actually a 'hidden engagement'—in short, a trial! It is now quite impossible for us to imagine the mental struggles that this 'engagement' imposed on Edward and Helen. Time was to prove that the struggle would fail—which may well have been the intent and expectation of either or both of the families.

The Sorrow of Parting

Somewhere... something or someone wounded him so deeply, so irreparably, that he never fully recovered.

Though he revealed so much about himself in his letters, he buried the secret of this wound in his heart. It showed itself only in the anguish and solitude of certain passages in his music.

(Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*)

Helen's stepmother had died in November 1883—of tuberculosis, the same disease which was soon to cloud Helen's world. Two months later, Edward had written to Buck:

Miss Weaver is remaining in Worcester and the little music &c that we get together is the only enjoyment I get and more than I deserve no doubt.

(14 January 1884)

But here is the return of his 'black-dog' despondency, and all sense of happiness withered. Just three months later, he wrote again to Buck:

Miss Weaver is very well. I do not think that she will remain in Worcester much longer now.

(21 April 1884)

These two letters have an ominous tone to them—the latter suggests the engagement was already broken but Edward did not have the heart to reveal it. It also indicates that Helen had probably decided, as Wulstan Atkins has recorded, to leave Worcester in June or July 1884—her mind now full of the unhappy memories of dead parents and failed dreams—and move north to the new surroundings of Bradford, to share the friendship of Edith Groveham. Helen was now twenty-three. She had met Edith, who was three years younger than her, in Leipzig in 1882 when they both were studying violin—both had the ambition of becoming teachers—and they had become close friends. Edith lived in the Bradford suburb of Manningham where her mother Elizabeth ran

a ladies' boarding school—Helen may have taught there and given lessons in violin and music, both within the school and to local students.

Helen's dream of becoming a violin teacher, supported by a diploma from the prestigious Leipzig conservatorium, was now fading. There were now newer, greater imperatives in her life for she too had discovered that her health was fragile—at some point she had contracted tuberculosis, quite possibly from the nursing of her mother in her last months. Now that both of her parents were dead her first priority must be her own health. At that time this implied moving to a warmer, cleaner environment, and one where the general quality of food and of life was superior to that in England. This was probably already in her mind during the summer of 1884. Firstly then, Helen felt driven to quickly remove herself from all the dark memories of Worcester. The short term solution was to move to Bradford. Though this new city was far more polluted than her own town, at least here she had friendship and the probability of employment. After her move to Bradford, Helen could then focus on a longer term solution to her difficulties. At some point Helen started to think of leaving England entirely, to seek the warmth and clear air her condition demanded. In the 1880s no one knew if this would cure her—but staying in England did not appear to be an alternative.

Edward's depression continued, and he advised Dr Buck that he would not be visiting him that summer of 1884, nor would he be attending his forthcoming wedding. Three months later, with a desperate need to share his misery with another soul who would empathise with him, Edward gathered courage and wrote again to Buck:

I will not worry you with particulars but must tell you that things have not prospered with me this year at all, my prospects are worse than ever & to crown my miseries my engagement is broken off & I am lonely.
...once more accept my good wishes for your happiness, these I can give you the more sincerely since I know what it is to have lost my own forever.

(20 July 1884)

The Slough of Despond

But Worcester held too many memories, and soon after Edward sought to escape all its familiarities. In August 1884 he travelled by himself to Scotland and the wild beauties of Mull, Staffa and Iona—with their powerful relationship to Felix Mendelssohn and his 'sea-musics'.

Arriving finally at Inverness he met an attractive young woman who remains wraith-like in our knowledge of the intimate life of Edward. In the diary which he kept of his Scottish journey he simply but oddly refers to her as 'E.E.' or 'L.E.'.

We know that Edward had a mind which loved puzzles and constantly sought patterns and relationships in words. He would have recognised immediately that the lady's initials matched his—but he would also have been powerfully reminded of the much closer links contained in the names of his former *braut*:

Helen Jessie Weaver

Indeed, there was in this pattern an even more clearly defined relationship:

eWe

'Edward William Elgar', no less!

He wrote a melody during his holiday, and later based a piece for violin and piano upon it (*Une Idylle*, op. 40, no. 1). Ultimately he dedicated the piece to 'E.E., Inverness'. It was just a chance meeting, and the lady was to vanish from his life after a subsequent pleasant day in Edinburgh together, accompanied by a group of her

friends. His quest for happiness was to become an ever increasing sequence of such 'ghosts'! Even Powick now became unsatisfying and, for reasons as yet unknown, he resigned his position there in October 1884.

There followed a bleak year for Edward, with only the small candle of the February 1885 performance in Birmingham of *Sevillana* relieving the gloom. A prospective 'Lakes' overture never eventuated, and a subsequent 'big work in tow', a so-called 'Scottish' (sic) overture, made little progress and quickly vanished.

He wrote to Buck:

Of course, all these things are of no account—but they serve to divert me somewhat & hide a broken heart.

(8 March 1885)

And it seems that even the work and preparation involved with the forthcoming 'Grand Orchestral Concert' given by the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society on 9 April—in which he was the conductor of an orchestra of fifty—and the presence of the elite of Worcester society failed (or so Edward writes) to relieve the gloom.

The deep depression continued—and this more than a year after the breaking of his engagement and Helen's leaving Worcester. This was no callow youth who had experienced a mild flirtation but a grown man now in his twenty-eighth year who having experienced the first great passion of his life had lost it forever!

Modern psychology suggests that Edward at this point was suffering from 'chronic grief': '...someone who has a dramatic, high level of depression and grief after a loss, death or otherwise, and they don't get better for several years... years ago we may have thought that they're grieving terribly, but they'll get over it. We know now that when people grieve very acutely that does not bode well for their getting better because it's really hard to recover from that ...people who cannot get it off their minds at all, those are the people who are not likely to do well.'

* * *

In the summer of 1885 Edward again accepted the invitation of Dr Buck to holiday in Yorkshire, as he had first done in 1882. But this year he was reminded of his former *braut*, Helen Jessie Weaver, for everyone there seemed to be happy but himself. Edward arrived at Giggleswick, near Settle, to be met with an atmosphere suffused with the happiness of the recently married couple. It was over a year since Helen had told Edward that she must break their engagement. Edward must have thought, 'Why can I not be happy as these my dear friends are? Why does happiness constantly elude me?'

Edward was not doing well. Not only was he suffering the grief of loss, but also the attendant loss of self-esteem. He was subconsciously driven to quickly prove to himself that he was still an attractive man and to find a substitute for Helen—one is tempted to say almost anyone, but preferably one with social position and, ideally, money! Within the space of less than three years there is evidence that he had a romantic interest in at least three women, and proposed marriage to two of them—one after his future wife Alice became a music pupil of his. The first we have already spoken of, the chance meeting with 'E.E.' in Scotland. The second occurred during this holiday when he renewed a relationship which had probably begun during his 1882 visit. The lady was Sarah-Ann Wilkinson Newholme, the daughter of a prosperous landowner who was six years older than him. Edward asked for her hand in marriage, to be soundly rebuffed by her father who forbade the marriage in no uncertain terms. 'I will not allow one of my daughters to marry a penniless musician,' he is alleged to have asserted. The third was Gertrude Walker, the daughter of the rector and squire of Abbots Morton, midway between Worcester and Stratford-upon-Avon. Gertrude was four years younger than Edward and a fine singer. As in the case of Sarah-Ann, the Walker family tradition relates that Edward asked Gertrude's father for her hand in marriage sometime in 1887, only to be rebuffed again on the grounds that he was a Roman Catholic, had no prospects and was not a gentleman.

Such crushing blows, particularly that of designating him as not being a gentleman, must surely have scarred a Victorian man of Edward's sensitivities for life. As Best writes: 'The short answer to the questions,

were you or were you not a gentleman... seems to be that you could not be sure until judgement was delivered in your favour by the appropriate social authority—the particular elite group by whom you were anxious to be recognised.’

At this point in his life it seemed that the ‘particular elite’ had handed down judgement. Edward would be thirty in June 1887, and even at that point in his life he would fail to see any prospect of his arising from his slough of despond.

* * *

On 10 August 1885, whilst holidaying again with the Bucks at Settle, and whilst seeking the hand of Sarah-Ann Wilkinson Newholme, Edward read a volume of poetry, *Pike County Ballads* by John Milton Hays (1838–1905)—an American statesman, diplomat and writer—from which he chose and set to music a ballad, ‘Through the Long Days’, which reflected perhaps the response he had had from Sarah-Ann’s father, and which intensified his thoughts and memories of Helen Weaver:

Through the long days and years
What will my lov’d one be
parted from me?

Always as then she was
Loveliest, brightest, best,
Blessing and blest.

Never on earth again
Shall I before her stand,
Touch lip or hand.

But, while my darling lives,
Peaceful I journey on,
Not quite alone.

The Brutal Blow

The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun. The brightness of our life is gone. Shadows of evening fall around us, and the world seems but a dim reflection—itsself a broader shadow.

(Longfellow, *Hyperion*)

And then came the most brutal of blows—perhaps the most brutal of his life. Shortly after his return from Yorkshire in October 1885, Edward heard—from his close friend Frank Weaver, no doubt (who, not only as brother but also surrogate father, would naturally have maintained regular contact with his sister)—that Helen had decided to leave England and emigrate to New Zealand. Her condition was continuing to deteriorate and she had decided to seek health and, hopefully, happiness in the ‘Britain of the South.’ Edward, in total despair, wrote to Dr Buck:

Miss W. is going to New Zealand this month—her lungs are affected I hear & there has been a miserable time for me since I came home...

(7 October 1885)

The news had crushed all the hopes Edward had sheltered in his heart since Helen had told him in the spring of 1884 that she would withdraw from their informal engagement. We will never know with certainty why Helen withdrew. There were major problems, the first being religion—Helen and her family were Unitarians, whilst

Edward was Roman Catholic. Secondly, his mother Anne, whose conversion in 1852 had created within her a strong, strict and fervent commitment to her faith, insisted that any wife of Edward's must, of necessity, be or become a Roman Catholic—as she had insisted with Charles Pipe, who in 1880 had had to convert before being allowed to marry Edward's sister Lucy. Others have given a traditional family reason: 'he was too serious, too much like a professor...' Finally, Helen's health was precarious. She suffered from asthma, but more seriously, she was suffering from the great scourge of the age, the onset of pulmonary tuberculosis (which she may not have previously revealed to Edward) which had killed her stepmother in November 1883. The disease had reached near epidemic proportions in the rapidly urbanising and industrialising societies of Europe and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death for all age groups in the western world. British medicine in the 1880s had no knowledge of the causes of tuberculosis; it was so much a part of life, so inevitable, so little understood that it was accepted mutely. The bacillus was only discovered and identified in 1882 by the German physician Dr Robert Koch, and a practical vaccine was not to become widely available until the early 1920s. There was no cure for the disease. The best advice in Victorian times was to seek an environment of clean air, sunshine and rest. Often it was recommended that a long sea journey, with its prolonged exposure to fresh sea air, would be highly efficacious.

Edward had hoped that, with time, Helen might change her mind and reverse her decision to break off their engagement. For fourteen months he had lived with this thought, but now his greatest fears had become reality and his despair deepened.

The 'Britain of the South'

Fortuitously, at this time, both the Australian and New Zealand governments were desperately seeking to attract white settlers to increase their small populations. In particular, New Zealand had in 1885 a white population of just 576,000. Auckland itself had a white population of about 83,000. In advertisements of the time New Zealand was called the 'Britain of the South' and the 'England of the Pacific'. When released in England in 1879, a book by Arthur Clayden, *England of the Pacific*, sold 3,000 copies in the first month of its release. In a government circular of 1886, the proud boast was made of New Zealand having the healthiest climate in the world—the annual death rate being 12.5 per thousand; whilst that of Britain was 23.5 per thousand. The excess of births over deaths was 57 percent in England, whilst in New Zealand it was 197 percent! These figures were officially claimed to be 'the lowest of all Australasian colonies'. Comparisons were made with respect to food: 'the British 5/- leg of mutton could be bought for 1/- in New Zealand'.

Land also was cheap and the claim made that 'any sober and industrious man can easily secure as the result of his toil, in an incredibly short time, a freehold house & garden.' For the major city of Auckland, in the North Island, weather was compared to England: 'The climate is one of the finest in the world; the change in the seasons being so gradual that they are imperceptible ...the hottest month is only 5 deg. F. hotter than ours, whilst the coldest is 9 deg. F. less cold than ours.' And no New Zealand city or town suffered from the industrial smog which engulfed so many of Britain's industrial cities, including Bradford, and had a profound impact on the health of town workers.

And so Helen made her brave decision to leave England, with all its dark memories and all its life-threatening deficiencies, and seek a new life in a country which offered 'the poor man's paradise—one truly his—in that land where he can get vegetables for a song, fruits for the gathering, he can always get a healthy, happy, comfortable independence, if not wealth.' From the fruits of Cora Weaver's research we can see that New Zealand did not fail Helen Jessie Weaver in what she sought. She recovered her health, married and raised two children, living to the age of sixty-seven. There is no evidence that Helen ever returned to England.

Trafalgar Day, 1885

The London newspapers of 9 October advised 'the arrival yesterday of the New Zealand ship *Ruapehu* at Plymouth after a passage of 37 days 12 hrs & 5 mins steaming time'. The ship had travelled via Rio de Janeiro and Madeira, and amongst its cargo were 13,000 carcasses of frozen mutton—a trade which continues to this day.

The *Ruapehu* was an almost new vessel of 4,163 tons. It was steam-powered but also had auxiliary sails, since it had been shown that, particularly in the west to east roaring forties of the southern oceans, the ship under sail could outrun any other steamer on the Australasia run, as well as save precious coal—the early steam engines being notoriously inefficient. This new entry of a hybrid commercial ship was later to be called a 'transition ship'—'the apogee of sail and the hesitant entry of steam'. The journey involved just four stops and took exactly seven weeks.

Although there is no record of it, it is highly likely that Helen would have returned to Worcester for a few days prior to her sailing. She would have wanted to have a little time with her brother Frank and his family, and bid farewell to local friends. She would also have wanted to say farewell to her relatives—her stepmother's uncle and his family in Reading, a place which she had often visited and enjoyed going to.

Helen had been advised that she must be at the Royal Albert Dock, London ready to board in order to meet the ship's requirement to sail 'as soon after noon as tide permits'. The sailing date was Thursday, 22 October, and high tide that day was at 1 p.m. This required Helen to be on board, with her goods stowed away, early on that day. There was an alternative train journey which would have allowed her to leave a little later and board at Plymouth; however, I think this unlikely, in that booking gave no prior cabin allocation. I believe that Helen—given her state of health—would have wanted to acquire the best available cabin for herself, whether she travelled first or second class. Allied with this, travelling to London provided the attractions of London shops and the facility of buying whatever new goods and items of apparel she might wish to take with her. As a result, she would need to have left Worcester on Wednesday, 21 October 1885. It was Trafalgar Day.

It is difficult to imagine Helen travelling to London alone. Cora Weaver tells us that she took with her a 'screen and desk' and a much-loved water-colour painting, bequeathed to her by her stepmother, and she would have had her own 'precious things' which she determined to take with her. It is very likely that Frank (and perhaps other members of the family) accompanied her, saw something of the world's greatest metropolis, and quite early next morning helped take Helen and all her worldly goods aboard the *Ruapehu*. The *Ruapehu* sailed close to 1 p.m. on 22 October with family emotions deeply affected in the farewelling. As far as is known, they were never to see each other again.

The *Ruapehu* travelled via Tenerife and the Cape, stopping at Cape Town, then sailed due east direct to Hobart and then on to Auckland. 'Miss H. J. Weaver, single' landed in Auckland on Thursday, 10 December 1885. She had left England with winter looming and arrived in Auckland in early summer—a portent of brighter things to come. As an aside, we do know that her close friend Edith Groveham did not accompany her on the voyage.

Edward was never to forget this day. It was the eightieth anniversary of Nelson's great triumph—and of his death, and the ship that carried Helen away was a sailing ship (unlike the steam ship *Himalaya* which transported Lady Mary Lygon to Australia!)—as in the original Goethe poem—as well as steam-powered, hence Edward's music recalls both types of ship propulsion. Given Edward's polymath mind, it is tempting to believe that he knew this detail and hence, whilst retaining the authenticity of Mendelssohn's musical image, he introduced the sound of the turbines into the music of Variation XIII to authentically represent the *Ruapehu*!

Although it was not a public holiday, Trafalgar Day was celebrated with all of the Victorian pomp and

circumstance appropriate to the great day. The atmosphere was one of the precious things England lost somewhere after 1914. In his lovely (but now forgotten) book *Dream Days*, Kenneth Graham creates a picture for us of how Nelson was typically remembered by the common people on those bygone days, when the wreath of laurel was once again placed on Nelson's noble brow:

...over there the coaches used to go by... And the people used to watch for 'em coming, to tell the time by, and p'r'aps to get their parcels. And one morning—they wouldn't be expecting anything different—one morning, first there would be a cloud of dust, as usual, and then the coach would come racing by, and then they would know! For the coach would be dressed in laurel, all laurel from stem to stern! And the coachman would be wearing laurel, and the guard would be wearing laurel; and then they would know, then they would know!

But there was no joy in Edward's heart, no matter how much laurel he saw! As we shall see, this day was to be stored in his heart and would become the trigger for the birth of his 'Enigma' Variations thirteen years hence, in 1898!

An Enigmatic Epiphany

The holiest of all holidays are those
Kept by ourselves in silence and apart;
The secret anniversaries of the heart,
When the full river of feeling overflows...

(Longfellow, *Holidays*)

Just as the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805 was one of the most decisive days in the history of England, so 21 October 1898 would eventually be viewed as one of the most decisive days in the musical history of England. Certainly it was the most decisive in the life of Edward William Elgar. The story has often been told: Edward arrived home from teaching at Rosa Burley's private girls' school, 'The Mount', ate dinner and then, relaxing with a cigar, proceeded to improvise at the piano. At one point Alice asked him, 'Play it again, I like that tune.' Asked what the tune was, he is reported to have replied, 'Nothing—but something might be made of it.' Until this moment, it had seemed just another day, but it was Moore who first asked the key question:

Was there anything in that day, 21 October 1898, to mark a new beginning? It was hardly likely. The day of weary teaching... all was dispiritingly usual...

The fact is that it was not an ordinary day. The day had powerful remembrances for Edward. It was on Trafalgar Day that Helen Weaver departed Worcester. And, distinctly peculiar to Edward and his 'Enigma' Variations, it was precisely thirteen years between Helen's departure from Worcester for Auckland, New Zealand and the day of Edward's musical epiphany.

* * *

The coming of another Trafalgar Day and the inextricably linked memories of 21 October 1885—when he recalled the agonised letters he had written to Dr Buck and the loss of his first love—all made the memories flood back. Each year the memory had returned, and each time he grieved—the loss was to haunt him all his life. In August 1890, he had learned of Helen's wedding, and soon after of the birth of Helen's two children, Kenneth in 1891 and Joyce in 1893. He did this, almost certainly, through his ongoing close friendship with Helen's brother Frank. Edward and Helen—two lives in parallel, but separated as if they existed on different

planets. Edward had fantasised that, after the recovery of her health, Helen might wish—out of home-sickness perhaps—to return to her home, her friends, and to him, but this was never to be.

But in October 1898, Edward had realised that another Trafalgar Day was approaching and that Helen had been gone from his life for thirteen years. Like many Victorians, the number 13 had special spiritual as well as occult connotations for him. With his strong Roman Catholic upbringing, the story of the Last Supper and the traitorous thirteenth disciple was part of his Victorian psyche.

He remembered the four short 'Shed' pieces he had written for Helen as tokens of love: a piece notated as *Nellie Shed* in 1878; a polka, *Nelly* in 1881; in 1882 a polka entitled *La blonde*; and a third polka named *Helcia* in 1883 (this being a variant of the name Helen, common in Poland and other east European countries). And all of these pieces were dedicated in the month of October, the month which was to see Helen leave him for ever. We have no evidence as to the intimate motive or event which had earlier made October so important to both Helen and Edward, but we may imagine that now, combined with the events of October 1885, October would always remain a month of intense memory for him.

He felt all these things, and on a profound impulse felt a theme rise within him. To him and him alone it would be the Helen theme. They had come to know each other in those far-off Leipzig days, the happiest days of his life, and it is possible that he proposed to her there, or shortly thereafter.

To Weave a Cloak

For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within.

(Tennyson, *In Memorium*)

But this was 1898, not 1885, and Edward had no desire to offend in any way the woman who had given up so much to marry him, and who had such an intense belief in his ultimate success. As the candidates for 'friends pictured within' sprang into his mind, he realised that he would need a 'cover' for any variation which would stand for Helen. His love for Alice was of another kind—more companionable than romantic, more a finding of another 'mother' who was totally loyal and who would, as a by-product, solve his grinding financial problems and even lift his status in society, particularly in that most status-conscious region of society—Malvern. At last, a farewell to female rejection because he was Catholic, or 'in the trade', or penniless with no future. I believe that both Alice and Edward were quite aware of the problems which this marriage might bring upon them—the resistance from the Victorian aunts when visiting for tea at Redmarley would almost certainly have been palpable—but Alice's determination would eventually conquer all. The relationship had been driven by her strong nature—she was nine years older than Edward and must have felt in 1886, just prior to meeting Edward, the music professor, that her chances of ever marrying had become extremely slim. When she first met this dark, serious musician who shared her love of literature and music, she decided at an early point in their relationship that she had met a man whom she could love and nurture. As Edward wrote in a letter to Dr Buck shortly after they had returned from their honeymoon:

And now (after all our talks about the mystery of living) I must tell you how happy I am in my new life & what a dear, loving companion I have ... I think all the difficult problems are now solved and—well I don't worry myself about 'em now!

* * *

Besides, the idea of cloaking the Helen variation was not important to anyone other than himself—he had no intention of offending anyone, and saw no reason to highlight the individuals. Only they would be allowed to know. Beyond this group of friends it was unlikely that others would show any interest—the music was the thing! Indeed, well into the 1920s the general public did not concern themselves with who the individuals were.

What suitable 'cloak' would offend no one and at the same time satisfy Alice's interest in the curious, nameless variation? A single letter, such as 'L.', would suffice if Edward told her who he had in mind. 'L.M.L.' would suggest Lady Mary Lygon and satisfy Alice. But in public conversation this would not do—after all 'L.' was not an initial of Lady Mary, just as 'D.' was not an initial of Dame Clara Butt. Lady Mary herself signed most notes with her correct initials, 'M.L.', or just 'Mary'. And perhaps even the mere proposal to dedicate a variation would be offensive to Lady Mary. How would he obtain her permission, and was it 'correct' to even make such a request of her, a lady of such high standing in society? And could Edward be comfortable in so deceiving his dear wife? Well, for the time being, the 'L.' would suffice.

To Edward, it was paramount that the relationship between 'variation' and 'beloved' should remain hidden for ever. Ultimately he decided to head the variation with three asterisks, these representing to him 'H.J.W.', but, as we shall see, to the average observer, representing merely 'the unknown'. He also decided that Alice would be placed first in the variations, as she was now first in his life—but, in memory of Helen, his first love, he would ultimately place '****', the thirteenth variation, next to 'E.D.U.' himself.

'Enigma Day'

Writing to Jaeger on 20 October, Edward had shown some interest in the writing of a 'Gordon' symphony (a subject which always reminded him of the fateful year 1885), but bitterly complained:

...but my dear man why should I try?? I can't see—I have to earn money somehow & it's no good trying this sort of thing even for a 'living wage' and your firm wouldn't give £5 for it—I tell you I am sick of it all...

(20 October 1898)

But now, within a day, on Friday, 21 October 1898, Edward arrived home after having given lessons in violin (teaching which he increasingly felt to be deeply unrewarding in every sense) at 'The Mount', the private girls' school in Malvern owned and run by Rosa Burley. His brain was burning with the desire to write a set of variations which were to encapsulate the spirit of a group of close friends. Within three days Edward was again writing to Jaeger:

Since I've been back I have sketched a set of Variations (orkestry) on an original theme: the variations have amused me because I've labelled 'em with the nicknames of my particular friends—you are 'Nimrod'. That is to say I've written the variations each one to represent the mood of the 'party'—I've liked to imagine the 'party' writing the var: him (or her) self & have written what I think they wd. have written—if they were asses enough to compose—it's a quaint idea & the result is amusing to those behind the scenes & won't affect the hearer who 'nose nuffin'. What think you?

Much love & sunshine to you.

(24 October 1898)

There is much to consider here. Firstly, Edward's dramatic change of mood in such a short time. These mood swings were already a marked aspect of Edward's character and would remain so. Less than three weeks earlier he had conducted his most recent work, *Caractacus*, as the centre-piece of the Leeds Festival. It had been a *succès d'estime*, but Edward had complained to Jaeger that all it had earned him—beyond accolades—was fifteen shillings a week! And, as ever, Rosa Burley tells us that, 'when it was all over he rushed back to Malvern with the air of one who has fought and is inclined to think he has lost—a heavy engagement.'

It is even more important to remind ourselves that Edward was totally unaware that he was writing a masterpiece (as Michael Kennedy was to say of it over one hundred years later, 'the finest orchestral piece of music yet written by an Englishman'). Composers do not sit down to write music and say to themselves, 'I am now writing a masterpiece which will lift me out of obscurity and make me both happy and famous!' No, it was merely Edward Elgar, temporarily relieved of his 'black dog' depression, and now perceiving—as through a

glass darkly—a new path, something uniquely for him!

Now, with his new-found enthusiasm, the music poured forth as if it had been bottled up for years. In three days he had 'sketched out' the work. Rosa Burley recounts how Edward, upon arriving at 'The Mount' in late October and through November, regularly regaled her with the rapid growth of the Variations:

At the time, he was far more concerned with the variations than with the underlying theme and constantly challenged me to guess whom they represented... In many cases... the portraiture was astonishingly accurate and the translation of physical or mental characteristics into musical terms wonderfully ingenious. As the work progressed... I realized that the complete set, when illuminated by Edward's brilliant orchestration, might show an enormous advance on anything he had previously written.

Interlude—On 'Friendship'

The word 'friend' in our time has become so debased that it can stand for almost any degree of human relationship—but Edward was using the word as a Victorian. After all, he was in his forty-second year when he commenced writing the Variations, and the word had a quite different meaning then, firmly based on both the subtleties and rigidities of 'class'—and Edward was in that sense quite remote from the Lygons of Madresfield Court. In modern times Moore has described it as an 'almost casual acquaintance', and a former private secretary and archivist at Madresfield Court, Dorothy Williams, has written:

Edward was on the periphery of Lady Mary's circle. She was willing to help him whenever possible, but he seems not to have been a close friend.

It seems to me then that to use the appellation of 'friend' for the relationship between Edward and Lady Mary, particularly in the period which we are examining, is to use the word incorrectly—in the modern sense—and to forget that we are talking about the Victorian era. As Rosa Burley explains:

In order to understand... one must remember again the rigidity with which social distinctions were maintained in the reign of Queen Victoria.

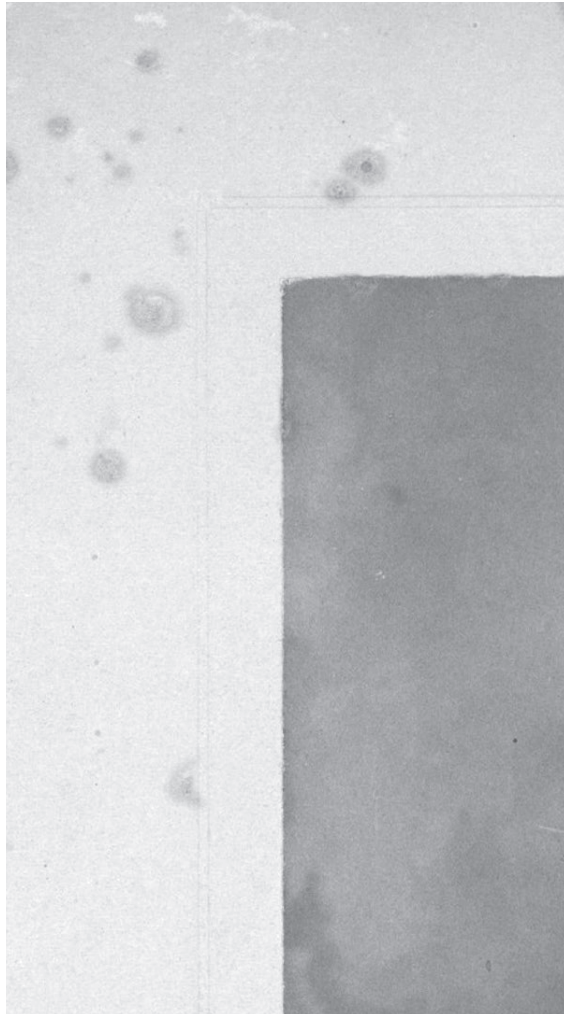
To which one may add, nowhere more strictly than in the Malvern of that time. Welcome in royal circles and with vast holdings in multiple counties, the Lygons were amongst the richest families in England, and High Church adherents. The gulf between such a family and those 'in trade' was vast. What Edward and all others of his class perceived in their dealings with the Lygons was their *noblesse oblige*. When one considers the other 'friends pictured within', Lady Mary's presence appears incongruous. It appears even more incongruous when we realise that, despite all the changes associated with the birth of the Variations between October 1898 and June 1899, Edward ultimately retained for Variation XIII both the enigmatic title '****' and the direction 'Romanza'. Is it in any way realistic to link Edward and Lady Mary with, as Kennedy tells us, music which 'implies a specially personal or tender quality'?

Given the position which Lady Mary held at Madresfield Court as gracious chatelaine and her extended spells of duty at Court, it is not surprising that the Elgars rarely met her—Lady Mary never visited the Elgars' home in the years between 1889 and 1898, and the sole mention of her during that interval occurs in October 1898, when Lady Mary attended the Leeds concert at which *Caractacus* was premiered and Edward introduced her to Gabriel Fauré. The few letters of Lady Mary to Edward of this period commenced with 'Dear Mr Elgar' and ended with 'Yrs Sincerely'.

No, 'it will not do' (to echo a later Elgarian response). The friends within the Variations are easily discerned as true, close 'friends' in the Victorian sense of the word—but Lady Mary, for all her graciousness, should not be regarded as one of the 'thirteen'.

Friends Pictured Within

The variations were written at a rapid pace. By 1 November 1898, when 'Dorabella' visited the Elgars, the piano score was well advanced, and she describes them at tea after a Philharmonic Concert in Worcester: 'The composer was in high spirits but I could get nothing out of either of them about the new music. All he said was:



*Photographic portrait of Lady Mary Lygon (Sydney, 1899).
Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.*

"You wait till we get home. *Japes!*" ...No sooner inside the door than E.E. fled upstairs to the study, two steps at a time—I after him, the Lady [Alice] following at a more sedate pace.' Dora Penny does not tell us all the subjects Edward played to her that evening, but he did play the theme, 'C.A.E.', 'R.B.T.', 'W.M.B.', 'Troyte' and 'Nimrod'. And then:

Then I turned over and had a shock. No. X, 'Dorabella.' Being overcome by many emotions I sat silent when it was over.

Modern analysis by Robert Anderson, Brian Trowell and Julian Rushton shows that 'L' for Lygon as the subject for what was eventually Variation XIII was there from the outset, with three asterisks as well, or not. It is interesting that for some brief time 'B.G.N.' was proposed as Variation XIII, but the relationship of 'L' and 'E.D.U.' as the final two variations occurred quite early. Both Rushton and Trowell agree that Variation XIII was one of the earliest conceived, and one of the first three to be marked in ink by Edward as 'finished'. It seems, from Julian Rushton's tables, that Edward at some early point decided to use the now familiar three asterisks to identify what became eventually Variation XIII.

This seems acceptable evidence that Variation XIII (Mendelssohn quotations, quotation marks and all) was finished in early December 1898; probably more that six weeks before the public announcement of Beauchamp's appointment to the governorship of New South Wales.

Others have suggested that Edward 'panicked' when he heard the news—post 24 January 1899—that Earl Beauchamp had been appointed governor of the colony of New South Wales and that Lady Mary was to accompany him. Moore implies that it was at this point that Edward altered the variation radically, introducing into it the repeated phrase from *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. The problem is that since this suggestion was written in 1984, no evidence for such a radical alteration has yet been adduced, and Brian Trowell firmly states that there seem to be no grounds for this. The decision to use the Mendelssohn quotation, thrice repeated by the clarinet, and to head the variation with three asterisks were all made well before 24 January, and no evidence has been brought forward to prove otherwise. Indeed, Rosa Burley, no mean musician herself, and at the time a close friend of Edward, in writing of the 'Romanza' states: 'I myself heard it before the end of 1898...' She continues:

But Edward told me quite clearly and unequivocally whom it represented and I always supposed that his reason for withholding this lady's name was that extremely intimate and personal feelings were concerned...

She goes on to say that the quotations from *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* and the sea voyage, 'bore no reference to the liner and the sea voyage which were afterwards associated with this variation but, as might be expected in a movement named 'Romanza', expressed something very different.'

The interest here is that the statement is true if one accepts that it had nothing to do with Lady Mary's 'liner & sea journey'. But we do not know if Edward told Rosa the entire truth—the story of his engagement and of Helen's leaving and going to New Zealand. Rosa is of the opinion (incorrectly) that it was only 'accidental' that the variation suggested a seascape and suggests that it was a conclusion falsely drawn. She does say, however, that 'I shall... follow the lead of Ernest Newman... and let her remain anonymous.' The use of 'her', together with the related information here, strongly suggests that the lady is Helen Weaver.

Newman wrote, with regard to Variation XIII, in 1956:

...that he (Edward) was dwelling in imagination on somebody or something, the parting from whom or which had at some time or other torn the very heart out of him.

Newman claimed earlier, in 1939, that he had been informed by a correspondent who was an intimate long ago of Elgar, that Helen was the subject of both the thirteenth variation and the Violin Concerto. He finally elected to withhold the information, saying 'Elgar's secret should not be exposed to profane eyes.' The use of 'profane' may make our twenty-first-century eyes narrow, but Newman was a Victorian and a close friend of Edward—

the 'profane' information might well have been a statement such as 'the only true love of Edward's life was Helen—and her leaving him had destroyed his happiness.'

* * *

Later Rosa Burley was to write:

I believe it is true to say that Edward enjoyed the writing of the Variations more than that of any other work. At any rate, he seemed happier to me. The fact is that for once he was not writing on commission but for the pleasure of doing so.

* * *

As we shall see, at the time that Edward was completing the manuscript score, neither William Lygon, 7th Earl Beauchamp, nor his sister Lady Mary Lygon, knew of William's appointment as governor of the Australian colony of New South Wales—they could not, since no such offer had yet been made!

Mr Chamberlain's Problems

It was October and winter was beckoning. To the east, in the world's largest, busiest and most powerful city—London—Joseph Chamberlain, aged sixty-two, secretary of state for the colonies since 1895, was wrestling with other more serious problems: the Boer problem in South Africa, which was about to take a turn for the worse; negotiating with the colonies of Australia in their drive to federalism and the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia (the recalcitrant people of New South Wales having rejected the draft constitution); and, as a relatively minor problem, seeking replacement governors for two Australian states, South Australia and New South Wales.

The solution for the relatively small and benign South Australia (no convicts had ever been transported there and the population was very small—less than 360,000) was to appoint Hallam Tennyson, eldest son of Lord Tennyson. The solution to the New South Wales question was more complex. It was no easy matter to find a governor for a colony as volatile as New South Wales. Having recently become the state with the largest population (1,360,000), its voters had just voted against the federation bill, and their premier, George Reid, was struggling to refashion the bill so that its conditions would satisfy a majority of the state's voters. New South Wales was the key to success of Australian federation. The present vice-regal incumbent, Lord Hampden, who had been appointed in 1895, had recently submitted his resignation. It was not so much that he disliked Sydney; his complaint was that he could not afford to maintain the public lifestyle which the brash city demanded. He had stated that any new governor would need to provide—out of his own pocket—some £4,000 to £5,000 a year (later he was to give a much higher figure!) in order to meet the demands made on the position of governor. It was, however, his wife who both despised the place and who missed her children, they having been accompanied back to be educated in England. Lord Hampden had no choice but to resign just three years into his term.

Chamberlain discussed the problem of a successor for New South Wales with his private secretary, Arthur Russell, the 2nd Baron Amptill, not only because of Russell's position but because he was married to the former Lady Margaret Lygon, a sister to the twenty-six-year-old and single William Lygon, 7th Earl Beauchamp! By late October 1898 all of the likely candidates had declined—usually because they knew of the added financial demands Sydney would place on them.

So Chamberlain had little recourse but to reluctantly offer the young, inexperienced Beauchamp the governorship. Beauchamp was very rich, handsome, had shown himself to be an excellent public speaker, and had at least some experience in public administration as mayor of Worcester in 1895–6. He even satisfied one of the 'demands' being made in Sydney—that he be a High Churchman! The position would give him the

KCMG, and he would become the youngest governor of a colony ever appointed—the prestige might just tempt him to accept.

We know that the proposal to offer such a prestigious colonial post to her brother proved a secret quite impossible for the young Lady Margaret Amphill to keep from her dearest sister (yes, there had clearly been ‘pillow-talk’ between Lord and Lady Amphill). Besides, the secret was safe—the intelligence, discretion and training of Lady Mary, both as the chatelaine of Madresfield Court and as lady-in-waiting to HRH The Duchess of York, made her the most discrete of women. Thus the two excited sisters held their secret and allowed their brother William to proceed on his holiday to Greece.

(To be continued)

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The letters of Lady Mary Lygon to her brother William Lygon, 7th Earl Beauchamp dated 1892–99 are archived at Madresfield Court, Worcestershire. The original copy of the ‘Beauchamp Diary’ is archived in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney; this hand-written document is not really a diary, but rather a reminiscence which covers the period December 1898 to November 1900. A copy of the ‘diary’ is also archived at Madresfield Court, Worcestershire.

ERNEST BLAMIREs, an Elgar Society member since 1994, is a retired communications engineer with an M.Eng.Sc. from the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Ernest was born in Harrogate, Yorkshire but has lived most of his life in Australia. In his early years he played in brass bands and discovered the music of Holst, Vaughan Williams and Elgar in this way. Apart from his interest in writing his regular 'Japes & Larks' column for the Elgar Society News and surfing the internet for Elgarian exotica, for some years he has been researching the life of William Lygon, 7th Earl Beauchamp for a projected biography. This present paper presents some of the serendipitous fruits of that research, both in Sydney and at Madresfield Court, Malvern.

Elgar at the Wheel

Catherine Moody

A photograph published recently in the JOURNAL prompts an investigation which uncovers the story of the early days of motor manufacture in Malvern, and at the same time reveals more of the environment in which Elgar spent the early years of his marriage and his career as a composer.

The photograph on the cover of the November 2003 issue of the JOURNAL shows Elgar at the wheel of an early motor car. It presents an intriguing enigma, because his companion Alfred E. Rodewald died in November 1903; the date of this photograph necessarily must be before this sad event.

What was the motor car? The editor asked me if I could shed any light on the question. Having given up driving many years ago I felt I was the last person to be knowledgeable about cars, until I reflected that it was not this end of the period since 1900 that matters, but the beginning of things.

One needs to look at the time when cars were not a familiar entity, when the horse was the power on the roads, before garages existed, before raw mineral oil had been refined into kerosene and petrol, taking the place of colza and rape oil for lamps, and sperm oil from the great whales of the

Elgar at the wheel of a mystery car, reproduced on the cover the Elgar Society JOURNAL (November, 2003).

Vol.14 No.2 — July 2005





The Morgan Runabout (1912). Courtesy of the Morgan Motor Company.

Antarctic for lubricating metal.

I began by sending copies of the photograph of Elgar and Rodewald in the car to experts in identification of veteran cars, but this produced no result. No one could suggest any possible make of car.

I was doing a great deal of research into Elgar's life at 'Forli', his house in Alexandra Road, Malvern, and at Birchwood Lodge, north of Malvern, and so I thought I would look nearer home for some clue. Reading the very well researched *History of Malvern Link* by Daphne Drake, I found that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there were three inventors of cars in Malvern Link. They were Morgan, Santler and Burston.

I approached Charles Morgan, the head and managing director of Morgan Motors. His grandfather, Henry F. S. Morgan was inventor and originator of the Morgan car. The firm, now in its second century, is going strong, still located here. Each vehicle is made individually. There is no assembly line, no mass production. Henry Morgan, coming from Stoke Lacy in Herefordshire where his father was rector, seems to have been able to foresee something of the place of the motor car in the world of the future.

At first, in the workshop of Malvern College and then at the Link at the crossing of Upper Housell with Worcester Road, he worked on his prototypes. Not only was the engine considered, but performance and use

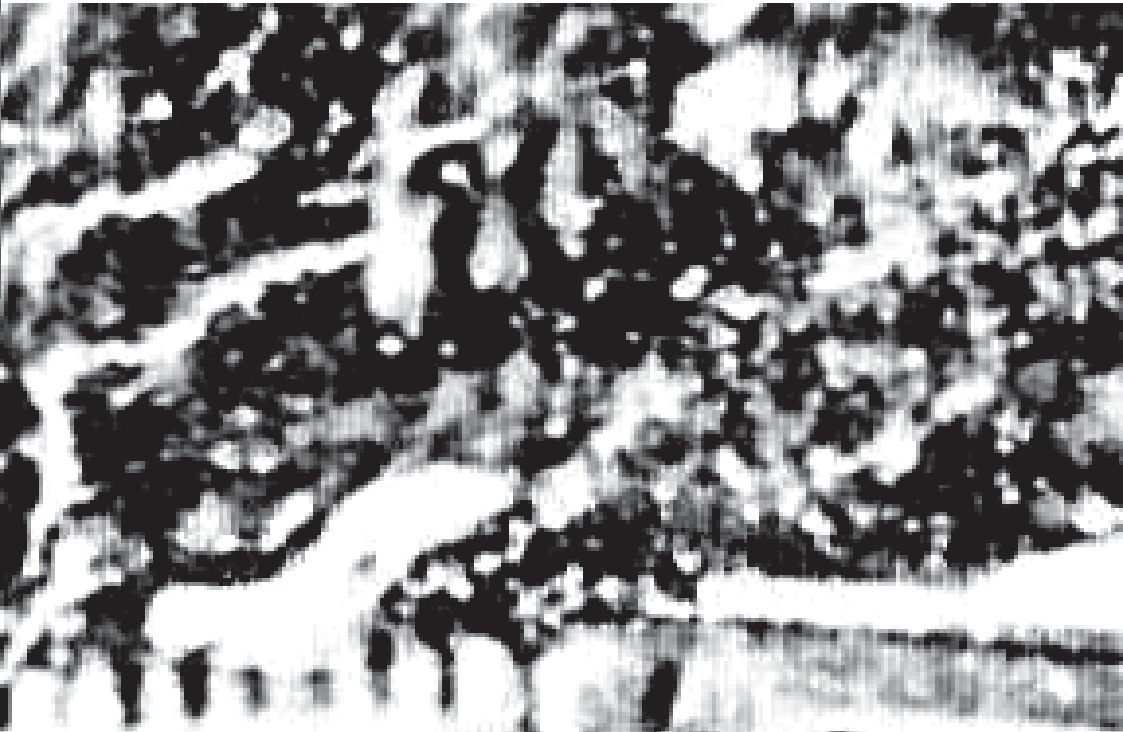
was in mind when in 1912 Henry Morgan drove the 'Runabout' at just sixty miles per hour continuously for one hour at Brooklands in the Olympic cycle-car one-hour race. He won the race.

Recalling that Elgar was photographed some time before 1903 and in view of the build of the Morgan cycle-car, I realised that the vehicle Elgar was driving was unlikely to be a Morgan.

The Santler car seemed more possible since its date was earlier. Charles and Walter Santler's car of 1894 had been discovered in its unrestored condition by John Mills in 1938. In 1988 it was restored by Dr Alan Sutton, and a commemorative plaque placed in Malvern Winter Gardens colonnade to celebrate this. But comparing it with Elgar's car, it seemed to look very different, the Santler being of lighter construction than Elgar's rather massive vehicle.

That brought us to the Burston car, and this seemed to be a dead end because, according to the *History of Malvern Link*, 'all Burston records had been destroyed'. I had not heard of the Burston car before, but I knew the Burston family in recent generations, Geraldine Burston having been my student at the Malvern School of Art. I felt it might be worth asking her if there were any family memories of the Burston car.

Yes, this was so, and Geraldine was able to unearth papers, correspondence and engineering drawings; but she could not unearth the car. She described to me what happened to the Burston steam-car: 'In the mid-1930s, whilst my father Gerald Burston was helping his father Henry J. Burston in the school holidays, he was asked to contact Scrappy Johnston, the local scrap dealer. He asked him to clear the small garage which housed the old Burston steam-car—which he did. Thus ended the life of this unique car.'



The Santler car (1894).

*The Burston steam-car invented by Henry Burston (1901–2),
made at the Newtown Engineering Works, Newtown Road, Link Top.*

Now the petrol-fuelled internal combustion engine has become the basis of the world of transport, the car is not so much a vehicle as a whole way of life. It needed a very vivid imagination in the nineteenth century to prognosticate the future situation. The Burston was a steam-car and it must be realised that in the 1890s steam-power was quite familiar. The steam-engine of the railways had been going for seventy years; steam ships of the Royal Navy, merchant shipping and liners were beginning to rule the waves; traction engines and steam rollers were levelling the roads; and in gypsy fairgrounds the wooden horses of the glorious roundabouts were powered by steam, their music vigorously exuding from the pipes of steam-organs.

The Burston Engineering Works on Newtown Road was already producing bicycles, and the fame of the Malvern Leader travelled as far as Australia. Geraldine Burston in 1976 came across an signboard advertising this efficient tricycle, which apparently helped antipodeans traverse their wide-open spaces.

Some writings and drawings have survived, and to me, as a visual artist, they are lucid drawings which speak of the successful overcoming of problems of function in working parts. They communicate something of the joy of creation in design.

If we look at the street map of Malvern we find the Newtown Engineering Works located where the main Worcester Road has Newtown Road branching off it at Link Top. Holy Trinity church is on the uphill side. There is a small green, and Trinity Bank, Hornyold Road and Newtown Road lead northwards. At the angle between Newtown Road and Worcester Road lies the Newtown Engineering Works.

Laburnum Walk is a path between them, and this has its significance in that 'Forli', the house of Edward and Alice Elgar, is but a few steps along the path. Elgar, a keen cyclist, could so easily have pushed his bike along the Walk to get brake blocks renewed or his bicycle bell made to ring true.

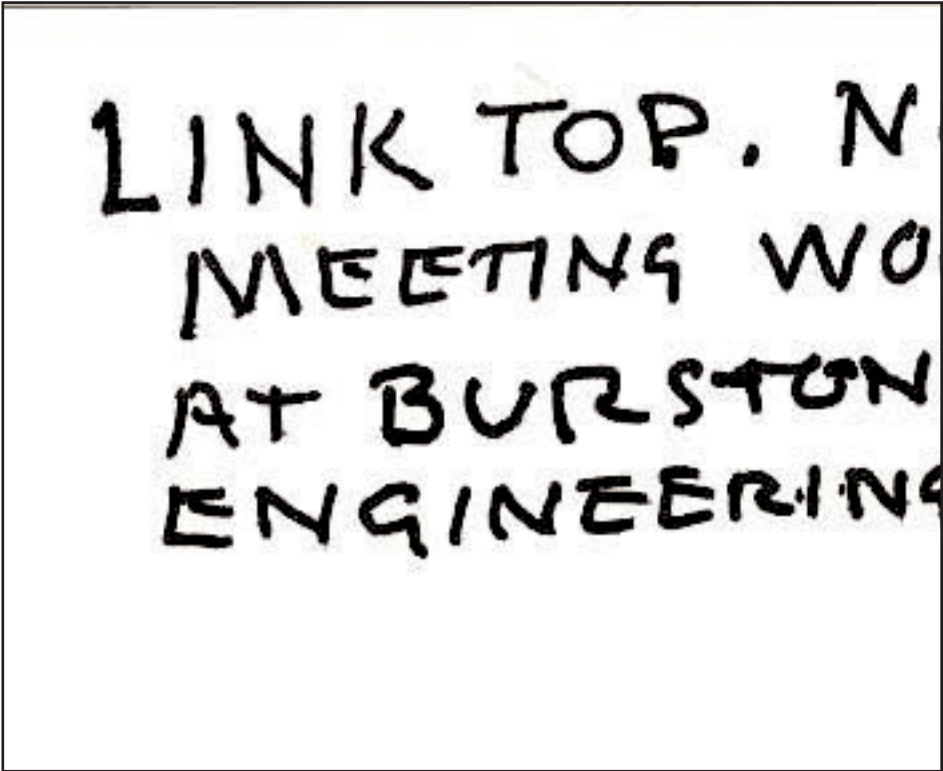
'In 1896 and 1897 an epidemic of "cycling fever" is said to have passed over the country,' according to the

Malvern News, and at the Newtown Engineering Works the Burston steam-car was also being invented, its twelve horse power engine capable of carrying four or five people. The new automatic steam-producing system is described, and Henry Burston's genius is shown to be working on every aspect of its function. By November 1902 the *News* reported that a whole year had been spent simplifying the operation of the pedals and levers. Safety was ensured by pressure going to zero whenever the car was stopped—the ability for a steam-engine's boiler to burst being thus overcome.

The zeal of the inventor is evident in many ways, and one can imagine that problems were solved by long hours of intense experimental thought. The search for 'malleable casting' makes me think of the silversmith's action of 'planishing' to refine the form of a vessel, in the same way that an engine part would need to be refined in its form. If this arises in the mind of a silversmith, it seems to me that a composer of music would feel parallel movements of creativity, finding the invention of a motor car not to be alien to his own craft of finding balance in an orchestra. I think Elgar would have had an empathy with the creativity in engineering. And would it not be possible for him to have the curiosity to wish to try it out on the secluded roads of Betws-y-coed?

If Rodewald, Elgar's friend, was also of the same mind—what fun it would be to find the 'mouldy buzzer' puffing along where they could exceed the speed limit (4 m.p.h. and a man with a red flag).

From the picture of the Burston steam car, Brian Culley, an authority on marine engineering, describes it



Map of Link Top.

Enlarged map of Link Top showing 'Forli' in relation to Newtown Engineering Works.

THE REMIRE

as follows: 'The engine appears to be twin-cylinder, possibly HP and LP (high and low power), with the air-cooled condenser in the front of the car. Chain drive transmission, solid rubber tyres, paraffin oil burner for flash steam boiler. Racing hydroplanes (speedboats) used to form a flash steam boiler possibly developed from the Burston boiler principle. It does not need a gearbox or clutch. This would suggest that even though the Burston steam car never got into production, it was not a dead end. The invention itself had a life of its own. Steam-power was used for many purposes beyond the car.'

The brothers Santler built a number of successful cars and then diversified, leaving Malvern to take up an important contract at Ampleforth School of maintaining the steam heating system, and later went to New Zealand.

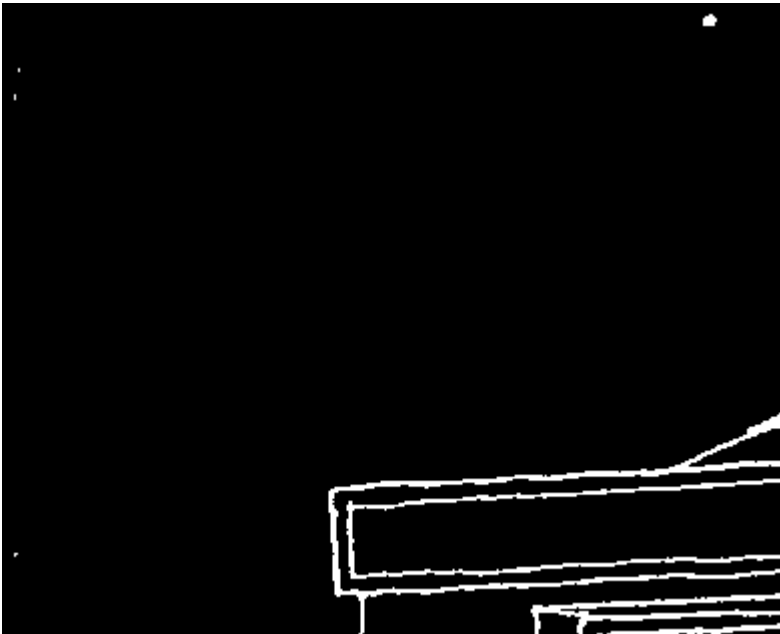
Morgan Motors forged ahead, adding to their inventiveness the conception of a motor car as a new social and economic element. The design of stylish bodywork was one ingredient, and another was performance. Henry Morgan built up the reputation and the identity of his 'make of car', and its own particular means of production which proved right for its initial century can be predicted to continue in its unique form.

The Burston steam-car was the one and only car the works produced. That inventiveness is only part of the story has been proved in Malvern, but the fascinating qualities of the steam-car is such that one cannot but wish that it had been developed. Its minimal use of paraffin makes it desirably 'green', and its use of water for steam makes it a model example of 'renewable energy'. If our roads were filled with steam-cars, perhaps some of our problems would be solved!

The ingenuity of its design, which Edward Elgar could have followed during the years he lived at 'Forli', so near to the Newtown Engineering Works, may well have spurred him to take part in trying out the Burston.

In those early days, driving a motor car involved all sorts of expedients when it broke down. Pushing it was one, hinted at in Elgar's nickname—'The Shover'. I have been told by James Nott how their early motor car jibbed at climbing over the Wyche Cutting. They were returning from a holiday, and his grandfather demanded that the toothpaste should be unearthed from the luggage. The toothpaste, when applied to the clutch, gave sufficient grip for the car to climb over the hill and get them home. Rabbit skin was put in the gearbox, and porridge oats in the radiator to overcome other problems.

In the photograph of Edward Elgar on the cover of the JOURNAL, his companion Alfred Edward Rodewald is holding a motor horn, the rubber bulb is in one hand. One might imagine Rodewald giving a toot on the horn and asking Elgar, 'What note would you say that might have been?' Elgar, at the wheel, looks as if his rejoinder might have been, though brief, illuminating and touched with humour—one of his 'japes'.



*The Retired Soldier pub, circa 1820 (drawing by the author)
which stands on the west side of Newtown Road near Burston's engineering works.*



Above: The Burston Leader tricycle; below, a signed drawing of the tricycle.



The substantial steering column and round steering wheel of the Burston steam-car is quite identifiable with the one Elgar is holding firmly in the photograph. In the early stages many cars had a tiller rather than a steering wheel.

Nowadays, even experienced drivers are precluded from even looking under the bonnets of their hi-tech cars, so it is surprising to find people driving about on a chassis without bodywork, but even in the 1930s an elderly lady of our acquaintance was ready to drive her son's car from Malvern to Exeter on the bare chassis. My own recollection of travelling in the open tourers of the 1920s means it is not surprising to find people driving about on a chassis without bodywork.

In the 1920s, the Old Bean, the Charron with its 'dickey' and the Standard open tourer with their draughty hoods gave me a glimpse of the early, exciting days. Being present at the launch in 1933 of the last Hampton car at the Dudbridge foundry of Wesley Whitfield showed me the climax of years of design. The sight of the carefully carved wooden 'patterns' made for casting in the foundry was familiar to me in the storerooms at Dudbridge.

Craftsmanship, the making of violins and the insides of pianos, all this was the subsoil and foundation of Elgar's art. Five-finger exercises are not enough for great composition. And from the Burston engineering workshop, Mrs Gerald Burston—née Mary Kenny—was a singer, and sang in 1933 at the last performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* conducted by Elgar himself at Hereford cathedral. Other members of the Burston family had careers in music, and so it was not only Edward Elgar who reached out and found in design the wonderful thread holding the best things in life together.

In this excursion around the subject, I do not claim to prove that it is the Burston steam-car in which Edward Elgar sits at the wheel in the photograph. His companion Alfred Rodewald may have brought the car from Manchester, and if our readers can tell us of ingenious inventors who built cars before 1903 in Lancashire, it would more fully illuminate the situation in the most innovative days. In the meantime, we have engaged in explaining the possibilities, revealing a little more of what was going on round about the Elgars' house 'Forli' whilst the 'Enigma' Variations were being evolved.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Geraldine Burston and her family in marshalling the available material; to Brian Culley for a great deal of the background knowledge of steam-power in all its aspects; to Catherine Hammond, niece of Henry Santler, inventor of the Santler cars; and to Charles Morgan, present designer and producer of Morgan Cars. Also I should like to thank the Elgar Birthplace Museum, Malvern Museum and the Malvern Public Library; Mrs Isobel Clarke, née Whitfield, for her recollections of inventiveness in the early days of cars; and to Mrs Janet Roberts for much background information. With Michael Peach, RIBA, the climate of innovatory design and its effect on Newtown was contemplated.

CATHERINE OLIVE MOODY was initiated at a very early age to the scientific approach to art of the Renaissance tradition. With an exhibition scholarship to the Royal College of Art she continued the study which had begun at Malvern School of Art with her father V. H. Moody. Craftsmanship and listening to music led to her interest—as an inhabitant of Malvern—in Edward and Alice Elgar. Catherine Moody paints draws and writes on art, design and architecture. She is also the author of an ongoing series of illustrated articles published in the JOURNAL that bring to life the Malvern in which Elgar spent his early composing career.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Crown of India

Elgar Society Edition, Vol. 18

edited by Robert Anderson

From time to time in the 1970s I used to penetrate the reaches of west London as far as Acton. There amid characterless streets stood a building which housed the remaining stock-in-trade of Edwin Ashdown Ltd, music publisher. It was presided over by the last of his line, Eric Ashdown, a quiet man in his sixties (assisted, if at all, by one or two occasional employees). Ashdowns had taken on the business of Emile Enoch and Sons, with all their remaining stocks of music.

The Ashdown stock-room, a barn-like space to the rear, held corridors of metal shelving. There lay turn-of-the-twentieth-century music by Cécile Chaminade in the original *art nouveau* covers. One of the stock-piles contained several copies of Elgar's *Crown of India* in piano score—new copies, as fresh as the day they were printed and bound in 1912.

Over an afternoon cup of tea Mr Ashdown told me the story of how his firm had come to Acton. Once upon a time Ashdowns had enjoyed full West End panoply in a building facing onto Hanover Square. But owing to the falling-in of an old lease, the owner demanded clearance—so as to raze the old building and replace it with something more densely profitable. A Monday deadline had been given. Mr Ashdown had removed his stocks of music to the new premises in Acton, and reckoned on taking the hire-library in the basement on the Monday. What was his horror on Monday morning to find his old building a mass of ruins. The Ashdown library lay at the bottom of tons of rubble.

In that library was Elgar's MS full score of *The Crown of India*. In those days a publisher wishing to avoid the expense of printing a full score for a work of possibly short-term interest, simply hired out the composer's full score manuscript as the conducting copy for any and all performances. (It was this practice which had sealed the fate of the *Gerontius* première when Novellos declined the chance to make a copy full score before the first performance. Publisher, copyists, and the composer himself then needed his manuscript full score for producing and checking orchestral parts. The result was that Richter did not get possession of it until the night before his only orchestral rehearsal: and Richter was a slow study.)

The lack of any full score has made *The Crown of India* probably the most difficult of all the Elgar Edition volumes to edit and produce. In view of the formidable problems attending it, the new volume is a real success. It is to my mind something more than that.

Here is the most 'occasional' of Elgar's larger works—on a subject whose once popular appeal has suffered a sea-change in the ensuing century. Inevitably this work's future lies more with scholars than with practising musicians. Yet its new volume fills the Elgar Society Edition's largest



Elgar Society
Edition, 2005
xxxii + 223 pp.
hardback
ISBN 1904856187
£85.00

format, grandly produced for posterity. The editorial work has been entrusted to Robert Anderson, retiring general editor of the Elgar Edition. Dr Anderson is also uniquely qualified to meet and solve the formidable problems presented by the remains of a work that nobody (least of all Elgar himself) would claim as a masterpiece. If one wants a modern exemplum of Elgar's *nobilmente*, here it is in red and gold.

In the absence of a full score, the new *Crown of India* volume begins with the full Enoch libretto and piano score. It finishes with a Suite for large orchestra extracted from the Masque music and engraved in full score by another publisher, Hawkes (later joined to Boosey & Co.). Between the piano score and the orchestral suite stand two items from the stage production, whose full scores have barely survived—one only as a set of orchestral parts, enabling the score to be reconstructed. These two middle items have been newly 'engraved' (to use the traditional generic).

From such a diversity of sources, the new volume shows only small unevenness from item to item: nothing to dismay neatness or legibility. My only regret is that it was not possible to add the instrument-names at the left of every page in the Hawkes Suite score. Page after page of bracketed (but otherwise unidentified) staves of music on a page of twenty-five or more systems up poses a challenge to this reviewer's score-reading powers, demanding frequent referrals back to the opening page of a movement, where instrument names are given.

One other problem centres on Dr Anderson's Foreword. He has assembled a grand review of historic events bearing on the *Crown of India* plot and references. The events are densely packed into prose where not a word is wasted. But especially in this volume's very long lines of text, the whole sequence loses much of its impact by confinement within two monster paragraphs. There might also have been some division, on page ix, between this and the production-history of the Masque.

Dr Anderson avoids any hint of *ex post facto* editorialising over the Imperial theme. His tone is irreproachable throughout—a careful scholar presenting the material entrusted to him. Once or twice his Foreword seems to this reader unnecessarily discursive. We are treated at length to Bernard Shaw's windy opinions of earlier stage efforts by the Masque's librettist. Similar plethora surrounds an account of bookshelf-erection in Elgar's new study at Severn House. Reduced emphasis in such places would throw more important things into higher relief. Among my recommendations to the Elgar Edition's new editor would be shorter lengths of text line, and a ban on paragraphs of more than a dozen of the present lines' length.

These are small spots on this latest of the Elgar Edition's suns. There can be no doubt that, barring future discoveries, *The Crown of India* music has found its ideal presentation. It also constitutes, for the time being, a farewell tribute to Robert Anderson, who has guided the Edition through thick and thin. But for him, and the tact and imagination of the Society's chairman Andrew Neill, there would be no continuing Elgar Society Edition. Perhaps Dr Anderson may be persuaded back to edit further volumes. His work on *The Crown of India* bears eloquent witness to his care, skill, experience, and energy—all the qualities most needed by an ideal editor.

Jerrold Northrop Moore

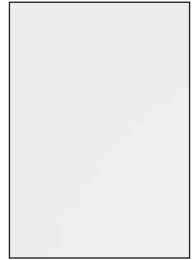
The Cambridge Companion to Elgar

edited by Daniel Grimley and Julian Rushton

In many ways, to borrow the advertising catch-line for a well-known brand of wood care products, this volume does exactly what it says on the tin: it is 'an accessible and vivid account of Elgar's work' with much to offer a reader with some musical knowledge in search of general information on the composer's compositions.

It can be broadly separated into groups of chapters, although there are understandably overlaps between them. Four introductory chapters include: the first, written jointly by the editors, outlining some of the main themes running through studies of Elgar's life and work; chapters by Jeremy Dibble setting Elgar in the context of his British contemporaries, and Robert Anderson recapping the relationships between Elgar and his editors; and Christopher Kent's chapter on Elgar's compositional methods, which displays an enviable knowledge of the composer's output in a broad outline of some to the techniques he employed. These chapters set the scene for the eight that follow, each a study of a genre of Elgar's compositions, including chapters on the later orchestral music by Christopher Mark, the chamber music and works for strings by Daniel Grimley, and the theatre music by J.P.E. Harper-Scott. The book concludes with three miscellaneous chapters: Timothy Day's exploration of Elgar's recordings of his own works; an insight by Jenny Doctor into the reciprocal relationship between Elgar and the BBC, and how it helped shape the image of Elgar that still persists to some extent today; and finally, a new view of Elgar as perceived by German critics by Aidan Thomson. (The book actually concludes with Charles McGuire's chapter on Elgar's functional music, although this might have been more logically placed alongside other considerations of the musical genres.)

As the editors point out in the introduction, each chapter in the volume stands independently of the whole, making it an ideal book to dip into. The majority are well written and informative, with most contributors adopting a scholarly yet accessible style of prose. The exceptions write in a more colloquial style. Timothy Day's penchant for writing fantasy in a second person narrative, for example, seems out of place in an academic text: '...if you lifted your eyes from the music and watched the "nervous, electric beat", the expressive gestures of the left hand, and the hands—sometimes the whole body—quivering with excitement, you were unlikely to fail to infuse your part with a degree of tension and excitement' (p. 190). Robin Holloway's wordy run-through of the early choral music comes perilously close to resembling a CD liner note, which might tempt readers familiar with the works to skip through sections were it not for his enormously entertaining and compelling style. There are few texts which refer to the end of *The Banner of St George* as 'flagrant flatulent bombast' (p. 70), or the music at the beginning of scene II of *Caractacus* as 'Sullivan on Substances' (p. 76)! While Holloway's polemical and provocative approach might offend some (for example, oratorio writing in England is described as 'this great tradition of awfulness' (p. 63) and a section in *Caractacus* is judged 'duff music' (p. 76)), the chapter nevertheless radiates infectious enthusiasm for the music. It also contains some interesting approaches to what are perceived to be the more problematic aspects of Elgar's output, especially the more imperialist works, such as the suggestion that 'awful words and their "unacceptable" message can be completely transcended by musical calibre' (p. 80). It is this apparently ideologically dubious group of compositions that Charles McGuire explores in more detail in his authoritative chapter on 'imperialism, the Great War and



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Elgar as popular composer', arguing that Elgar should be judged by the standards of his time, not our own.

On the whole, the majority of contributors seem to have struck a balance between reviewing Elgar's compositions for those new to the composer and offering an interpretation of them, although some offer little more than a review of pre-existing material. Robert Anderson's consideration of the relationship between Elgar and his publishers provides a commanding synopsis of Jerrold Northrop Moore's study of the same subject. Jeremy Dibble's 'Elgar and his British contemporaries' reviews the often discussed relationships between Elgar, Stanford and Parry, and places Elgar in the context of the musical culture surrounding him. And Diana McVeagh's chapter on the shorter instrumental works (which rather puzzlingly contains a sizable consideration of *The Music Makers*) displays her enviable knowledge of the composer and his music in an essentially descriptive chronology.

A narrative and analytical approach characterises many of the chapters, and while the book cover claims to examine the music from 'a range of critical perspectives', serious engagement with current ideas and theories is limited. There are glimpses of ideas which will interest more seasoned Elgarians, although one is often left wishing more space was available for their elaboration: for example, Julian Rushton's chapter ends with an interpretation of the First Symphony which 'replaces a modernistic, teleological narrative with post-modern ambiguity' (p. 152), closing with the suggestion that 'Elgar's symphony is an enigma, not in the trivial sense of a hermeneutic game... but in the Pauline sense of a dark reflecting glass, from which each succeeding age receives back some partial truth about itself' (p. 153). Also, there is John Butt's suggestion in his chapter on the church and organ music that Elgar's familiarity with, and therefore intuitive assimilation of, the Gregorian chants of the Catholic Church might account for the modal inflections and resulting tonal ambiguities that make him sound 'in retrospect as "authentically" English, as if the composer had somehow already intuited the old modal idioms that the younger generation actively sought' through the conscious study of folk music (p. 108).

Within these chapters, and also those by Daniel Grimley and J.P.E. Harper-Scott, one almost senses a tension between the need to introduce a large range of material and the desire to add a new interpretative slant on the compositions and their creator. The issue of whether this can be achieved in a volume of this kind is complicated by the inclusion of a brilliantly provocative essay by Byron Adams entitled 'Elgar's later oratorios: Roman Catholicism, decadence and the Wagnerian dialectic of shame and grace'. Placed in the centre of the book, Adams' chapter makes no attempt to describe or introduce his admittedly huge subject, but rather places the oratorios from *The Dream of Gerontius* onwards 'within a cultural, historical and aesthetic perspective so as to illuminate not only their position within Elgar's oeuvre, but also the ambivalent attitudes of their creator towards religious belief, society and aesthetics' (p. 81). Drawing from a wide range of sources, Adams traces the ways in which Elgar's troubled and idiosyncratic relationship with religion changed through the course of researching and writing the oratorios, suggesting that he failed to complete his trilogy when his 'lapsed faith made the final oratorio [*The Last Judgement*] an untenable proposition' (p. 104). He locates these works in relation to the 'decadent' aesthetic which flourished around the end of the nineteenth century, prompting writers such as Wilde and Pater to treat Roman Catholicism as 'a nexus for exploring such diverse

elements of their aesthetic as eroticism, shame, and suffering, both corporeal and spiritual' (p. 85). The ultimate expression of these ideas in music is found in Wagner's music-dramas, especially *Parsifal*, and Elgar's indebtedness to Wagner can be seen as drawing him further into the decadent tradition. Indeed, Adams claims that 'by choosing Newman's poem *The Dream of Gerontius* as a basis for a sacred choral work and by adorning the verse in a musical idiom profoundly influenced by Wagner, Elgar united a dazzling array of decadent signifiers in one spectacular and moving *Gesamtkunstwerk*' (p. 85–6). As such, he sees the stigmatising of the decadent aesthetic after the trials of Wilde in 1895 as having a significant impact on the reception of Elgar's oratorios, and thus the motivation and beliefs of the profoundly insecure composer himself.

This is a dense and complex article, and at times the reading seems a little determined, as possible interpretations come close to being expressed as fact. This is particularly the case with regard to the extent to which Elgar's employment of 'decadent' Catholic discourses was the result of the influence of this aesthetic, or simply a result of his religious background (see, for example, the end of p. 96). Nevertheless, Adams paints a challenging and perhaps to some uncomfortable portrait of Elgar as a 'self-loathing' man deeply influenced by the cultural trends of his time. I wonder what a reader new to Elgar would make of this chapter. With no general context within which to place and evaluate Adams' narrative, it is perhaps possible that they will draw several misleading conclusions. But, while Adams offers little about the tonal plan of the oratorios or their musical themes, there is a stimulating quality to the writing that will hopefully inspire further research. It is in this quality that the *Cambridge Companion* offers something beyond a standard text-book style account of Elgar's music, and I have a slight regret that other contributors have not taken a more progressive, even radical, approach. Many seem to assume that an accessible, introductory account necessitates the type of dry description that already exists in numerous other sources. Perhaps it would be more contemporary and stimulating to introduce Elgar to a reader in a more dynamic and challenging way.

Overall, the book is very well presented: it is well edited with few mistakes in the main text (a notable exception being the date of the performances of *The Crown of India*, given as 1911 in the introductory chapter, rather than 1912). The footnotes show signs of having received less attention, with several typing errors, a footnote missing from the end of Robin Holloway's chapter, and a repeated footnote in Julian Rushton's. However, these are only small quibbles; as a whole, the huge variety of material covered and the differing personalities of the contributors serve to recommend *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* to all those interested in getting to the heart of Elgar's music.

Corissa Gould

Elgar and Parry: Blest Pair of Sirens?

by Kevin Allen

I first knew Kevin Allen as Elgar enthusiast and Branch stalwart. He has, of course, in recent years also assumed the role of scholar and author. Chief among his output have

been his splendid biography of Jaeger and the indispensable *Elgar in Love*. This present brief pamphlet is on a smaller scale, being an expanded version of Kevin's inaugural Wulstan Atkins Memorial Lecture given at last year's Gloucester Three Choirs Festival and published now as a result of understandable requests from those who heard that lecture.

The publication of lectures is in fashion. London Branch's symposium of essays based on Branch presentations was reviewed in the March 2005 JOURNAL. The previous issue reviewed the transcriptions of the Elgar/Vaughan Williams gathering at the British Library in 2003, *A Special Flame*. The majority of my own essays issued as *Elgar and the Awful Female* began life as talks. Getting worthwhile but potentially transient research into print is a valuable exercise, and perhaps a detailed look at a small area of Elgarian interest is nowadays more valuable than yet another full biography.

Kevin Allen's fine piece is a case in point. Clearly the result of much research and thought, *Elgar and Parry* is both informative and entertaining. The author has had the advantage and privilege of access to unpublished diaries of Sir Hubert Parry and this, notwithstanding much other reading and investigation, is perhaps what gives the essay a special quality.

I presume Kevin approached this task primarily as an Elgarian. However, with the aid of the diaries he tells us a deal about Parry—*inter alia* we have his views on the country of the Severn Valley, Conservatism, religion, music (Parry does not think much of either French or Italian influences), Stanford (some classic anecdotes) and, of course, Elgar.

In some, albeit not all, talks I have attended entitled *Elgar and X*, where 'X' is a composer, usually far less eminent than Elgar, it has become apparent that the speaker wishes to go on about the secondary figure, a man doubtless of great interest to the lecturer if not the audience. Kevin, however, as early as the first page states his intention of 'comparing and contrasting' Elgar and Parry in the time-honoured school essay fashion. In this he succeeds well and I certainly felt I was being informed about both men, their encounters and interaction.

Superficially, the contrasts of social origin, wealth, education, political and religious beliefs—Parry, despite Delius's famous stricture that he would have set the entire Bible had he lived long enough, was an unapologetic agnostic—are what strike us. However, there were things in common, too. For example they were 'almost equal victims of the invidious position of music' in Victorian England. Their marriages were similar in so far as Maude Parry's family felt she was worthy of a more aristocratic match than Hubert, a mere member of the landed gentry. The outcome of the marriages, however, was very different. Maude was no great supporter of her husband's work and made considerable demands of her own upon Parry by reason of her hypochondria. One could not say that about Alice Elgar.

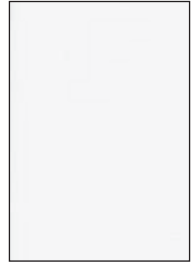
Parry was famous for his good humour, generosity and kindness. Slow to take offence, he contrived by and large to put up with Stanford let alone Elgar. Indeed relationships between Parry and Elgar were generally good—'little short of hero worship' on Elgar's part to begin with. Parry, though, did feel he had offended Elgar as a result of telling him that his music 'made some very curious noises'—an avuncular joke lost on Elgar—and, indeed, it is the differences, especially musical differences, with which we are ultimately left.

Like Elgar, Parry sometimes talked nonsense—about Disraeli certainly, but also about Mozart. One supposes that Elgar never knew that Parry felt that 'it [*Gerontius*] reeks too much of the morbid and unnatural terrors and hysterics engendered by priestcraft'; that *Falstaff* was 'full of his mannerisms and distortions'; that *For the Fallen* was 'very poor stuff—pitiful choral writing—like a sentimental part-song'. For his part Elgar once told Jaeger, 'I cannot stand Parry's orchestra: it's dead & is never more than an *organ part arranged*'. The two were miles apart in approach and technique. Kevin quotes a fascinating view of the two composers by Benjamin Britten. I think Britten is absolutely right in essentials, though Kevin feels he is perhaps 'somewhat unfair' to Parry. Read it and see what you think!

If I have a regret about this pamphlet it is that I could have wished for a higher standard of presentation. There are no illustrations, index nor footnotes. The typeface is rather small. Kevin tells us that he 'does not attempt to say all that could be said'. I wonder, therefore, if this essay, further expanded and with illustrations, etc. might not have made a suitable subject for the Elgar Editions series of monographs, which are so beautifully presented. However, we owe the present publication not only to Kevin's scholarship but also to his enterprise. It has emerged quickly after the event and is a gift at the price. A couple of years ago I discovered a lovely boxed set of the vinyl Sargent *The Dream of Gerontius* in the unlikely venue of the gift shop of the Leyburn railway station on the restored Wensleydale line. I acquired the set for £1 and *Elgar and Parry* is the best bargain since.

Of course, Kevin subtitles the essay 'Blest Pair of Sirens?'. All good pieces about Elgar should perhaps ask questions as well as answer them. There is certainly much to stimulate the reader here, and Kevin leaves us with the splendid thought of what would Parry have made of Elgar's arrangement in 1922, after Parry's death, of *Jerusalem?* Too Elgarian?

David Bury



Kevin Allen, 2005
24 pp.
£2.00
(Available from the
Elgar Birthplace
Museum)

The Absent-Minded Imperialists

by Bernard Porter

The English seem to love to have their history expressed by aphorisms. One of the most famous, and most inaccurate, is that they acquired an empire in a fit of absent-mindedness. The degree to which they were really interested in it has become a subject of controversy. On the one hand, the Said/Mackenzie/Jeffrey Richards school maintains that Britain was an 'institutionally' imperialist country for the whole of the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth. Others, including the author of the work reviewed, maintain that this is at least simplistic, if not totally wrong. Bernard Porter is not only a distinguished historian but the author of an important essay on 'Elgar and Imperialism'—reprinted in *Oh My Horses!: Elgar and the Great War* (Elgar Editions, 2001)—and an enthusiast for the composer's works. In this volume he seeks to establish the facts about the permeation of British society by imperialist attitudes and obsessions, using mainly published (and primarily English) sources. These sources have certainly been well garnered—the 300 pages of text are supported by more than 100 pages of footnotes. The style is rather ruminative, seeming at times as if the author were trying to persuade himself of his own thesis. This makes comment difficult,

especially when it comes to assessing the (frequent) references to Elgar and his career as supporting evidence of the conclusions.

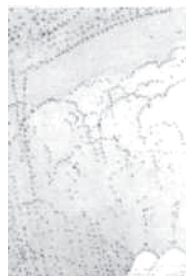
These conclusions seem to be that before about 1880 the only people interested in the Empire were the upper class (especially the public school-educated section which provided the proconsuls) and the working class (which provided the enforced settlers—soldiers, the unemployed and convicts). From then to 1918 there was a deliberate national attempt to promote the Empire as a demonstration of the glory of British arms and entrepreneurial achievement. From 1918 to the Second World War the emphasis changed to the idea of the civilising benefits to indigenous peoples which British rule conveyed. Empire was replaced by Commonwealth (despite the historical ambiguity of the term). Intriguing reasons are given for each of these changes, though one which the author has not offered is that after the 1870s the British may have begun to see the Empire as an antidote to their increasing sense of relative decline. The Germans might have had better welfare and the Americans might have been richer, but the British had the largest empire ever.

This is not the place to enter into a detailed critique of the author's fascinating and well-argued thesis. Our concern is with how Elgar fits this pattern of events and, even more to the point, what light is thrown on the important issue of Elgar's own opinions. Porter is dismissive of the Richards Elgar-as-out-and-out-Imperialist line, as stated in 'Elgar's Empire' (*Imperialism and Music*, 2001), but by implication equally so of the Elgar-as-pure-artist view, which removes him from any meaningful historical reality altogether. Of course Elgar was a conservative, traditionalist monarchist but, as Porter demonstrates, so were a lot of his contemporaries who could not be termed imperialist as a result. The book is tantalising for Elgarians in raising wisps of ideas and opinions which could be argued at length. The author reminds us of the Indian 'impedimenta' cluttering the Elgar's home (p. 38), and that Alice Elgar was of imperial stock herself, with nine relatives serving in India (p. 42). (She was in many respects an obvious 'mehsaib' and would not have been pleased to know that a census enumerator believed that she was Indian herself.) In 1916 Elgar told Percy Scholes that he thought Britons insufficiently patriotic (p. 195). Did he *mean* Britons? The year raises doubts. The suggestion that Elgar may have cooled towards the Empire as a result of Campbell-Bannerman's famous attack on 'methods of barbarism' (p. 242) must surely be discounted, given his strongly anti-Liberal views. Criticisms of Elgar's music for its supposed racial arrogance and the vulgarity of its performance as a music hall turn (p. 250) are more interesting, but these instances extend over a period of twenty-odd years in which, as Porter's own researches show, opinions changed dramatically. The comments on the Elgar-Kipling relationship (or rather non-relationship) are intriguing, as are those on the imperial exhibitions and Elgar's role in them. Equally so is the suggestion that the military persona adopted by Elgar and his obsession with 'bracing, outdoor' music was an attempt to portray the male macho image which the (imperial) times approved (p. 251). Ironically, Elgar, like Kipling, was a physical weakling.

In the larger view Elgar's career well fits Porter's general thesis. During his youth Empire was unimportant—how much did it appear in his education, indeed how much British history did Elgar really know and from what sources? As he rose to fame, so did the imperial theme in his music. From 1896 to at least 1902 it is distinctly tintured with imperial colouring. Contemporaries regarded *Cockaigne* as an imperial work, and it could be argued that even *King Olaf* has a hint of it. He returned specifically to

imperialism in 1912 with *The Crown of India*. After 1920 he took up it up again with works as varied as 'Big Steamers' (not, as Porter claims, an addition to *The Fringes of the Fleet*), *Pageant of Empire*, *Empire March* and a late *Pomp and Circumstance*. On the other hand, his interest seems to have arisen more from a desire to ingratiate himself with the upper class, who were imperialist, than a real conversion to the philosophy itself. His real objections to the 1924 Pageant could be said to be more snobbish than artistic. Moreover, most of his friends were German Jews rather than Anglo-Saxon colonial governors, and he did not get on with the few 'colonials' he did know (e.g. Kipling, Wylde, Stanford). Canada was the only part of the Empire he visited, and then only briefly. It is hard to accuse Elgar of racism in the absolute sense, though very easy to point out his strong class sensitivity. But in any case, Elgar did not fit the ideal of the imperial citizen as divined by Porter: obedient, loyal, courageous, hard-working and ever ready to serve (p. 121). Empire attitudes, too, were strongly anti-intellectual and anti-cultural.

How far does this work go towards contributing to an effective analysis of Elgar's motives? In truth, not very far; the references are apposite but unconnected, and do not add up to a coherent view. Nevertheless, Porter demonstrates that Elgar is a paradigmatic figure. He cannot be divorced from his historical context and cocooned in provincial, rural and artistic mysticism, as some writers seem to be anxious to accomplish. Surrounded by oriental exotica, upper class contacts, and constantly reminded by his wife of her imperial connections, the adult Elgar must have been well aware of the Empire. By the same token, he probably often longed to escape anything which smacked of it. Calling Elgar an imperialist is like calling Hitler a socialist. Both found the respective tag useful, but neither were serious devotees. Yet there was a catch. His remarkably acute marketing antennae told him that launching his music under an imperialist banner would improve its chance of a hearing. Ironically, what worked for him in the short term has turned out to be a problem in the long.



CD & DVD REVIEWS

Carl Newton

Oxford University
Press, 2004
498 pp. hardback
ISBN 0198208545
£25.00

Piano Concerto

including the sketches, drafts and recordings of Elgar's Piano Concerto realised for performance by Robert Walker; *Suite of Four Edward Elgar Songs*, transcribed by Haydn Wood; Elgar, *So Many True Princesses*, orchestrated by Anthony Payne; Anthony Collins, *Elegy in Memory of Edward Elgar*.

David Owen Norris (piano)
BBC Concert Orchestra and BBC Singers
conducted by David Lloyd-Jones

Here is a disc full of curiosities! I must confess that the music that impressed me most

is not by Elgar at all. Anthony Collins' *Elegy in Memory of Edward Elgar* is a sombre, powerful threnody based on motifs from the Third Symphony's slow movement. I find its darkly passionate mood very moving. Another pleasant surprise is Haydn Wood's *Suite of Four Edward Elgar Songs*. Why bother doing such a thing, I initially thought, but it turns out to be delightfully done. Haydn Wood's transcriptions of Elgar's vocal parts and idiosyncratic piano writing is masterly, and the suite would make a charming addition to any concert. Henry Geehl's orchestration of the late piano piece *Adieu* adds nothing to the composer's original, but *So Many True Princesses*—surely a miniature masterpiece—gains enormously from Anthony Payne's sympathetic orchestration of the surviving piano part. Of the two absolutely original Elgar works here, the lyrical charm and evocative instrumentation of the *Spanish Serenade* work their usual magic, while the *Pageant of Empire* chorus has a noble and majestic tread—a last flowering of Elgar's imperial style.

I've left the largest work, the Piano Concerto, to last because, truth to tell, I can't muster much enthusiasm for it. The commitment of the soloist, conductor and orchestra is beyond doubt, but unlike the Elgar/Payne Third Symphony, much of this sounds to me like cobbled together pastiche. The opening of the first movement is impressive, and there are moments of authentic Elgarian grandeur. But I don't like the tempo of the second movement, more *allegretto* than *andante*. Margaret Fingerhut's more graceful and relaxed tempo in Percy Young's version of this movement on *Classico* is more apt and less determinedly skittish. The finale is the least impressive movement, and surely Elgar wouldn't have given us such a corny ending. Did Robert Walker use all the sketches? Percy Young in *Elgar O.M.* quotes a strongly Brahmsian theme as the finale's theme, but I hear it nowhere in this work. I am also not convinced by the logic of the key structure. Why (*pace* the sleeve note) is a G major conclusion the obvious solution to a work that begins in C minor/E flat major, with a slow movement in D? I can think of no Elgar work that ends in a different tonal base from which it began, except the little piano piece *Adieu*, which begins in B minor and ends in the dominant key. To quote Percy Young again, 'the piano concerto sketches bear no sign of the eagerness characteristic of other unfinished works. It is evident that this was an intention to please other people rather than an irresistible inspiration.'

Despite all this, I do admire the effort that has gone into constructing this piece, although I hope it doesn't become known as 'Elgar's Piano Concerto'. I do, in any case, urge members to buy this disc for the other treasures on it. Performances and recording are exemplary throughout.

Barry Collett

Elgar Marches

Coronation March, op. 65; *Funeral March from Grania and Diarmid*, op. 42; *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* Nos. 1–5, op. 39; *March from Caractacus*, op. 35; *March of the Mogul Emperors*, op. 66 no. 4; *Empire March; Polonia*, op. 76.

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra conducted by James Judd

Elgar and the matter of class makes for a fascinating discussion. Though the son of a man of trade, he married the daughter of a retired Indian Army general, and it was she who gave him the vital social and moral support to promote him to the image of Edwardian landed gentry and its society, if not the actuality. His music, though considered quintessentially English, neither derives from nor bears any affinity to this nation's past. On the contrary, its kinship is nearer to the German Romanticism of the past and his own day. While there's more of Brahms than folk tunes to be found in his music, there's also little of the impressionism which his contemporaries Delius, Holst and the younger Vaughan Williams espoused. Meteoric once it took off, Elgar's social status shot from provincial violinist and composer to knight, baronet and Master of the King's Music, and spawned music of pomp and ceremony for occasions from the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria to the coronations of kings, first Edward VII and then his son George V, as well as other events.

This generous disc of Elgar's marches (forty-four seconds short of eighty minutes) is full of tunes which will 'knock 'em flat', as the composer described the now famous trio melody of the first *Pomp and Circumstance* march which became *Land of Hope and Glory*. The CD gets off to a sombre start with the *Coronation March*, originally intended for a ballet based on Rabelais rather than festive music for George V, followed by the 1901 Funeral March from *Grania and Diarmid*, incidental music for a play by George Moore and W. B. Yeats—'big and weird' as Elgar described his own music. The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra is an excellent orchestra, with many fine soloists amidst their number, and under their music director James Judd they wear their musical hearts on their collective sleeves, producing fine, idiomatic playing in the generous acoustical ambience of the Michael Fowler Centre in Wellington. Judd sustains tempo and conjures textures of both richness and quasi-miniature detail.

A longer pause between the second and third tracks is needed to catch a breath after *Grania and Diarmid* before rushing headlong into the first of the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. The tracking geography is no fault of Judd's, even though he then takes Elgar's *Allegro, con molto fuoco* ('with much fire') marking rather too literally. Neither does he linger, as Barbirolli did, over the aforementioned trio, which needs a touch more *largamente* about it—there is no need for embarrassment in such music. As far as structure is concerned, these military marches take the same format with repeats as found in the Classical minuet and trio. The years of composition range from four marches bunched together between 1902 and 1907 to the fifth—an afterthought for Percy Hull at Hereford Cathedral—dating from 1930. The listener will welcome the opportunity to become acquainted with the less familiar of the five marches. In fact, after the first, only No. 4 (dedicated to G. R. Sinclair, Hull's predecessor at Hereford and a 'friend pictured within' the 'Enigma' Variations) can really be described as well-known to audiences, again because of its noble and grandiose trio.

The disc concludes with an idiomatic performance of the glorious symphonic prelude *Polonia*. Judd encourages his strings, solo or tutti, to revert to the playing style of the day, and its climactic moments are superb. It is preceded by three relatively rare marches. The first from *Caractacus* is given a particularly good account, though their brass and percussion sections go on to have many a golden moment in the fine *Empire March*, the most military in style and the track which should surely have concluded this

enjoyable disc. How many expatriates among the players (including Poles in the case of *Polonia*) felt homesick as a result of recording these works down under? This CD is worth every one of the few pennies Naxos charge.

Christopher Fifield

'Enigma' Variations, Introduction and Allegro — Haitink



Elgar, *Variations on an Original Theme* ('Enigma'), op. 36; Introduction and Allegro for string quartet and string orchestra, op. 47; Britten, *Our Hunting Fathers*, op. 8.

Heather Harper (soprano)
London Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Bernard Haitink

Dutton (Epoch)
CDLX 7148

The LPO launched its own label in mid-May. The four discs so far available comprise live recordings of Shostakovich under their current principal conductor Kurt Masur; Rachmaninov with Vladimir Jurowski, who conducts them at Glyndebourne; archive material of Tennstedt conducting orchestral excerpts from Wagner operas; and this disc of Haitink conducting Elgar and Britten, recorded between 1979 and 1986. It would be fair to say that Haitink is more associated with Bruckner, Mahler, Brahms and Beethoven on the concert platform than with Elgar. Nevertheless, he has demonstrated a close affinity with the composer as well as with Britten, whose *Our Hunting Fathers*—with Heather Harper in superb form—is framed by two of Elgar's best known orchestral works, the Introduction and Allegro and 'Enigma' Variations.

Once out of the starting blocks, the strings of the LPO respond with fiery intensity to Haitink's impassioned direction of the Introduction and Allegro. He clearly loves the work and lingers over phrases; if he sometimes brings the music almost to a halt, it is always rewarded with revelatory audible detail. The playing is marked by beauty of tone from the solo quartet of the principals of the day. This is a live concert from London's Royal Festival Hall in November 1984, so the odd blemish at expected high-wire acts on the E string of the violins is inevitable. The themes of 'Enigma' and 'Nimrod' get much the same treatment, careful caressing by Haitink of moments in which he cannot resist the temptation to savour. *Giocoso* moments are delivered with male swing and swagger depicting 'R.B.T.', 'W.M.B.', a brilliantly showcased 'Troyte' and 'G.R.S.', while lovely solos in winds and strings highlight Lady Elgar, 'Ysobel', Winifred Norbury, 'Dorabella', and '****'. Apart from Jaeger and Nevinson, it is the ladies who provide 'Enigma' with both its charm and sophistication. The protracted ending gets a predictably worthy response from the applauding 'Prommers'.

Britten's *Our Hunting Fathers*, op. 8 was commissioned by the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival for its 1936 event and, as its early opus number would indicate, was the composer's first large-scale work for orchestra. Using two poems by W. H. Auden, Thomas Ravenscroft and two anonymous ones, this five-movement work is no anthem for the Countryside Alliance (neither is César Franck's *Le chasseur maudit*) containing as it does such phrases as 'the quarry's dying glare' and 'the sadness of the creatures'. It is a masterly work, beautifully scored, and in this account, impeccably delivered with exquisite clarity of diction by Harper, a Britten expert *par excellence*, whose colourful performances of the cruelly difficult 'Rats Away!' and

'Dance of Death' are a *tour de force*. The tender orchestral ending to 'Messalina' and the virtuoso playing in the scherzo 'Dance of Death' will impress. From this disc one can only await further treasures from the LPO sound archive with impatient anticipation.

Christopher Fifield

Elgar, Delius and Holst: part-songs and choral works

including Elgar: *The Shower*, op. 71, no. 1; *Death on the Hills*, op. 72; *Love*, op. 18, no. 2; *Go, Song of Mine*, op. 57.

BBC Singers conducted by Stephen Cleobury and Justin Doyle

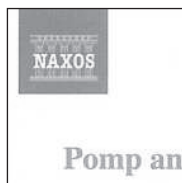
The *BBC Music* magazine's CD has included some Elgar for the second time in three months (Tadaaki Otaka's 'Enigma' was reviewed in the last issue of the JOURNAL). It is encouraging to see the BBC exploring lesser-known repertoire in this way. (I wish some of the really rare music which was broadcast a few years back in the *Fairest Isle* series had been made more permanently available.)

The recording quality is excellent: the voices are well balanced and just the right distance from the mikes to make the most of the acoustic at St Paul's, Knightsbridge. The BBC Singers are of course world famous, but there is a hint here that some of the reserve team were on duty—suspect intonation and one or two coarse voices in places. The Delius and Elgar pieces (recorded in November last year) suffer more than the Holst (in August). The latter is conducted by Justin Doyle and he brings out the best in these often quite difficult songs. The third group of the *Rig Veda* choral hymns (for ladies' voices and harp) is particularly impressive.

The Elgar is rather a mixed bag. The opening song, *The Shower*, is very slow to the point of dreariness. The weather would seem to be more like a drowsy, hazy, warm summer afternoon. It is the slowest version on record. *Death on the Hills* doesn't fare much better, for though Cleobury follows Elgar's metronome markings quite closely, he loses momentum through a tendency to pull back. Again, it is a very slow version compared with other recordings. Things improve with *Love*, written for Alice on Elgar's fiftieth birthday: the expression and colour make this very satisfying. And *Go, Song of Mine* comes off beautifully: it is perhaps no surprise that it is one of the faster of the recorded versions. The tenor line so often makes or mars this song, and here the men are on top form. The staccato markings seem to me a little over-emphasised, but it is only a minor fault.

The Delius songs also vary in quality. The early part-songs (to German words) fare much better than the better-known *Midsummer Song* and the wordless pair *To be sung of a Summer Night on the Water*. The second of these—surely based on the old song *Madam will you walk?*—has an air of Bacchanalian revels, led by the tenor soloist; but here unfortunately, the poor man sounds as if being hunted down by members of the local coven.

Copies of the April issue of the *BBC Music* magazine can be obtained by ringing



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Geoffrey Hodgkins

Severn Suite—Band of the Grenadier Guards

Pomp and Circumstance Marches nos. 2 and 4, op. 39;
The Severn Suite, op. 87; *Cockaigne (In London Town)*, op. 40; Serenade; *The Wand of Youth* Suite No. 2, op. 1b; *Sérénade mauresque*, op. 10, no. 2.

The Band of the Grenadier Guards
conducted by Lieut. Col. P. E. Hills

For those of us whose listening habits tend to revolve around concert halls and cathedrals, a recording like this is a valuable reminder of the significant role of military and brass bands in our cultural heritage. This is the second in a projected series of three CDs of music by Elgar, and forms part of a wider series of recordings produced by the Specialist Recording Company presenting original works and arrangements for military band of music by British composers including Walton, Arnold, Bliss, German and Sullivan (details of which can be found on the company's website at www.specialistrecording.com). The original Elgar release featuring music from *The Crown of India* (SRC 101) was reviewed in the November 2001 issue of the JOURNAL.

Almost inevitably, it is the two military *Pomp and Circumstance* marches which on this recording come off most convincingly; this style of music is, of course, the Grenadier Guards' stock-in-trade, and one cannot fail to be moved and stirred by their rich, powerful sounds. The March No. 2 perhaps sets out at a more leisurely pace than its *Allegro molto* marking would suggest, but it is convincing and delightful nevertheless. Boasting the largest percussion line-up of the original four *Pomp and Circumstance* marches (unfortunately, I have no score to check the instrumentation of No. 5), the tinkling sounds of glockenspiel, jingles and triangle—alongside two side drums, timpani, bass drum and cymbals—create the charming effect of distant cutlery trays jangling in the officers' mess. *Cockaigne* also lends itself particularly well to the military band treatment, this setting by an unnamed arranger handing over the work of the violins to some very industrious clarinets. The delicacy of which a military band is capable is well illustrated in the movements of the second *Wand of Youth* suite—to this writer's mind, Elgar's most endearing and beautifully crafted miniatures.

Henry Geehl's military band arrangement of *The Severn Suite* is of some historical interest, as memories of working on it may well have been at the back of his mind when in old age he made his inflated claims of having arranged the original brass band version. (We now know Elgar made the brass band version himself.) The only disappointment in this performance is that the supposedly livelier movements are taken well below tempo; the 'Toccata' in particular suffers from a laboured reading (minimum at 92 per minute rather than 116) which changes its character to that of a rather stately march. One cannot help but recall George Bernard Shaw's comment upon hearing the early performances of the brass band version in 1930, when he suggested the 'Menuet'

should be printed with the direction, 'Remember that a minuet is a dance and not a bloody hymn!' Nevertheless, it is marvellous that this sympathetic arrangement is available for listeners to appraise and enjoy; as a consequence, one may be inclined to be less harsh in one's opinion of Geehl's (probably unintended) deception.

A final aspect of this production which cannot be passed by without mention is the marvellous 'gate-fold' CD cover packaging. There was a time when the experience of listening to recorded music was inextricably linked to the sight and touch of the record itself, when exploring the visual landscape of an imaginatively designed LP cover was an essential accompaniment to the aural delight of hearing the music. I rediscovered that particular pleasure with this disc: look closely and one can find a visual representation of every single track (and more besides) in Grant Bradford's beautifully intricate garland-like pen-and-ink cover illustration. I would argue strongly for an immediate return to the 12-inch LP format, if only to allow me to see more of its magical detail without the aid of a magnifying glass!

Philip Maund

Elgar's Enigma Variations

A Hidden Portrait and a complete performance

BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis

The face of that Helen who went to Troy was such, they say, that it launched a thousand ships. I remember the part in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* played by someone who could well have sunk an equivalent number. What effect on shipping the face of Sir Andrew Davis might have I would not care to speculate; but in this DVD there is too much of it. It is not as if the range of his expressions might be thought to match the mood of each variation, let alone suggest the person 'pictured within'. There is a glimmer of elation for the finale; otherwise he is properly concentrated on the job and hardly a subject for detailed inspection.

More interesting, perhaps, is to range the BBC Symphony Orchestra, study the ring on a string player's finger, watch the inflated cheeks of an oboist with an important lead, and wonder above all how the timpanist will represent the throbbing liner in '***'. Will he use two golden guineas, such as Elgar was urged to offer when he apparently preferred coins to the side-drum sticks he had prescribed in the score? The BBC player adopts the simplest course of all, merely reversing his usual sticks and beating with the cane end. Will the cathedral organ or indeed another instrument specially imported reinforce the climax of the finale? This particular jape of Elgar's revision goes unrealised.

The performance does not have a cathedral sound to it and must have been captured by a multitude of microphones subtly placed. Davis, though, has a tendency towards cathedral tempos, with a 'Nimrod', for instance, that is too mindful of national mourning, and a tendency to slow unwarrantably when the music's emotion proves too powerful to him. The players are probably enjoying themselves, as is usually the case with Elgar, though there seems little rapport with the conductor, who even manages to turn the final page of his score to make certain of the last dozen bars. Such visual concentration on Davis is cruel indeed.

Far more rewarding is emphasis on the glorious cathedral, with the coping to the




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west door so illuminated it might be a reredos to the main altar. The lighting is indeed cunningly managed. I question, though, the decision to have images of the variations cast on to parts of the building, so that Ysobel might appear below the triforium, Dorabella on a spandrel, and so on. It might instead have been more fun to explore the building still further, as the architectural Troyte would certainly have done, and as Elgar himself so often did, whether in youthful discovery or mature reflection.

In the *Hidden Portrait* Andrew Davis deals with the 'Enigma' question quickly enough. He makes an attempt at the piano with *Pop goes the Weasel* and ruefully dismisses it; rightly he ignores most of the suggested themes that might 'go'. It is entertaining to see a couple of comely actors as Elgar and Jaeger settle somewhere on the Malvern Hills to discuss the slow movement of the Beethoven 'Pathétique' sonata. It is equally droll to watch a pseudo-Dorabella having got on her bike and then dismounted to exercise a few dance steps. As a proud possessor of roller-blades myself, I admired a black trio displaying their skill in Hyde Park, though suspecting that only political correctness could have brought them into Elgar's world.

Elgarians will enjoy the odd howler, which I leave with confidence to their detective skills. 'Craeg Lea' as the home of the Variations is a howler only by a few weeks, though I was amazed how wrong it seemed that Elgar should come exhausted from a day's teaching to that "illimitable" horizon' and start strumming the Variations' theme rather than to the so much more poky 'Forli'. If this DVD has its hero, it is of course the mainly invisible Elgar; but a wander round Worcester Cathedral or indeed on the Malvern Hills is a refreshment at any time. I remain convinced, though, that television is not for me.

Robert Anderson



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LETTERS

From: Philip Scowcroft

On p. 44 of the March 2005 *JOURNAL* Andrew Neill asks for information on Retford, arranger for military band of Pomp and Circumstance March No. 4. Here are a few details about him, mostly courtesy of Philip Mather of the International Military Music Society.

Michael J. Retford was born in Ireland in 1854, but came to England and after his marriage lived in Derby and then, from the 1880s, in London. He does not appear to have been a bandmaster or director of music, at least not for a regular (as against volunteer) regiment, but he did play in the Coldstream Guards band for a time. He died in 1923.

He was a prolific arranger for Boosey's Military Band Journal—of the first, third and fourth Pomp and Circumstance marches and of Land of Hope and Glory as a cornet solo with band, and, with some help from bandmasters Jacob Kappey (Royal Marines) and C. W. Hewitt (Royal Sussex Regiment), of all the British Army's regimental marches. Retford's own compositions included a march Sail Away (1903) and a galop Always Ready. He also compiled in 1910 a selection of Spanish war songs. His portfolio also included a piece called Sevillana; this may be another Elgar arrangement for military band, but even if it is not, he has his own particular niche in our knowledge of Elgar.

From: David A. Couper

On recently re-reading Jerrold Northrop Moore's paper 'The Music of Youth and Age' in the booklet which accompanied the second volume of The Elgar Edition: the complete electrical recordings of Sir Edward Elgar (EMI Classics, 1992), it occurred to me that there are two additional points which relate to the question of whether Elgar speeded up his performances for the gramophone.

Firstly, one sometimes hears phrases like 'the old four-minute shellac discs'. This has been misleading for many years. As early as 1914 one of Caruso's discs lasted 4m 46s (as timed on a CD reissue). On the other hand, we have Rex Palmer's statement of 1933: 'we now get up to 4 minutes 45 seconds on a twelve-inch side'. This shows that throughout Elgar's recording career performances up to say 4m 40s did not need to be hurried.

Secondly, we can compare the two recordings of Cockaigne. The first was spread over four sides and took 13m 2s. The second (on three sides, and therefore supposedly liable to be hurried) took 13m 38s (CD timings).

These facts clearly reinforce Dr Moore's remarks, and I feel that the idea that Elgar altered the tempi of his performances to fit them on the disc can be laid to rest.

From: John Hammond

Arthur Reynolds (*JOURNAL*, March 2005) states: 'By 1920, the greatest works of Sir Edward Elgar and John Singer Sargent lay behind them.'

This assertion that all Elgar's finest work was composed before the death of his wife in 1920 is repeated in numerous books and articles. Surely it is high time the charge was laid to rest? The beautiful Nursery Suite (1930) and the sketches for the Third Symphony (1933), so impressively realised by Anthony Payne, amply

demonstrate that in the final years of his life Elgar's creative powers had most certainly not deserted him.

100 YEARS AGO...

Alice Elgar's diaries make many references to Elgar's poor health during the spring of 1905. The furore caused by the inaugural Birmingham lecture was undoubtedly a contributing factor, but he was probably also worried by the forthcoming trip to America. They went to Morecambe for the Festival where Elgar adjudicated and where on 19 May he conducted a choir of nearly 300 voices (trained by Henry Coward) in *King Olaf*. He congratulated them all in a speech in which he said: 'You are making your own music among yourselves, and not importing it'—a thinly disguised criticism of music in London.

The Elgars boarded the *Deutschland* at Dover on 9 June, and took some time to settle. Eventually they enjoyed the six-day voyage, thanks to some convivial company, including Julia Worthington, a friend of Professor Sanford. The latter met them when they docked in New York on 15 June, and took them to his home in New Haven, Connecticut. The weather was very hot and humid and they both suffered: 'we sit in pyjamas bathed in perspiration from morning till night,' Elgar wrote to Alfred Littleton. He was still feeling unwell, but managed to enjoy some of the social occasions organised for him by Sanford.

On 28 June Elgar was presented with his robes as Doctor of Music at Yale University. 'Very interesting dignified ceremony,' wrote Alice. Horatio Parker played the 'Meditation' from *The Light of Life*, although Alice felt it was 'not read rightly'. However, he also played—possibly for the first of countless times at graduation ceremonies—*Pomp and Circumstance* No. 1. Two days later Elgar was visited by the president of the Cincinnati Festival and agreed to attend the next festival there the following spring. On 2 July they went to Boston for two days, staying in the Hotel Touraine, and meeting the American composer George Chadwick, who was director of the New England Conservatory of Music. They returned to New York on the 8th and the following day dined with Julia Worthington at her home at Irvington, about twenty-five miles up the Hudson River. They sailed for home on 11 July with Sanford and some of his friends.

Back in Hereford, Elgar was taken up with rehearsals for the forthcoming Three Choirs, and helping Ivor Atkins with the orchestration of his *Hymn of Faith*, for which Elgar had provided the libretto. He returned to 'a trunk of letters', as he told Jaeger, and he was still depressed: 'My life now is one incessant answering of letters & music is fading away,' he wrote on 6 August. One letter awaiting him was news of the early death of Robert Howson, conductor of the Morecambe choir. In his memory Elgar wrote a part-song, *Evening Scene*, begun on 21 August. It may also have been to soften the blow to Canon Gorton, as Elgar's commitment to go to Cincinnati would mean missing the next Morecambe Festival. Gorton was now invited to be a guest at Castle House in College Green for the duration of the Three Choirs. Other members of the house party were May Grafton, the Elgars' niece; Frank Schuster; Henry Embleton from Yorkshire; Mrs Henry Wood; Annie Gandy, another Morecambe acquaintance; and three Americans—Julia Worthington, Professor Sanford, and Frank van der Stücken from Cincinnati. Elgar's old friend Hubert Leicester was now mayor of Worcester, and had decided to use the Three Choirs as the occasion to offer Elgar the Freedom of the City of Worcester.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

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