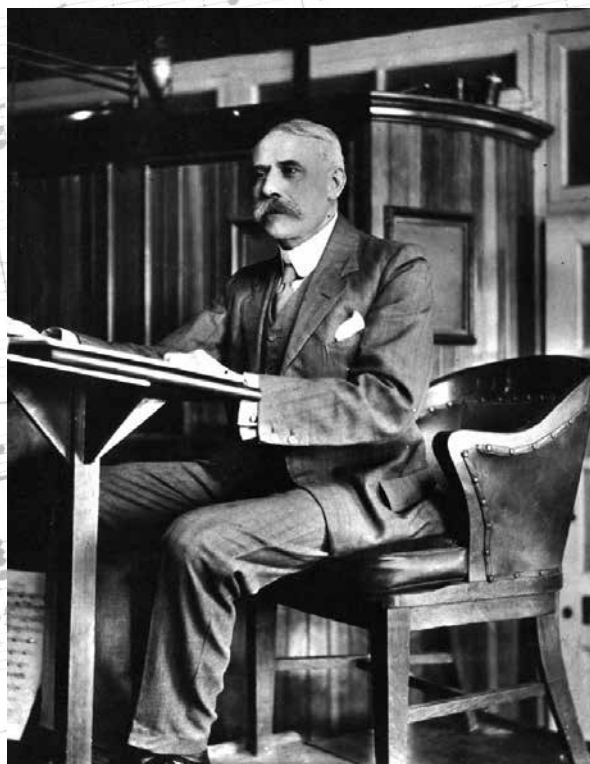


The Society
Elegar
JOURNAL



April 2015 Vol.19, No. 1



President

Julian Lloyd Webber FRCM

Vice-Presidents

Sir David Willcocks, CBE, MC
Diana McVeagh
Michael Pope
Dame Janet Baker, CH, DBE
Leonard Slatkin
Sir Andrew Davis, CBE
Donald Hunt, OBE
Christopher Robinson, CVO, CBE
Andrew Neill
Sir Mark Elder, CBE
Martyn Brabbins

Chairman

Steven Halls

Vice-Chairman

Stuart Freed

Treasurer

Helen Whittaker

Secretary

Helen Petchey

The Elgar Society Journal

18 Holtsmere Close, Watford, Herts., WD25 9NG

Email: journal@elgar.org

April 2015 Vol. 19, No. 1

| | |
|--|----|
| Editorial | 3 |
| The sound of Elgar's orchestra – a study of early twentieth-century orchestral performance practice <i>Ben Palmer</i> | 4 |
| A lost masterpiece – the demise of <i>King Olaf</i> <i>Martin Bird</i> | 15 |
| Michael Kennedy CBE – A Personal Tribute <i>Andrew Neill</i> | 24 |
| Imperial propaganda and <i>Caractacus</i> : Social Darwinism and Britain's altruistic obligation <i>Bryson Mortensen</i> | 30 |
| Music reviews <i>Jenny and Michael Wigram</i> | 38 |
| Book reviews <i>Geoffrey Hodgkins</i> | 40 |
| CD reviews <i>Frank Beck, Martin Bird, Barry Collett, Andrew Neill, Richard Wiley</i> | 42 |
| Letters <i>John Edwards, Peter Foxell, William Mackinnon-Little, Andrew Neill, John Norris</i> | 54 |
| 100 Years Ago | 59 |

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

*Front Cover: Elgar conducting at The Gramophone Company's Hayes studio on 22 May 1919,
having had a 'lovely drive [from Severn House along] lanes & elm fringed roads, chestnut trees in
blossom'.*

Notes for Contributors. Please adhere to these as far as possible if you deliver writing (as is much preferred) in Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format. A longer version is available in case you are prepared to do the formatting, but for the present the editor is content to do this.

Copyright: it is the contributor's responsibility to be reasonably sure that copyright permissions, if required, are obtained.

Illustrations (pictures, short music examples) are welcome, but *please ensure* they are pertinent, cued into the text, and have captions.

Presentation of written text:

Subheadings: longer articles benefit from judicious use of these.

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

Plurals: no apostrophe (CDs not CD's).

Foreign words: if well established in English (sic, crescendo) in Roman, otherwise italics.

Numbers: spell out up to and including twenty, then 21 (etc.) in figures.

Quotations: in 'single quotes' as standard. Double quotes for quotes within quotes.

Longer quotations in a separate paragraph, *not* in italic, *not* in quotes; please leave a blank line before and after.

Emphasis: ensure emphasis is attributed as '[original emphasis]' or '[my emphasis]'. Emphasized text *italic*.

References: Please position footnote markers *after* punctuation – wherever possible at the end of a sentence.

In footnotes, please adhere as far as possible to these forms (more fully expounded in the longer version of these notes):

Books: Author, *Title* (Place of publication: Publisher, year of publication), page[s]. Thus: Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 199.

Periodicals: Author, 'Title of article', *Title of periodical*, issue number and date sufficient to identify, page[s]. Thus: Michael Allis, 'Elgar, Lytton, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 84', *Music & Letters*, 85 (May 2004), 198.

End a footnote with a full stop, please, and never put a comma before a parenthesis.

Titles that are 'generic' in Roman: e.g. Violin Concerto. Others in *italics* (e.g. *Sea Pictures*; the *Musical Times*). Units within a longer work in single quotes, e.g. 'Sanctus fortis' from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Editorial

In the last issue of the *Journal* I reviewed the first recording of the complete incidental music for *Arthur*, regretting that ‘the music [was] performed with minimal vibrato on the part of the strings’. Although knowing that after hearing the Old Vic pit band play it for the first time Elgar wrote to Carice, saying ‘Rehearsal last Friday – such a funny noise’, I remained unconvinced that the sound produced by the Orchestra of St. Paul’s on the new recording was exactly what he had in mind. I am delighted to say that Ben Palmer, the conductor of the *Arthur* music, has accepted my invitation to write an essay on Elgar’s sound world, which takes pride of place in this issue.

Pride of place in the CD reviews is given to Andrew Davis’s new recording of *King Olaf* and *The Banner of St. George*. As readers will probably know, this is only the second recording of *King Olaf*, and it got me thinking of possible reasons why a work so immediately popular and widely performed in the 1890s should be so neglected today. I hope that the resulting essay on the ‘demise of *Olaf*’, together with my review of the CDs, will be sufficient to convince any doubters in the ranks to buy the new recording and discover that there are certainly no good musical reasons for the work’s current neglect.

Now, of course, we need a second recording of *Caractacus*, with its stirring Finale (*such* a good tune). Elgar ‘did suggest we should dabble in patriotism in the Finale, when lo! the worder (that’s good!) instead of merely paddling his feet goes & gets naked & wallows in it’ and I for one am delighted to wallow with him. Also in this issue you’ll find the final part of Bryson Mortensen’s trilogy, ‘Imperial propaganda and *Caractacus*’. It’s been a series that has raised a few eyebrows, but I am very grateful to have had the opportunity of publishing a view of *Caractacus* and its time from outside these shores.

The passing of our Vice-President Michael Kennedy (who, incidentally, produced alternate words for the Finale of *Caractacus*) is marked both here and in the *News*. Many of my generation will have got to know of Elgar’s life through Michael’s magnificent *Portrait of Elgar*, including Andrew Neill, who has written a personal tribute to his friend for this issue.

Finally, my thanks to Jenny Wigram and her son Michael for reviewing the latest offering from the Elgar Complete Edition – the concertos. Both are professional musicians – Jenny a violinist and Michael a ‘cellist – who have played the concertos as soloist and as orchestral members. It is always good to get a practical point of view on the Edition!

Martin Bird

The sound of Elgar's orchestra – *a study of early twentieth-century orchestral performance practice*

Ben Palmer

Introduction

We tend to think of the modern orchestra as having been established in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The standard symphonic line-up employed by late-Romantic composers such as Elgar is still (more-or-less) in use today, as are many of the concert halls designed and built at the time, and many of the conventions of concert-going. The period instrument movement has concerned itself almost exclusively with repertoire from before 1900, and the majority of performers tend not to consider composers such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Holst as candidates for the 'historically informed' treatment accorded to music of earlier periods. This is curious, not least because this was the first generation of composers for whom we have, thanks to the advent of recording technology, an irrefutable record of how their music actually sounded at the time it was first performed.

These early recordings, together with the few recent forays that there *have* been into historical performance in early twentieth century repertoire – the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment's *Dream of Gerontius*, Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth's centenary performances of *The Rite of Spring* in 2013, or Sir Roger Norrington's modern instrument experiments with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra, for example – have shown us that although it was not dissimilar in appearance, the orchestra of the early 1900s did indeed *sound* markedly different from its modern day counterpart.

Layout

It was Sir Henry Wood who, before the First World War, started to adopt the now commonplace practice of seating the first and second violins together on the left, and placing the 'cellos and basses to the conductor's right. Elgar, however, grew up knowing only the traditional eighteenth and nineteenth-century string layout, with first violins to the left of the conductor and seconds to the right, with the violas and bass instruments in the centre. Though this arrangement is still preferred by some British orchestras (most notably the Hallé under Sir Mark Elder), it fell gradually out of favour during the middle decades of the century, and can be considered a relative rarity today. Sir Adrian Boult, always a militant defender of the traditional antiphonal layout, made the case for it in a famous letter to *Gramophone* magazine in January 1968:

In my young days every orchestra (all over the world I think) placed its strings with the second violins on the conductor's right, opposite the firsts and balancing them. The basses were as near the centre as was convenient, but Hans Richter always made certain of their balance by splitting them with four players in each corner at the back. This violin balance was maintained by Toscanini, Bruno Walter and Weingartner all their lives and is still to be heard sometimes. ... With that balanced whole [the audience] will get the antiphonal effect between violins so often written for by composers from Mozart to Elgar. With the modern placing they will sometimes get a fuller sound when the firsts and seconds play in unison, but it seems to me the only advantage; while subtle effects, like Beethoven's scoring at the sixth bar of the Fifth Symphony, will come to them as from a pianoforte arrangement.

It is abundantly clear that Elgar, even in his later works, was still writing for an orchestra with the violins separated. This is borne out by the countless instances in his music. To quote Boult again: 'where firsts and seconds *answer* each other, and the obvious expectation of the composer was that the sounds should come from opposite sides of the platform'. A brief glance at almost any Elgar orchestral score will illustrate the point, for instance: *Froissart* (1890), four bars before Letter I; 'Enigma' Variations (1899), 12 bars before Fig.81; or the Cello Concerto (1919), four bars before Fig.56.

Though Wood also devised various schemes for re-seating the wind, brass, harps and percussion to best advantage, the arrangement of these instruments today remains much as it was in 1900.

Forces

Hans Richter's Hallé Orchestra, which premièred two of Elgar's works, *In the South* and the First Symphony, and which the composer himself conducted on numerous occasions, numbered 100 musicians in 1908: four of each woodwind, four horns, two trumpets and two cornets, three trombones, tuba, one timpanist and three percussion, two harps, an organist, and strings 16.16.11.12.10. Several years earlier, in June 1904, Richter also conducted the debut concert by the London Symphony Orchestra, including a performance of the 'Enigma' Variations. On that occasion, the LSO numbered 99 (Richter having asked for a hundred players), including 16 first violins, so we may assume that the proportions were similar to that of the Hallé. It is interesting to note that at this time, not only were the two violin groups placed antiphonally on the stage, but they were also equal in number, as had been common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By 1934, the year of Elgar's death, the Hallé line-up had been adjusted to 16.14.12.12.10, much closer to the standard modern practice of employing fewer seconds than firsts, fewer violas than seconds, and so on. In combination with the change in layout to Wood's violins-together formation, we may infer that the standard modern string orchestra has, albeit very subtly, a rather different internal balance from the orchestra for which Elgar was writing.

The only other significant change in the orchestra was to be the gradual disappearance of the cornet. During the course of the nineteenth century, many composers had begun to exploit the new valved brass, most famously Berlioz, who wrote often for pairs of cornets alongside the unvalved 'natural' trumpets. Even when the trumpet was furnished with valves, the cornet still persisted, especially in the theatre, the trumpet being prized for its nobility of tone, and the cornet for its agility. Elgar must have been aware of the cornet's supersedence by the trumpet, for he wrote for both instruments together only in some of his early orchestral works, *Cockaigne* (1901) and the *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches Nos.1-3 (1901-04). By the time he came to compose the fourth and fifth *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches (1907 and 1930 respectively), he was writing instead for three trumpets, the cornet having been replaced in all symphony orchestras by around 1920.



Fig.1. Elgar and the London Symphony Orchestra at Queen's Hall in 1922. The second violins are seated to the right of the conductor, as they are in Figs.2 and 3. (Arthur Reynolds collection.)

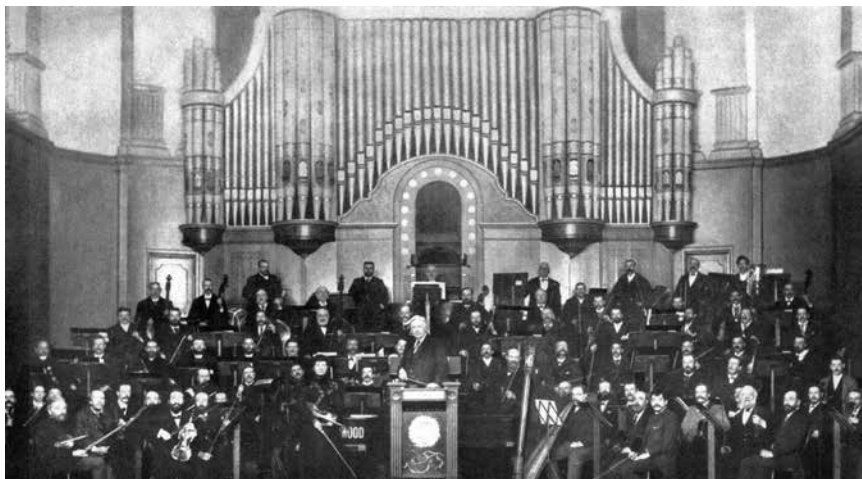


Fig.2. Sir Charles Hallé conducting the Hallé Orchestra in 1895. The solo violinist is Wilma Norman-Neruda (Lady Hallé).



Fig.3. Sir Henry Wood conducting the New Queen's Hall Orchestra at a Queen's Hall Promenade Concert in 1922.

It is interesting to note, however, that the pit band at the Old Vic, for which Elgar wrote his 1923 incidental music *Arthur*, still employed a pair of cornet players, though Elgar expected them to double on trumpets for a sequence of heroic offstage fanfares.

Instruments

Our modern stringed instruments are, to all intents and purposes, identical to those found in the orchestra in Elgar's time; indeed, many instruments from around that period, and indeed far earlier, are still in regular use today. Only the double bass had yet to be furnished with the more recent mechanical extension found now on most instruments; in the early twentieth century players either had a fifth string, or tuned their bottom E string down as necessary. Though Elgar's bass parts do not often venture below E, they do so with enough frequency that he must have known players were capable of these notes. In *Gerontius* (which features an uncharacteristically large amount of low writing for the basses, including the bottom C) Elgar shows that he was aware that different tuning systems might have been in use, offering the alternative 'If no open 'A' string, play the small notes' at Fig. 80 for a passage of *ppp* octaves.

String instruments in the early 1900s were predominantly strung with gut. These gut strings were made from the intestines of sheep, goats or cattle, with the lower strings (the violin G, and the viola and cello C and G) almost invariably overwound with silver, copper or silver-plated copper, which enabled the strings to be thinner and more responsive than unwrapped gut. As they became available throughout the 1890s, steel E and A strings for the violin (and, later, strings for the other instruments too) gradually came into use, though the practice was adopted earlier in the US than throughout Europe, where many players preferred to forgo the practicality of the new technology in favour of the warmer sound of gut, temperamental though it was. Steel strings remained controversial until at least the 1930s (as late as 1920, violinists in many German orchestras were contractually obliged to play on gut), so it seems likely that the change in British orchestras occurred gradually throughout Elgar's later years.

Much has been written about the supposedly inferior sound quality and harshness of metal strings, but it was the soloists who were the first players to adopt them in number. The American, Maud Powell (1867-1920), for whom Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto of 1912 was commissioned, adopted the wire E string as early as 1907, and said of it:

Most people will admit that hearing a wire E you cannot tell it from a gut E. Of course, it is unpleasant on the open strings, but then the open strings never do sound well. But all said and done it has been a God-send to the violinist who plays in public.

The French violinist Jacques Thibaud (1889-1953), who took up the steel E string before 1918, was unequivocal about its superiority:

After my last New York recital, Ysaÿe asked me, 'What strings do you use?' When I told him I used a wire E he confessed that he could not have told the difference. And, in fact, he has adopted the wire E just like Kreisler and the others, and has told me that he is charmed with it – for Ysaÿe has had a great deal of trouble with his strings. I shall continue to use them even after the war, when it will be possible to obtain good gut strings again.

The woodwind in the early twentieth century orchestra sounded noticeably different from a modern section, but this was perhaps more to do with the playing style (more of that later) than

the instruments themselves. Though advances in technology and manufacture have certainly made them easier to play and more reliable in intonation, in 1900 there was much less concern for the blend and homogeneity, and each instrument had its own characteristic sound. Flutes were almost invariably made of wood (metal flutes did exist, but wood was preferred in Britain), with most instruments based on a mid-nineteenth-century design by the German maker Theobald Boehm. The flute's broad sound was in stark contrast to the rather plaintive, penetrating quality of the oboe. The clarinet was more woody in tone, whereas the bassoon sound was reedy, due in part to players' preference for the French model of instrument. The sound of the woodwind did change gradually though the early years of the century, as younger and foreign players brought with them a new, more flexible, refined style of playing. Notable influences were the Belgian Henri de Busscher, who replaced William Malsch as first oboe in the Queen's Hall Orchestra in 1904, and Archie Camden, principal bassoon of the Hallé and later the BBC Symphony Orchestra, who adopted the German bassoon. Elgar's scores often called for the standard four 'doubling' instruments, the piccolo, the cor anglais, the bass clarinet and contrabassoon. In his first large-scale orchestral work, *Froissart* (1890), the contrabassoon is optional;¹ in the 'Enigma' Variations, written some nine years later, the instrument is not given as optional, but Elgar still cued the exposed solo at the start of Variation III for the double basses, suggesting that he might not always have expected the instrument to be available.

The family of instruments most radically different from the ones in use today is the brass. All the instruments were made with a smaller bore, which produced a narrower sound with much less volume; simply put, the brass could not blaze across the orchestra as it does today. Perhaps the most famous horn player of the period was Aubrey Brain (1893-1955). He deputised for his father on the LSO's first US tour in 1912, under the direction of Arthur Nikisch, and was appointed principal horn of Beecham's opera company orchestra in 1913, of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1922, and as co-principal of the LSO in 1923. Brain joined the BBC's Wireless Symphony Orchestra at its formation in 1927 and became principal horn of the BBC Symphony Orchestra when it was founded in 1930. He played a French Raoux hand horn made in around 1865, to which English-made piston valves had been added. He fought to preserve the 'English' style of playing, preferring the lighter narrow-bore French horns to the heavier and wider German instruments that were starting to gain popularity (Beecham himself bought a set for the London Philharmonic), forbidding their use in the BBC Symphony.

Most orchestral trumpets and cornets were pitched in B flat, with a detachable shank or a 'quick-change' valve to lower it to A. As the quality of trumpet manufacture (the orchestral cornet having become obsolete) improved throughout the early twentieth century, the intonation in sharp and flat keys, not to mention the response of the valves, improved, thereby reducing the need for the A shank or 'quick-change' valve, the players simply transposing at sight parts written for the A trumpet, or the other myriad transpositions found in the repertoire. It is a pity that this facet of the trumpet has been lost, as the A trumpet had a slightly thinner character, much as the B flat and A clarinets have a noticeably different sound. Even more lamentable is the complete disappearance

1 *Editor's note:* Writing to Elgar on 1 January 1890 about the orchestral requirements for *Froissart*, William Done, the Cathedral organist, said: 'Will you kindly tell me whether any extra instruments will be required. I hope not as the orchestra [i.e. the platform in the Worcester Public Hall] is so small.' He wrote again on the 4th, saying: 'At the last Festival we had both Tuba and Contra Fag. but I do not intend to go to the expense of both this time. I myself much prefer the Contra Fag. - one of the two we must have, but as Mr. [Lee] Williams will conduct throughout the Festival I must leave him to decide which and will let you know as soon as I hear from him.'

of the low F trumpet, a noble instrument written for by Elgar in some early works including the 'Enigma' Variations, *Gerontius*, *Cockaigne*, and the *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches Nos.1 and 2. Once commonplace, especially for the players on the lower second and third parts, it was rapidly superseded as the higher B flat/A trumpet came into general use, and parts (including Elgar's) came to be written either in B flat, A or C. Though conductors complained about the narrow sound of these new smaller instruments, players were quick to recognise the extra security they offered in the high register, not to mention their greater projection and volume. Even when most orchestral players were using the B flat/A instrument, some British composers continued to write for the F trumpet, notably Vaughan Williams in *A Sea Symphony* (1903-09) and the *London Symphony* (1914), though by the time he came to write the *Pastoral* in 1922, he too was writing parts in C.

Small-bore tenor trombones, and a bass trombone in G known as the 'English rose', were in use until well after the Second World War. These instruments, known as 'pea-shooters', produced a much narrower tone and, like the trumpets of the period, were simply not capable of producing the vast wall of sound we have come to expect from a modern brass section. The standard orchestral tuba was an instrument pitched in F, only a fourth lower than the euphonium (an instrument played by many tuba players) and much smaller than the enormous modern tuba played in most orchestras today.

Like the brass, in the early 1900s many percussion instruments, such as cymbals and drums, tended to be rather smaller than their modern-day equivalents. During the nineteenth century composers had become more adventurous with their timpani writing, demanding rapid changes of pitch which became ever more difficult on hand-tuned drums. The development of so-called machine drums, with mechanical devices to facilitate rapid tuning, made the situation much simpler, but it was only around by 1910 that all European orchestras had the complete sets of three, four or even five matching mechanical drums needed to cope with the most demanding contemporary scores. Timpani heads were always in calfskin, whereas many players today use the more durable and less temperamental plastic equivalent. Elgar wrote usually for three timpani, and gave the player ample bars rest to re-tune when he required a change of pitch, suggesting that he did not necessarily expect British orchestral players to have mechanical drums. Even in his Fourth Symphony of 1935, Vaughan Williams still offered an alternative note if hand-tuned drums were in use, a quick change from F to G flat being marked 'Gb chromatic drum', with the substitute C written above. Elgar asked several times for the timpani to be played 'with wooden sticks', but always for a special effect, for instance at *Gerontius*'s very first words ('Jesu, Maria, I am near to death'), or to recreate the sound of a ship's engine in Variation XIII of the 'Enigma' Variations. Norman Del Mar, in his posthumously published book, *Conducting Elgar*, gives a typically no-nonsense insight into how the composer expected this passage to be performed:

The score marks this to be played with side-drum sticks, but every timpanist in Britain knows that this is a mere euphemism for the two pennies which Elgar always insisted upon at his performances and which give a quite individual hollow, almost clattery quality in the prescribed *ppp*. It is particularly unfortunate therefore that our 'old' pennies, in their day the largest coins for their value, have been superseded owing to the introduction of decimal coinage. But two such coins, skilfully secreted into the timpanist's hand so that they can be interchanged with the sticks at fig.58 in a split second, are without doubt the proper agents for this passage.

Portamento

Undoubtedly the most striking feature of all early British orchestral recordings is the copious presence of string portamento. These lush, expressive slides, both upward and down, on intervals large and small, were an integral part of the string sound of orchestras at this time. Curiously, this extensive technique is widely thought of as an early twentieth-century phenomenon, peculiar to Elgar and his contemporaries. If there is one thing that early recordings prove, so prevalent was portamento in every single one, is that it *must* have been in use for a long time before 1900. We know that orchestral fashions changed slowly, over years and generations rather than weeks and months, and so it must have been with portamento. Clive Brown, in his superb book *Classical & Romantic Performance Practice 1750-1900*, devotes a whole chapter to it, citing numerous examples and descriptions of vocal and instrumental portamento. He concludes the chapter thus:

Virtually all the authors who discussed portamento in singing and string playing stressed the danger of abusing it; but their notion of abuse is directly dependent on what they considered to be the norm. It is impossible from these writings to be absolutely certain how apparent or frequent the musicians of the Classical and Romantic periods expected portamento to be, yet there is every reason to believe that it was often meant to be a distinctly audible effect ... Even the authors of the most violent diatribes against its abuse were almost certainly happy to hear it tastefully and proportionately introduced, but here, as elsewhere, ideas of what was tasteful or proportionate will almost certainly have been very different from ours at all stages of the period.

Some exponents of historical performance have indeed explored portamento in nineteenth-century repertoire (notably Sir John Eliot Gardiner, in his recent recordings of the Brahms symphonies with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique), but there is nothing close to what we hear in Elgar's recordings of his own works. Clive Brown again:

In the truncated version of Elgar's Violin Concerto, which Marie Hall recorded under the direction of the composer in 1916, there are many portamentos for both soloist and orchestra. The portamento implied by Elgar's fingering in the soloist's second bar in the Andante is performed very strikingly with a slow slide of the first finger up the G string. Interestingly, the same portamento, though still obvious, is much less prominent on Menuhin's 1932 recording with the composer, and in later recordings it is executed in an extremely discreet matter.

Similar indications that imply portamento are found everywhere throughout Elgar's scores (for example, in Variation V of 'Enigma'), though as the composer's own recordings testify, string players added it liberally as they desired, even when not specifically called for. So, we may assume that orchestral portamento reached its peak at some point in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and was probably considered desirable, or at least not undesirable. Sir Hamilton Harty, principal conductor of the Hallé from 1920-33, advocated a notably heavy portamento, whereas Sir Henry Wood discouraged it, and as a result his Queen's Hall Orchestra sounded comparatively much 'cleaner'. The practice diminished significantly through the next decades of the twentieth century.

Vibrato

Just as the early twentieth-century recordings make it clear that portamento was prevalent, so they show unequivocally that string vibrato, though it certainly *was* in use in the orchestra, was not applied continuously. The Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), a student of Mendelssohn and close friend of Brahms, wrote in his *Violinschule* of 1900:

...the pupil cannot be sufficiently warned against the habitual use of the tremolo, especially in the wrong place. A violinist whose taste is refined and healthy will always recognise the steady tone as the ruling one, and will use the vibrato only when the expression seems to demand it.

This certainly seems to have been the attitude on the British orchestral scene until at least 1930, when the pervading influence of younger soloists who championed the new sound, such as Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) and Yehudi Menuhin (1916-99), gradually encouraged orchestral players to adopt continuous vibrato.

Vibrato in the woodwind and brass, however, was almost unheard of in British orchestras. The above-mentioned Belgian oboist, Henri de Busscher, was a notable exception; it was his gentle French-style vibrato (it was adopted there much earlier) that inspired Léon Goossens, upon his appointment as principal oboe of the Queen's Hall Orchestra in 1915, to experiment:

The fashionable woodwind sound in the early days of this [twentieth] century was more wooden. Vibrato was rarely, if ever used, and certainly not as a fundamental aspect of tone production. Those first days at the Queen's Hall Orchestra represented for me a period of isolation from the prevalent style of sound reproduction. I suffered a great deal of abuse and jibing from other players at this time for persisting with my own concept of a beautiful oboe sound incorporating vibrato as an essential aspect of its singing quality. However, critics were favourably disposed and conductors liked it; so my confidence in the approach was ultimately justified.

The Goossens style of vibrato was slow to catch on, and most recordings of the period still feature a woodwind sound that is completely straight. It is easy to understand why it became more popular in due course, however; as the strings gradually moved towards a constant vibrato, the traditional English woodwind sonority must have seemed increasingly incongruous. It seems that the gradual change to continuous vibrato was entirely player-led – there is no record of conductors or composers asking for more, or indeed less, vibrato. The closest thing we have to a complaint is the famous Sir Thomas Beecham quip on hearing the vibrant Goossens tuning A given in the London Philharmonic Orchestra: 'Gentlemen, take your pick'.

Elgar's own recordings are particularly fascinating. *Cockaigne*, recorded in April 1926 with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra, reveals an intense but narrow vibrato from the violins in some places, but absolutely pure tone in many others, and almost no vibrato whatsoever from violas and 'cellos, except at the encouraging 'Vibrante' marking at Fig.14 and Fig.15. This ensures an excellent blend between the lower strings and the woodwind and horns with whom they are frequently doubled. The violins show restraint at the grandiose final statement of the big tune at Fig.39, in spite of another 'vibrante' marking given by Elgar – could this be because the players were aware of the flutes, clarinets, cornets and organ (all non-vibrato instruments in this recording) playing the same melody?

Elgar's 1933 recording of the *Serenade for Strings* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra

reveals a significant change. Vibrato is much more pronounced (especially in the violas and 'cellos) and is almost constant, whereas portamento, though still present, is much less obvious. The players pass up the opportunity to slide on several occasions where they would have certainly done so just a few years earlier. The sound in Elgar's recording of the prelude to *The Kingdom*, made that same year with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, is comparable.

And so, as the fashion for portamento diminished, continuous vibrato became more prevalent, arguably in inverse proportion to one another. The difference is clear: even as late as 1926 vibrato was judiciously used or not used, according to taste and context, whereas by 1933 it was practically a continuous colour, only withheld at moments of great tranquillity or gentleness, such as the close of the *Serenade's* second movement, which is played with absolutely pure tone.

A review of a performance by the Prague Quartet in the *New York Times*, printed on 5 December 1937, however, shows us that not everyone was enamoured with the new vibrato-fuelled sound:

Their style, however, will be considered old-fashioned by present-day technicians. The first and second violins use vibrato as sparingly as it was used before Kreisler came to show us its advantages in hiding (when the violinist is not a Kreisler) slight imperfections of tone and intonation. Fortunately the intonation of the Czech musicians is beyond reproach; clean, manly tone caused some regrets among those who prefer the leveling, over-sweet vibrato effect. For my part I felt thankful that violinists should still exist who realize that true violin tone is produced by a masterly handling of the bow and not simply by the wobble of the left hand.

Interpretation

Much could be written here about Elgar's interpretation of his own works (not to mention the interpretations by other conductors of Elgar's music). Suffice to say, he did not always strictly observe his own metronome marks, and nor was he averse to speeding up as the music gets louder, or slowing as it softens. His second recording of the 'Enigma' Variations, for example, made with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra in 1926, provides us with an unparalleled insight into his musicianship and his approach as a conductor.

The Adagio Variation IV, *Nimrod*, for instance, begins at crotchet = 42, markedly slower than his own printed metronome mark of 52. As the wind and horns enter at Fig.34, however, he lets the music roll forward, reaching the printed metronome mark at the *mf* climax, five bars before Fig.35, into which he gently slows again. He sets off again at crotchet = 52, and then again drives forward as the double basses, bassoons and third and fourth horns enter, giving great prominence to their *cresc. molto* theme, before pulling back in the bar before Fig.36, giving a great deal of time for the second half of the bar, allowing the crescendo of the whole orchestra to develop. Fig.36 begins again at the printed tempo, but gathers momentum, reaching crotchet = 60 at the strings' *rf*, before broadening with each accented A flat in the melody, giving huge emphasis to the largamente triplet. There is a hint of subito piano before the crescendo in the bar before Fig.37 (the score shows only hairpins, *cresc.* or *molto cresc.*), and the climax arrives back in the main tempo, slowing immediately on the second beat, as shown in the score. The performance of the entire movement lasts just two minutes and 47 seconds.

Conclusion

In writing this article I have sought, as much as possible, simply to present the facts, rather than offering a value judgement about whether or not it might be desirable to try to recreate any facets of the early twentieth century British orchestral style in contemporary performance of Elgar's music. That is for each reader, be they a listener, instrumentalist or conductor, to decide.

My own point of view, for what it's worth, is that there is a great deal to be gained from engaging with this information. Asking players to use period instruments and gut strings may not be practicable in an everyday orchestral situation, but every other topic discussed above can, with a little rehearsal time, be implemented with any modern orchestra to great effect. The layout of the strings, in my opinion, is the most crucial thing to get right – with antiphonal violins, Elgar's music simply leaps off the page. Achieving the correct proportions within the string orchestra (even if few promoters' budgets nowadays will stretch to an orchestra with 32 violins!) is easily done. Portamento is still very much in use today, and so string players merely need some encouragement to use it liberally and confidently.

As for what is undoubtedly the most contentious issue of the lot, the non-vibrato string sound ... Truthfully, I simply do not understand why so many are so vehemently opposed to it. To me, pure tone is expressive, rich, delicate, and ravishingly, heartbreakingly beautiful. Elgar's first recording made was in 1914. None of us can pretend to know exactly how British orchestras sounded before 1900, but given the almost vibrato-free early solo recordings of Joachim and Arnold Rosé, combined with the overwhelmingly convincing written evidence (and it is worth remembering that all the descriptions of vibrato use applied only to solo playing), it seems not only plausible but rather likely that orchestras played without using any at all.

To suggest that Elgar's music played with pure tone is, as Stephen Pollard put it, 'the musical equivalent of dead roses', or as the late Raymond Cohen was quoted as saying in *The Guardian*, 'disgusting', I find both confusing and rather sad.

I can't help thinking that Elgar would have loved the modern orchestra, with its virtuosity and rich, expensive sound, but that he might have written very differently for it. It stands to reason, therefore, that to realise as faithfully as we can what he *did* actually write, we should at least attempt to conjure up the sound of the orchestra that he had in mind, even if we can't all quite agree on exactly what that might have been.

Ben Palmer is Artistic Director of the Orchestra of St Paul's, and is in demand as a guest conductor throughout the UK and abroad. Recent CD releases include the première recording of the complete 'Arthur' incidental music (in his own edition, made for Volume 17 of the Complete Edition, of which he is editor) and David Matthews's arrangement for string orchestra of the String Quartet. On Saturday 30 May he conducts the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra at the Forum Theatre in Malvern, in a programme including the Serenade for Strings, the Cello Concerto with Guy Johnston, and the 'Enigma' Variations.

A lost masterpiece – the demise of *King Olaf*

Martin Bird

In 1896 a ground-breaking large-scale work for three soloists, chorus and orchestra, by an up-and-coming English composer, received its première at the Midlands choral festival that had commissioned it. Despite its formidable choral challenges, quite unlike any that the singers had experienced before, it was an immediate success with both performers and public alike, and over the next few years was taken up with great enthusiasm by choral societies across the country: scarcely a month would pass by without a performance.

In 1900 a ground-breaking large-scale work for three soloists, chorus and orchestra, by the same up-and-coming English composer, received its première at the Midlands choral festival that had commissioned it. Despite its formidable choral challenges being no greater, and the choral and orchestral forces available being, on paper at least, markedly superior, its performance was so mediocre that for the following two years it was shunned by choral societies across the country on account of its perceived difficulty, and received only two complete performances in this country.

Yet well over a century later scarcely a month passes without a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*, while the Elgar Diary has listed a mere ten performances of *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* in the last decade, of which just four were in England.

What went wrong? Why has a pioneering masterpiece of late Victorian choral music become no more than an occasional footnote while its successor has long been firmly established in the choral repertoire?

The genesis of Olaf

The establishment of the North Staffordshire Musical Festival owed much to two things: the completion of the Victoria Hall, Hanley, in 1888, and the presence in the Potteries of the leading choral conductor of the time, Charles Swinnerton Heap. The first Festival, in 1888, lasted just one day and was built around a performance of *Elijah*. In 1890 the second Festival, now a two-day event, included a number of British choral works, including the première of Heap's cantata *Fair Rosamund*, Stanford's *The Revenge*, Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens*, and Sullivan's *The Golden Legend*. In 1893 *Elijah* and Berlioz's *Faust* took centre stage: the only substantial British choral work being Henry Smart's *The Bride of Dunkerron*.

For the 1896 Festival the authorities, encouraged by Heap, commissioned a choral work from Elgar. This was bold move – brave even – from a composer whose only large scale choral and orchestral work to date was *The Black Knight*, a setting of Longfellow's poem 'From the German of Uhland'. He chose as his subject another Longfellow poem, 'The Musician's Tale: The Saga of King Olaf', from *Tales of a Wayside Inn*. It did not meet with universal approval, the delightfully sharp-tongued Rosa Burley being particularly forthright on the subject.

I confess that my heart sank when I realised that Longfellow was once more to serve as librettist and my hopes were not encouraged by a study of the poem. *Olaf* is a wretchedly muddled story in which there is neither consistency of character nor unity of plot. It is always difficult enough to follow the plot of any cantata but when we are asked to believe that the three soloists are skalds or bards who stand round and tell the story, occasionally impersonating various characters, the confusion becomes hopeless. The fact that the soprano and bass each represent more than one person, makes it impossible for the listener to know at any moment who is supposed to be speaking and indeed after hearing it a good many times with the score I have only the vaguest idea as to what it is all about.¹

But there is no doubt that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a favourite poet in Victorian times and, as well as having an obvious appeal to Elgar, the subject might have been regarded as a 'safe' choice by the festival authorities. As Stanford wrote:

... it has succeeded in transcending the best wishes and anticipations of the entire musical world. It would be scarcely too much to prophesy that a place, not only amongst the permanent successes of our generation, but even in the shelves of the classics, is ready for this masterly composition of the English school. [Longfellow's poem], from which the libretto is selected, has inspired our fellow-countryman to write a work which, for earnestness of purpose and refinement of expression, realises all the promises held out so temptingly by his early cantatas ... The subject is undoubtedly a fascinating one, simple in idea and picturesque in its poetical treatment, lending itself at every turn to musical expression, and capable of gaining from association with the sister art much of the vigour which its diction otherwise lacks. Although Longfellow's work may not be of the strongest, his rhythms adapt themselves admirably to musical treatment ... For the purposes of [the] cantata, the characters, which in Longfellow's poem are both numerous and ill-connected, have been reduced to four, and those the most characteristic in the poem.

To select from a lyrical poem of long and, it must be added, rambling dimensions matter sufficiently concentrated to tell the story clearly without sacrificing the best of the poetry, or mutilating the design of the action, was undoubtedly a matter of no ordinary difficulty. The dangers and pitfalls which lurk to catch the adapter have been very successfully avoided.

The score of the cantata abounds in beauties of the highest order: it is characteristic, sympathetic, poetical, and full of that intangible quality which, for lack of a better word, may best be termed style ... The instrumentation throughout is masterly, and, what is more rare in these days of advanced orchestral treatment, new. The vocal writing is admirable, the choral numbers designed with the greatest knowledge of broad effects.

The production of this masterly work has been received by a chorus of approval on the part of the public, of the press, and of the musicians. With regard to the enthusiasm of the first we have no doubt as to its genuineness or its lasting effect. The [work] will, by a long and prosperous career, furnish one more proof that a simple and interesting story, appealing to the best side of human nature, and told in good language, will, if wedded to music worthy of it, make a lasting mark, and have an elevating influence.²

Stanford, of course, was writing not about *King Olaf* but Sullivan's *The Golden Legend*, written for the Leeds Musical Festival of 1886, and it is here, I suspect, that we find the true genesis for Elgar's work. One only has to listen to the magnificently dramatic Prologue, 'The Spire

1 Rosa Burley and Frank Carruthers, *Edward Elgar; The Record of a Friendship* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 87-88.

2 Charles Villiers Stanford, *Studies and Memories* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), 156-169.

of Strasburg Cathedral. Night and storm. Lucifer, with the Powers of the Air, trying to tear down the Cross', to realise that this is no pious or insipid Victorian cantata, but a powerful work showing that one British composer, at least, was prepared to learn from Berlioz and Wagner.³

Elgar could not fail to have taken such a work to heart. He knew it intimately and from the inside, having played it on a number of occasions. He is believed to have played it first in May 1887 at a concert of the Birmingham Festival Choral Society, conducted by William Stockley.

Mr. Stockley, with watchful care, [conducted] a performance that reflected the highest credit on himself and those under his control. The audience received the "Golden Legend" in a manner that showed it had secured their regard and appreciation. We have little hesitation in saying it is a work of genius, and will keep its composer's memory green long after his operas are forgotten.⁴

In September he was among the first violins when it was performed at the Three Choirs Festival. Sullivan had promised, 'if he is in London, to come to Worcester to conduct his work in person'.⁵ In the event the baton was taken by Charles Lee Williams, the organist of Gloucester Cathedral. The concert was sold out well in advance, and provoked 'probably the largest gathering of carriages ever seen in Worcester'.⁶

It must have been to the managing committee a matter for regret (as it certainly was to hundreds of disappointed people outside) that it was found impossible to arrange for another performance on Thursday evening ... Those who were so fortunate as to be present on Tuesday night will not readily forget the effect produced by the marvellous prologue, nor the impression left on their minds by a first hearing of this beautiful work. Sir Arthur Sullivan has written nothing like it for wild grandeur or dramatic effect – effects produced by legitimate means, and, with the exception of the four bells, taken entirely from the resources of his orchestra. His howling wind and keyhole whistlings are not obtained by a rush of peas or shots in a swinging box, nor his thunder by the rattling of a sheet of iron, but the whole is finely conceived and artistically carried out.

As a rule the orchestral accompaniments were too loudly played for the size of the Hall, and the conductor seemed unable to make the orchestra take notice of the signs he was making in his endeavours to keep down the accompaniments. Sir Arthur Sullivan should certainly take out a patent for his musical flash of lightning with which he introduces Lucifer in the garb of the travelling Physician, or at least warn off would-be imitators. The effect is magical.

The audience were lavish in their applause at the beauty of the composition and at its faultless execution ... Rounds of applause were bestowed upon Mr. Lee Williams and the performers generally by the audience, who plainly showed their appreciation of Sullivan's splendid work and of the efforts of the conductor and performers.⁷

3 The only recording, conducted by Ronald Corp, is available on Hyperion CDA67280, admirably engineered by Tony Faulkner and Mike Dutton. However, it pales in comparison with the centenary performance given at the Leeds Musical Festival on 15 March 1986 by Charles Mackerras and the BBC Philharmonic, and recorded by the BBC.

4 *Birmingham Post*, 4 May 1887.

5 *Gloucester Citizen*, 18 April 1887.

6 *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 10 September 1887.

7 *Ibid.*

It was next heard in Worcester on 22 November 1892 when it was performed by the Worcester Festival Choral Society conducted by Hugh Blair. Elgar was leading the orchestra, and ‘our amateur instrumentalists came out of the ordeal with untarnished laurels ... strengthened by the engagement of a fair proportion of professionals from Birmingham and elsewhere’.⁸

The cantata was rendered at the Public Hall in a manner eminently creditable, an awkward blemish notwithstanding. The chorus was of its accustomed strength – over 100 voices – and the orchestra was increased to 70 to meet the exigencies of the scoring. The society has been ambitious to attempt the work for a year or two past, and the preliminary obstacles were overcome in time to allow of its being taken up for the first concert of the season.⁹

Success in Hanley

It was in the summer of 1894 that Elgar began serious work on *King Olaf*. He had long shared with his mother a love of Longfellow; in *The Golden Legend* he had an example of what could be done to bring out the drama in a Longfellow poem; and he had immersed himself in the great dramatic operas of Wagner. Now Swinnerton Heap was to perform *The Black Knight* with the Walsall Philharmonic Society, albeit with piano accompaniment, a performance that took place on 13 December. Heap had been to Forlì at the end of November to go through the score with Elgar: on 21 December he returned to invite Elgar to conduct it with another of his choirs, the Wolverhampton Choral Society, on 26 February 1895, and this time with orchestra.

Mr. Elgar received quite an ovation at the close of the work, and a pleasing little scene took place during the interval, when he appeared along with Dr. Heap and Mr. G. N. Adams [Chairman of the Society] in the ante-room, and thanked the members of the society for the excellent manner in which they had done their work. Dr. Heap, who had been singing amongst the tenors, also added a few words, and said he felt confidence in recommending Mr. Elgar’s work to the committee, and the result proved that his confidence was not misplaced. Mr. Adams expressed the hope that the society should again at some future time have another work before them from the same composer.¹⁰

Heap performed it again, with the Birmingham Festival Choral Society, in December 1895, by which time he had persuaded the North Staffordshire Musical Festival to commission *Olaf* for production at the 1896 Festival.

Elgar completed the vocal score on 21 February (and the very next day commenced the vocal score of *Lux Christi!*), and by the end of May Novello had produced copies. It was not until late June, however, that Heap and his chorus-master, Frederick Mountford, received copies of the choruses in Sol-fa with which to begin rehearsals.

One must not under-estimate the enormity of the challenge that *Olaf* would have presented to the chorus. When I conducted it with a scratch choir of singers of varying degrees of ability and experience, we brought it up to a reasonably acceptable standard in eight hours’ rehearsal one weekend. The North Staffordshire Festival Chorus, in contrast, comprised members of nine small choirs functioning in the Hanley district, the majority of whom would not have been able to read

8 *Worcester Herald*, 26 November 1892.

9 *Berrow’s Worcester Journal*, 26 November 1892.

10 *Midland Evening News*, 27 February 1895.

music. They would have worked, in their individual choirs, at the immensely difficult choruses over a period of many weeks. True, many of them would have had experience of the idiom through their singing of *The Golden Legend* in 1890, but Sullivan's choruses, effective as they are, are by no means as tricky as Elgar's. Havergal Brian knew one of the tenors, Arthur Bailey, the village grocer of Odd Rode Church, and musical enough to be its choir-master.



Fig.1
Harry Acworth

... we were rehearsing a work by a new chap named Elgar – called *King Olaf*. It is strange music and we don't understand it. We are not supposed to lend out copies, but I will bring mine for evening service and you can look at it during the sermon.¹¹

Elgar himself went to Stoke on Trent on 8 October 1896 to rehearse the Festival Chorus.

The rehearsal at Stoke last evening was conducted by Mr. Edward Elgar, the composer of the Cantata “King Olaf”, written especially for the forthcoming festival by that gentleman. Mr. Elgar had a very cordial reception. He took the choir through the more difficult passages of the work, some of the parts being gone through a number of times. On the whole, the choir showed a capital knowledge of the divisions they were expected to sing, and with a little more attention to the work should give an impressive rendering of it on the all-important occasion. The Cantata promises to prove a great hit; and to add to the reputation of the composer. At the close of the rehearsal, Mr. Elgar expressed the pleasure afforded him to conduct the choir, and thanked the singers warmly for the attention given to his suggestions, and the evident desire to benefit by them.¹²

As with *Gerontius*, the first performance was somewhat fraught: Edward Lloyd, the tenor soloist, failed to appear for the final rehearsal owing to a misunderstanding over train times, for which Elgar blamed Heap; and Elgar's grip on proceedings at the concert was by no means certain.

... as [Elgar] walked to the conductor's desk he looked too frail for the task and seemed at times as though he did not know the score. The audience was small, and on that cold foggy morning could be said to reflect the general atmosphere. The orchestra had been drawn from London, Manchester and Birmingham, and was led by Willy Hess. The principals were Medora Henson, Edward Lloyd, and Ffrangcon Davies. But Lloyd had missed the final rehearsal, an omission that nearly wrecked the performance at ‘And King Olaf saw the light’ (sung by Lloyd). Disaster was saved by Willy Hess, for whose grasp and intuition Elgar always expressed himself as very grateful. At the close, however, the small audience, chorus and orchestra rose and acclaimed the composer, for they knew in their hearts that they had assisted in making history.¹³

Olaf was an all-round and instant success, not least with the critic of the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, and future biographer of Elgar, Robert Buckley.

Mr. Elgar has eclipsed himself; has produced an epoch-making work, and I think that will make

11 Reginald Nettel, *Ordeal by Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 11.

12 *Staffordshire Sentinel*.

13 Havergal Brian, *Havergal Brian on Music*, Vol.1 (London: Toccata Press, 1986).

famous among musicians the place of its production. Henceforth 1896 will be spoken of at Hanley as the “King Olaf” year. After the “Black Knight” and the “[The Light of Life]” great things were confidently expected, but Mr. Elgar has surpassed expectations. English music is lifted to the highest plane of contemporary art; Mr. Elgar is demonstrated the greatest English genius since Henry Purcell. The new cantata is stamped throughout with greatness. “King Olaf” is great in detail, great as a whole, great in its mastery of modern artistic resource, great in thematic conception and development, great in popular attractiveness, great in the occult subtleties that conquer the expert, great in originalities of melody and harmony, exceedingly great in dramatic forcefulness, and above all great in inspiration and the marvellous spontaneity and lucidity in its most complex combinations. We have no hesitation in classing “King Olaf” with the greatest work of the kind extant. “King Olaf” belongs to the fraternity of Dvorak’s “Spectre’s Bride” and the “Faust” of Hector Berlioz; and we are not sure that Mr. Elgar’s work is not in some respects greater than either. No dramatic cantata of equal greatness has ever been produced by any English composer. By “King Olaf” Mr. Elgar unquestionably takes rank among the greatest masters of the age. There is not a weak spot, nor a dull bar in the work. Its 86 minutes of duration commanded a rapt attention, none so rapt as the little knot of professional critics in the balcony. These one and all rejoiced to be at once present for the birth of a masterpiece. All were prepared for a striking and powerful work, but the pianoforte score, replete with beautiful harmonic and structural music-pictures, passed but a vague adumbration of the glowing chromatics of the orchestra.¹⁴

He was not alone: a review in the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* explained that ...

At the close of the performance, which all round was a very fine one, there was an outburst of cheering that showed unmistakeably that “King Olaf” had made its mark. Festivals demonstrations do not always mean much; failures have been applauded; but this time the audience was right. “King Olaf” is a great work; as a secular cantata there is no greater in the English school of composition.¹⁵

... whilst *The Standard* thought that ...

Mr. Elgar has constructed a score that may fairly be said to excel any Festival novelty that has hitherto been produced this year. The music flows on with delightful freedom from laboriousness, the part-writing, both for voices and orchestra, is luminous, though certainly not easy, and if Mr. Elgar knows his Wagner, which unquestionably he does, there is no suspicion of plagiarism. Considering the difficulties of *King Olaf*, the performance under the composer’s direction this morning was extremely good, the sweet-toned North Staffordshire choristers giving all possible effect to the choral numbers. This remarkable work should be heard in London at the earliest available opportunity.¹⁶

It was all summed up neatly by the critic of the *Glasgow Herald*:

The music of “King Olaf” is thoroughly modern in idea and in development. To suggest characters, personal peculiarities, and the influence of certain events upon the future, Mr Elgar freely resorts to representative themes. The instrumentation is throughout full of detail, and repays the closest attention, which, indeed, justice for an exceptionally clever work demands whether obtaining expression through vocalists or instrumentalists. Mr Elgar has the subject entirely within his grasp. He has mastered each of its many situations; it is this that gives individuality to a composition replete with power and imagination.

14 *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 31 October 1896.

15 *Birmingham Post*, 31 October 1896.

16 *The Standard*, 31 October 1896.

The entire work teems with interesting points, and the whole is marked by a strengths and firmness but rarely displayed either by native or foreign composers nowadays. The composer, who conducted, was again and again enthusiastically recalled to the platform at the close.¹⁷

Following the success of the first performance, *King Olaf* was given in London (at the Crystal Palace) in April 1897, and by the end of 1897 a further ten performances in major towns and cities throughout England had been noted by the Elgars. Given that choral societies would have finalised their programmes for 1896/7 well before the first performance, this was a remarkable achievement. By the end of 1899 there had been more than 35 performances up and down the country.

The contrast with Gerontius

Olaf was written in response to an invitation from the North Staffordshire Musical Festival to produce a new work of sufficient length to fill half a programme. *Gerontius* was written in response to a similar invitation from the far more prestigious Birmingham Musical Festival. The forces required are similar: three soloists, a large choir and a large orchestra. Both texts were by well-known writers of the day: Longfellow and Newman, and both required abridgement to bring musical settings within the time limits required of Elgar. For *Olaf* the task was undertaken jointly by Elgar and his neighbour, Harry Acworth, who also provided brief links to the Longfellow scenes that remained: for *Gerontius* the task was undertaken solely by Elgar. Both were written for secular festivals, so that Newman's Catholicism was no obstacle, particularly as the 'noble, saintly and heroic'¹⁸ General Gordon had been reading and annotating a copy as he faced death at Khartoum, a fact which made it 'the most widely read literary work, after Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, on the subject of the afterlife in an age that was preoccupied with death'.¹⁹

Musically the two works have much in common. Each shows the influence of Wagner in its use of a modified version of the *leitmotif* scheme of construction (and some of the themes in *Olaf* are reminiscent of those of *The Ring*). Each is a dramatic tale, told in an almost operatic way. Elgar's description of his heroic tenor as 'a man like us ... a sinner, a repentant one of course but still no end of a worldly man in his life, & now brought to book'²⁰ could apply as well to *Olaf* as to *Gerontius*. In each work the primary role of the orchestra is to drive the sense of drama rather than to act as a mere supporter of the chorus. It is in the chorus work that both differ fundamentally from their British predecessors – even from a ground-breaking work such as *The Golden Legend*.

From a technical point of view both present considerable difficulties to the amateur singer: it takes a high degree of musicianship, awareness and basic skill just to sing the right notes at the right time and to maintain the pitch, especially against an orchestra that is frequently completely independent of the chorus. Gone are the days (which extended to Mendelssohn and beyond) where altos, tenors and basses could expect to be doubled by the trombone section. *Gerontius*, it is true, requires a double chorus plus semi-chorus, but then Elgar knew he had twice the number of singers at his disposal compared with *Olaf*, and professional singers available for the semi-chorus and to 'stiffen' the amateurs. And in *Olaf*'s 'As torrents in summer' Elgar provides a better opportunity

17 *Glasgow Herald*, 31 October 1896.

18 Joseph Wardle, *General Gordon: Saint and Soldier* (Nottingham: Henry Saxton, 1904).

19 Fr. Ian Ker, *Newman and The Dream of Gerontius* (Elgar Society Journal, Vol.17, No.2, August 2011), 30-32.

20 Letter to Jaeger, 28 August 1900, EBM 8401.

for the chorus to lose pitch than in the ‘Kyrie eleison’ or anywhere else in *Gerontius*, and in a crucial place at the commencement of the Epilogue: a considerable risk if you wanted to ensure your audience went home with happy memories!

Nowadays we accept without question (in this country at least!) that *Gerontius* is a great work – and rightly so – but let us not be blind to its flaws and *longueurs*. For me the chorus ‘O loving wisdom of our God’ remains a stumbling block in which Elgar just seems to be going through the motions, especially in those performances (the majority, I fear) where his brisk metronome mark is ignored. And let us not forget Frank Schuster’s remark that ‘beside *The Kingdom*, *Gerontius* is the work of a raw amateur’.²¹ *Olaf* may have more imperfections than *Gerontius*, but that doesn’t make it something to be ignored or dismissed because of the existence of the later work.



Fig.2
Charles Swinnerton Heap

So what went wrong?

By common consent the first performance of *Gerontius* was a disaster, but it was by no means a total disaster. Hans Richter gives a more balanced view in his diary: ‘The chorus in *Gerontius* very bad, the poor composer was in great despair; but the solo performances and the orchestra were excellent’. Whatever may have been said of the soloists, they were of the highest class. In Edward Lloyd Elgar had a massively experienced tenor, more than familiar with the Elgarian idiom, who had been working on his part for two months before the première. Marie Brema was a superstar who had sung Brünnhilde and many other Wagner roles at Bayreuth – not necessarily the ideal background for the part of the Angel, but impressive nonetheless. Harry Plunket Greene’s intonation has been criticised, and it does not seem to have been his strongest point throughout his career, but from personal experience I can sympathise with the challenge of having to maintain an accurate solo line against a chorus determined to sing a semitone flat.

Blame for the shortcomings must fall almost entirely on the chorus, though it must be allowed that there were extenuating circumstances for even their dismal performance. The Birmingham Musical Festival, in common with all other major musical festivals in the country, had a policy which can best be described as ‘let’s sing as much music as possible regardless of whether we have sufficient time to rehearse it’. To this was added the caveat of ‘the band’s expensive, so we can’t afford to have more than 18 hours of full rehearsal even though we’ve got 30 hours of music to get through’. It’s a shock to the system to sing with an orchestra after rehearsing for weeks with a piano, and it takes time to acclimatise and get things right. At those piano rehearsals the majority of the chorus was working from single line parts. In other words, they would have had little or no idea of what other parts were singing, and very little help in pitching the note for each lead. But of course that was not all. Swinnerton Heap died before the chorus had sung a single note of *Gerontius*, and, when faced at the final rehearsals with the results of inadequate preparation, Elgar displayed his lack of man-management skills by haranguing the singers rather than working with what he’d got to improve matters.

None of this, however, excuses the fact that a body of singers, many of them paid, chose not to honour the responsibilities that went with their commitments. As a result *Gerontius* gained an

21 Adrian Boult, introductory note to EMI recording of *The Kingdom*.

immediate reputation as unsingable – despite being no more difficult than *Olaf* – from which it took many years to recover.

The fact that it *did* recover is no reason why it should have replaced *Olaf* in our concert programmes. But we are looking back at *Olaf* having known *Gerontius*. Musicians of 1896 were not at that disadvantage: *Olaf* was demonstrably better than just about anything new in the way of choral music at that time, and presented an exciting and refreshing change. I cannot deny that, with the benefit of hindsight, *Gerontius* is ‘better’ than *Olaf*, but that cannot be the sole reason for its neglect nowadays. Perhaps the reason lies in its libretto. Poor old Harry Acworth has had his critics over the years, but his additions to *Olaf* were, after all, limited to linking passages. But it was Longfellow who saddled Elgar with lines for his love duet such as: ‘T’is the bodkin that I wear, when at night I bind my hair’. I’m sure Brünnhilde and Siegfried or Tristan and Isolde are saddled with similar couplets, but we can ignore them ’cos they’re normally singing in German! I’d be interested to know if any member of the Elgar Society has ever knowingly read a word of Longfellow other than in a musical setting: in an Elizabethan rather than Victorian age his poetry is ‘known of’ rather than ‘known’. Somehow we – I – can accept Newman’s words as an integral part of a musical masterpiece while having to suppress a snigger at Longfellow’s as part of another.

We must also accept the reality that Elgar is not the only great composer who is known by one choral work above all others. One well-known online record store lists currently 129 recordings of *Messiah* but just 11 of *Judas Maccabaeus*; 37 of *Elijah* but just 5 of *Paulus*; and it lists the new recording of *Olaf* (but not Handley’s), alongside no fewer than 26 of *Gerontius*.²²

Spare a thought, too, for the organisation that needs to at least break even from its concert promotions. Why risk lesser-known Handel oratorios when *Messiah* will pull in the punters, or *Paulus* when you could do *Elijah*? It’s hard enough to avoid a loss with *Gerontius*: put *Olaf* on your schedule and you will decrease your income by 50% while retaining the same expenses.

As Elgarians we may just have to accept that, as far as regular performances or recordings are concerned, *Olaf*’s day is done. But do not draw from that the conclusion that *Olaf* is anything other than a great and pioneering masterpiece of English choral music.

22 Make that 27! A new recording by Colin Davis and the Staatskapelle Dresden is announced as we go to press, and will be reviewed in the August issue.

Michael Kennedy CBE – A Personal Tribute

Andrew Neill

This is about a man who used words to convey a love and understanding of music. He was not a trained musician but he was a man of music; an art he adored and which he succeeded in clarifying and communicating for and to countless others. It was through his words we came to know him but it is through music he will be remembered.

It is possible that Ralph Vaughan Williams was one of the most perceptive of composers. In asking Michael Kennedy to write his musical biography, Vaughan Williams had seen in his young friend an ability that Michael might not have yet appreciated, being then only in his early thirties. This book is indispensable for anyone interested in British music and is as fine a testament as any to Michael's abilities, particularly as it led to the great books that followed. Michael had an exceptional skill in presenting the character of a man or woman 'warts and all' without diminishing that person and, by his exceptional and beautiful English, enhancing his subject in the process. This is obvious from his books on Elgar and Britten, neither of them 'easy' personalities. Michael also had the ability to spot connections or associations that would not have occurred to anyone else:

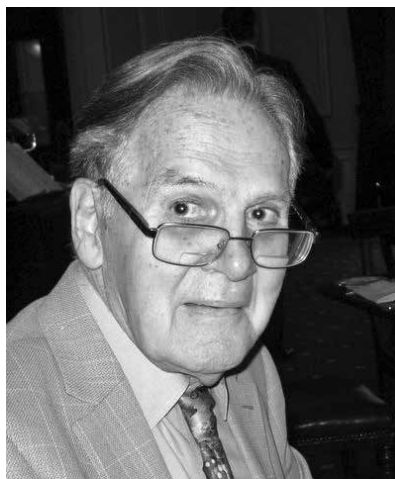
To the end of his life his [Vaughan Williams'] pale skin was fresh, his face unlined. No ravages of time or struggles of spirit showed there. Humour and serenity, kindness and candour were his habitual expressions, with occasional flashes of sudden anger. As a friend once said, 'Even when he is telling you you are wrong you feel "What a pleasure"!'. Of all this, Epstein's bust reveals nothing, but David McFall's is a strikingly true portrait of the man as he really was, like Sir Gerald Kelly's 1958 painting.¹

I met Michael Kennedy, with his wife Eslyn, for the first time in 1981 at a dinner to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the formation of The Elgar Society. He accepted the invitation to speak without hesitation and it was heart-warming to learn years later how much he approved of and supported societies such as the Elgar, RVW and Strauss, to all of which he devoted time and energy. He never turned down a request to speak at a Society event or do something 'for the cause'. Over many years Michael and his second wife Joyce travelled to London for the annual Strauss Society Christmas party. Michael would prepare a serious interview with a major musician such as Dame Janet Baker or Dame Felicity Lott or Sir Charles Mackerras. In 2007 Joyce and Michael came to the Royal Festival Hall so that he could present The Elgar Society medal to the conductor Andrew Litton: another example of their devotion and support for a Society they both believed in wholeheartedly. It was my privilege, in turn, to present Michael with his own Elgar medal during a Hallé concert in 2011.

1 Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 386.

Following that first meeting it was to be another twenty years before our relationship developed into a friendship – which of course included Joyce – as my wife Victoria and I came to spend many a happy time in their home in Manchester where our conversations would cover a range of subjects such as cricket, politics, history and, of course, music.

Michael's common sense and practical approach to most issues always made these discussions stimulating – and I can see now his eyes shining as he turned quickly towards me as a point suddenly came into his mind: 'No ravages of time or struggles of spirit showed there. Humour and serenity, kindness and candour were his habitual expressions'. There would be telephone calls: 'Have you heard the Kaufman Wagner CD?; What did you think of the Grange Opera *Capriccio*?; Oh dear – the Glyndebourne *Rosenkavalier* was far worse than I feared; Mark's *Leningrad* was simply superb – did you hear the broadcast?'²: that sort of thing. Then there



Michael Kennedy

were long chats about Sir John Barbiroli, Strauss's endings to his operas, Verdi (that last scene in *Aida*, where Verdi pares everything down to a minimum, exercised us both) and the genius of Puccini and Donizetti. Of course we could also depress ourselves about the state of English cricket!

Why was Michael important? For readers of this it will be because of Michael's writings about music and on composers such as Britten, Elgar, Mahler, Strauss, Vaughan Williams and Walton. These books, in particular, are worthy of our memory as are Michael's qualities: his *honesty*, *humanity*, *humour* and *humility* all of which stick in my mind. Those four 'h's': how rare to see them together and how rare to see them applied to a person who was as much a journalist as he was biographer. There is more, as Michael Henderson stressed in a tribute in the *Daily Telegraph* on 3 January: 'Many critics leave behind readers who remember their work fondly. But few changed our perceptions of great creative personalities in the way Michael did ... And even fewer were loved so widely and deeply as this journalist-scholar, whose innings ended this week'.

Michael's *honesty* never wavered but it could be quirky. He thought the comma was over used and said so. Of course he used commas in his writing but he used them sparingly. Then I recall leaving a concert with Michael where music of some minor British composers had been played: 'That's the sort of thing that gives British music a bad name', he muttered to me. However, in contrast, if he thought a composer was worthy of acclaim, no matter if the musical establishment was less than enthusiastic about this particular composer's work, he would support the cause of, say, Puccini because he knew Puccini was a genius and did not mind saying so. Of course he did not love the music of all composers but you would not know, for example, his lack of enthusiasm for French Baroque music from one of Michael's greatest contributions to music: his editing (with his wife Joyce) of the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*. That indispensable book is as important as is his espousal of the life and music of Elgar, Strauss and Vaughan Williams.

For me, though, one of the most important musical biographies I have ever read is *Portrait of Elgar*. I had become seduced by Elgar's music when at school but then, beyond a few recordings,

2 Sir Mark Elder's performance of Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony issued on the Hallé's own CD label.

there was little opportunity to hear much of his music or get to grips with Elgar's life. This, of course, came before Jerrold Northrop Moore's monumental biography of Elgar that was published in 1984. Stupidly, I was unaware of the pioneering work of Diana McVeagh or Percy Young whose work I subsequently read. In 1968 *Portrait* appeared and there was Elgar the man laid out before me in glorious English – with all the quirks and foibles that go to make up this particularly difficult genius – generously analysed. I was hooked and, I think, read the book in two sittings! What is more Michael's love for Elgar's music never diminished. I recall sitting next to him a few years ago during a lecture when the 'canto popolare' from Elgar's *In the South* was played. He grabbed my arm and whispered: 'what a tune'!

This tribute is my attempt to say what I felt and what I know many others felt about this wonderful, generous man: someone who has touched the hearts of many musicians and music-lovers around the world as well as his vital domestic community in Manchester. Michael was someone who taught himself music – as Joyce said: 'he picked it up as he went along'. This, I believe is an important factor in his character, leading to a wonderful clarity. He had to make up his own mind – he was never told what to like or what not to like: he came to a conclusion and stuck to it! I am sure it helped him to identify with Elgar – another auto-didact. Michael's honesty combined with a generous heart and a mastery of the English language made him one of the most compelling figures in post-war British musical life.

Few people have been able to share their love of music with so many and, at the same time, open unknown doors to a world of ever-expanding riches. Michael adored Strauss's music. Those who do not 'get it' cannot understand what it meant to Michael but the secret is perhaps contained within two of what Michael would have called the most 'adorable' characters in all opera: the Composer in *Ariadne* who sings at the end of the *Prologue*: 'Musik ist eine heilige Kunst' (music is a holy art) and the Countess Madeleine in *Capriccio* who cannot decide on the primacy of words or music. Despite Michael's wonderful fluency I have little doubt that he would have made his choice – and we are the richer, as a consequence. Music, for him, really was 'eine heilige Kunst'!

* * *

Michael's love of Manchester never dimmed and his honorary doctorate from the University of Manchester in 2003 is evidence of the affection in which he was held in academic circles. Nowhere was his devotion more evident than in his support of the Royal Northern College of Music. Joyce Kennedy once described her relationship with Michael as 'one half of a package' and, in talking to the staff at the College, it is obvious to me that both Joyce and Michael 'were part of the fabric of the place'.

Michael was first a Fellow of the College and subsequently appointed a Companion in 1999.³ For many years he was a member of the College's Board of Governors and a member of the first Joint Committee chaired by Dame Kathleen Ollerenshaw. When Joyce and Michael married in 1999 they held the ceremony in the College's Concert Hall. It was then that *The Joyce and Michael Kennedy Award for the Singing of Strauss* was established for, instead of asking for wedding gifts, they asked friends to contribute towards a new fund to promote the singing of Strauss's vocal music. Over the years this has developed into one of the major and most prestigious prizes in the College.

3 Companionship of the RNCM is rarely awarded and the honour is only currently held by four other people, the Duchess of Kent, Sir John Manduell CBE, Sir Simon Towneley KCVO and Professor Edward Gregson.

The Award has grown since its inception and is now able to make a substantial difference to a student's time at the RNCM. The first award was for £750 but has risen to £5,000, a hugely important award for young singers. Past winners have included Wendy Dawn Thompson, John Pierce, Nadine Livingstone, Chris Turner, Rebecca von Lipinski, Lee Bisset, and Kathryn Rudge. Joyce and Michael are often in touch with these singers some of whom were able to come to Michael's funeral on 12 January.

Joyce Kennedy is a passionate devotee of chamber music and both she and Michael have supported every RNCM Chamber Music Festival, assisting the Festival financially by sponsoring a key performance. Michael also wrote *Music Enriches All*, an illustrated history of the first twenty-one years of the College, and also *The History of the Royal Manchester College of Music*, both of which remain invaluable works of reference for the College.

* * *

A few years ago I was dining with Joyce and Michael at their favourite Italian restaurant not far from their home in Manchester. It was one of those evenings when only a couple of other tables were occupied, one of which was in use by four men who were clearly having a good time. Just before we left one of the four approached Michael and asked if he was *the* Michael Kennedy. It transpired that this individual was a local window-cleaner and an avid attendee of Hallé Concerts. He was also a great admirer of Michael's writing on Elgar. During the preliminaries Michael did his best to direct the conversation in my direction on the assumption that the Chairman of the Elgar Society would be of far greater interest! Briefly we played a form of tennis as I attempted to bat the conversation back to Michael, the person whom his fellow Mancunian really wanted to meet! At last Michael was convinced and entered into a brief but heart-warming conversation with this man who left telling the restaurant staff how thrilled he was to have spoken to Michael.

On another occasion when, after a late concert in Worcester Cathedral, a number of us (including Joyce and Michael) ended up in a nearby Pizza Express restaurant. Michael gazed mournfully at the menu and confessed that 'he did not really like pizza'. He was persuaded, without much difficulty, to have two deserts instead! The story of the window-cleaner is an example of Michael's inherent modesty and *humility*. There was nothing false about his instinctive reaction in attempting to direct this man in my direction and he seemed almost surprised that a complete stranger would want to meet him, and this was the man who had become musical royalty in Manchester – occupying the intellectual position vacated when Sir Neville Cardus died in 1975.

Of course Michael was a man of many parts: journalist, newspaper editor, critic, biographer, writer on music and compiler of the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*. Everyone will have his or her own idea of Michael's greatest achievement. Perhaps this may be his editing of the Northern edition of the *Daily Telegraph* or his many perceptive and witty reviews or the Dictionary or his pioneering work *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* from 1964: but I have already nailed my colours to the Elgarian mast!

Michael's *humanity* is at its most obvious in his devotion to the music and life of Richard Strauss. Once he had made his mind up about Strauss's character he never wavered: Strauss was a German patriot, initially seduced by the Nazis but who then had to play a game of cat and mouse with the authorities to protect his Jewish daughter-in-law and grand-sons. When Michael's biography of Strauss, *Richard Strauss Man, Musician, Enigma* was published in 1999 more than one German musicologist recognised that Michael could write in ways that they still felt unable

to emulate over fifty years after the collapse of Nazi Germany. Then there was Wagner whose music Michael adored and admired but whose personality and views he naturally found abhorrent. Nevertheless he was completely objective dismissing those who constantly talked about Wagner's personality with the comment: 'the man who wrote *Mastersingers* cannot be all bad'!

In reading just a few of the millions of words written by Michael I remain in awe of his ability to put his finger on the essentials whether about a piece of music or a person. For example he ends his Strauss biography thus: 'Strauss has as many flaws and limitations as any other composer, but they seem to me to fade into insignificance compared with the overwhelming greatness of his life's work. It was not a Beethovenian greatness. He did not give mankind spiritual consolation. He did not believe he would alter mankind's destiny through his art. But he could look into the human heart, sometimes through a glass darkly.'

Then there was Elgar. How could one not be beguiled by a statement such as this from the preface to his *Portrait of Elgar*: 'I believe, however, that it [Elgar's music] is far too great to be tied to one short period of history and that, in any case, it is music of so personal a nature that it can be described accurately not as "Edwardian" but only as "Elgarian"'? And then at the very end: 'That he was a great master of the art and fabric of music, a genius of the orchestra, is only an aspect of the final portrait of Elgar as one of those rare beings who make men dream dreams and see visions.' There is much of Michael in those last words (from *The Kingdom*) too.

Michael insisted he was not a religious person but he recognised integrity when he saw it, as his friendship with many in Manchester's Jewish community shows. He formed a close relationship with the late Rabbi Felix Carlebach and, when the Rabbi died, Carlebach's daughter asked Michael to write her father's obituary of which the following is an excerpt (from the *Daily Telegraph*):

Carlebach was in many ways an actor or a conductor manqué, diverting his love, knowledge and skill as an artist into his calling as a pastor of souls. His style of oratory, with an inimitable German-Jewish accent, would have done justice to Sir Donald Wolfit. It was once wryly remarked that it would be worth being dead to have one's funeral oration delivered by Felix Carlebach. He looked the part, too, with his handsome face, Old Testament beard, wide fedora hat, astrakhan collar and pinstripe trousers.

Orthodox in his beliefs, he never forced his views on others. He had a wide circle of non-Jewish friends to whom he was humane, broad-minded, unbigoted and generous-hearted as well as a most amusing companion.

That last paragraph might be a description of Michael and his wonderful, subtle sense of *humour*. In his note to his *Glyndebourne: A Short History* he writes: 'I would like to have told more anecdotes, such as Fritz Busch's remark in 1935: "No stars are ever away at Glyndebourne, because even work is more attractive than the night life of Lewes." And John Prichard's quip on hearing that the operatically inexperienced Bernard Haitink was to succeed him as music director: "I didn't know Brahms had written an opera"!'.

This is not an obituary but a personal tribute and inevitably misses much: the difficult circumstances of Michael's upbringing, his wartime service in the Royal Navy, his editorship of the Northern edition of the *Daily Telegraph*, his love of cricket and support for Lancashire, his devotion to Manchester and his beloved Hallé Orchestra, his friendship with Sir John Barbirolli and, today, with Sir Mark and Lady Elder. It fails to show his importance as a critic and his generosity of spirit when trying to find the best in a production or performance and it does not mention the love of and for his adoptive family. It also fails to show the breadth of Michael's knowledge and his wide musical interests. To cover all these aspects would mean trespassing on the

world of biography. However, Michael's love for his wife Joyce was such an important part of his life that I am sure few would disagree with me when I stress this here. Without her neither would we have read much of Michael's more recent writings nor would he have been able to enjoy his last years as he and she managed his Parkinson's disease. Joyce made sure his encouragement for the performance of unknown works by Vaughan Williams came to something and that his ideas for Strauss's sesquicentennial celebrations were put into effect. It is not surprising that Manchester put on what was perhaps the most original Straussian celebration of them all – anywhere.

In February 2011 Simon Heffer celebrated Michael's 85th birthday in the *Daily Telegraph* and ended his article as follows: 'The Elgar Society usually gives its medal to foreigners, in thanks for the promotion of the composer's work abroad. There is no finer man for whom to break that tradition than Mr. Kennedy, whose service to the memory of Elgar has been second to none. For his services to music as a whole, not least his long work as a governor of the Royal Northern College of Music, Mr. Kennedy had the CBE (itself long overdue) in 1997. If any man alive deserves a knighthood for his services to our country and our culture, it is he.' Alas a knighthood is not possible now, but Simon Heffer's words remain as valid today as they did in 2011.

Of course we will miss Michael but, generous as he was, he had already become excited by a new generation of writers who shared his enthusiasms. In conclusion I feel it important to let Michael have (almost) the last words, in his role as part critic and part chronicler of our time. In his note for the CD release of the 1952 recording of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* Michael's compassion and realism come together powerfully and movingly: '... [Kathleen] Ferrier, who knew while she was making the recording that it was her own *Abschied*, that she would see the lovely earth grow green again only once more. Like Mahler she answered the challenge of a death sentence by reaching the pinnacle of her art. Yes, she shows some strain on her top G, but the radiance, vibrancy and transcendental compassion of her singing here place it beyond the reach of carping criticism.'

Few have that gift of reaching to the heart of any matter as Michael showed in that piece about Ferrier and in numerous other reviews, articles, books and CD notes. We who knew him will be envied that we lived at the same time as Michael: that we came to love him. If his life fades from the memory his words will not. It is wonderful to state with certainty that, through his words, Michael Kennedy will not be forgotten.

Imperial propaganda and *Caractacus*: Social Darwinism and Britain's altruistic obligation

Bryson Mortensen

This is the third in a series of three articles that discuss various aspects of empire in Edward Elgar's 'Caractacus', each focusing on the appearance of one of three concepts emphasized in contemporary propaganda: national pride, chivalry and military, and Social Darwinism. This article will study the third of the three messages.

The final piece of the ideological foundation of the British Empire was the concept of Social Darwinism. Central to this idea was the notion that some civilizations were naturally in a better state or more evolved than others; consequently, it was the responsibility of advanced civilizations to raise lower ones to their level.

While what was meant by 'better state' remains somewhat enigmatic: the mechanism tasked to achieve it in Britain was religion – specifically the roles of missionaries. Nominally, they went to new British colonies to spread Christianity. As early as 1792 an important article by William Carey argued that it was a Christian obligation to 'convert the heathens'.¹ Consequently, missionary societies were formed to train and support missionaries sent to the 'uncivilized' British colonies.² Fifty years later, David Livingstone reported to the Foreign Secretary of the London Missionary Society: 'There are many and very large tribes in the direction in which I go. All are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. I hope God will in mercy permit me to establish the gospel somewhere in this region ...'.³ While spreading Christianity was the primary mechanism employed to help lesser civilizations rise to the level of the 'British state', Jeffrey Richards points out the idea that spreading British social values was also essential: '... the idea that the British being the greatest race in the world had a duty to provide government and justice for "inferior races"'.⁴ Richards argues that this 'leadership principle' was seamlessly woven into the missionary outreach that was fundamental to Britain's dissemination of the very values that distinguished its empire from Rome's empire. The *Daily Mail*, at the time of the Diamond Jubilee espoused a popular belief that British military establishments across the Empire were equipped for this mission by their creation of 'civilized soldiers': '... that we send out a boy here and a boy there, and the boy takes

1 This article was published by William Carey and was titled "An enquiry into the obligations of Christians, to use means for the conversion of the heathens."

2 Smith, Simon C. *British Imperialism 1750 -1970* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43.

3 *Ibid.*, 47.

4 Richards, Jeffrey. *Imperialism and music: Britain 1876 -1953* (Manchester University Press, 2001), 14.

hold of the savages of the part he comes to, and teaches them to march and shoot as he tells them, to obey him and believe in him and die for him and the Queen. A plain, stupid, uninspired people, they call us, and yet we are doing this with every kind of savage man there is.⁵ Although the focus was on training ‘savages’ to be soldiers, the larger goal was that they also become gentlemen of the very type Elgar aspired to be.

In *Caractacus*, Elgar exemplifies this theme, portraying the ‘conversion’ of Orbin, the suitor of Caractacus’ daughter Eigen, from membership in a ‘semi-priestly order of minstrels’ (a phrase Acworth used in the introduction to the libretto) into a committed member of Caractacus’ army. This portion of the story (which has no historical basis⁶) lines up quite conveniently with Britain’s idea of making ‘savages’ (non-Christians) into soldiers as a way of equipping them to be members of a civilized society. Acworth has Orbin follow Caractacus, the hero and ‘great gentleman’ of the story. By this turn of the plot, Acworth created a character who could symbolize the positive effects of Social-Darwinism espoused by Victorian Britain.

The one shortcoming of this analysis is the fact that Orbin leaves ‘religion’, albeit Celtic mysticism, to join a group that is essentially non-religious. Considering Elgar’s issues surrounding religion, it comes as no surprise that he opted not to make religion the ideological centrepiece of the work.⁷ Charles McGuire’s research into any possible role the Celtic revival played in British nationalism highlights several legends suggesting that Caractacus may have become a Christian while in Rome; indeed he and Eigen may themselves have become missionaries who attempted to convert the Celts to Christianity.⁸ While all of this is based on legends concocted by McKay, it has the potential to have played a role in the perception of Caractacus as an upstanding gentleman and Christian in turn-of-the-century England, thus influencing Elgar’s interpretation of Orbin’s ‘conversion.’ In the libretto, the Arch-Druid’s claim to be both the ‘voice of wisdom’ and the ‘voice of God’ would be considered blasphemy and Orbin’s subsequent decision to join Caractacus parallels the conversions happening throughout the British Empire at the time of *Caractacus*’ composition.

Most interesting, however, is how Elgar textually and musically portrays Orbin’s transformation from common ‘savage’ to a ‘great gentleman’ by virtue of his association with Caractacus. Orbin’s transformation is best shown by observing the changes that take place linguistically and musically during his conversion.

Before the Conversion

There are essentially two moments that provide insight into Orbin’s character before he leaves the Druidic order. The first is hearing Eigen relate the tale of a druid maiden in Scene I. More interesting and complex is Orbin’s interaction with the Arch-Druid as he receives the prophecy (Scene II).

In both scenes, Orbin’s dialogue is straightforward and unornamented. In Scene I he responds to a question posed by Caractacus somewhat curtly, immediately directing his attention to Eigen’s

5 *Daily Mail*, 23 June 1897. ‘At Saint Paul’s: A Wondrous Sight.’

6 Acworth, in the argument at the beginning of the score, admits that Orbin is an imaginary character.

7 McGuire, Charles Edward. ‘Measure of a Man: Catechizing Elgar’s Catholic Avatars’, in *Edward Elgar and His World*, edited by Byron Adams (Princeton University Press, 2007), 3-38.

8 McGuire, Charles Edward. ‘Elgar and Acworth’s *Caractacus*: the Druids, race, and the individual hero’, in *Elgar Studies*, edited by J.P.E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 65.

tale. The incipient nature of the Orbin's contribution to the scene implies a poorly developed – almost dismissible – character connected to an uneducated person. In the next scene, Orbin's role becomes much more important as he attempts to read the omens in the shield belonging to the war god from whom the Druids received prophecy. He says only what needs to be said, scarcely hinting at the role he will play in later scenes. At this point, Orbin seems little more than a tool to keep the story moving. His plain speech and limited verbal interaction symbolize the British portrayal of an 'unredeemed savage' at the time Elgar composed the piece, even though his position was highly favoured among the Celts.

The music which Elgar associates with Orbin is a subtle hint at his future significance. His theme, played before his entrance (see Fig.1), is very short but harmonically complex. While his mere four lines of text in scene one are set to music that forms a basic periodic structure, it transitions chromatically until arriving in B major – the key of Eigen's tale – via the leading tone of F-sharp (see Fig.2). Both phrases of Orbin's melody end on a chord in first inversion. This harmonic instability conveys insecurity, even lack of strength, in Orbin's character.



Fig.1: 'Orbin' Scene I, figure 33, bar 20

Orbin

Fig.2: Scene I, figure 38, bar 4

Orbin's singing in the second scene is not so chromatic, although some intriguing chromaticism does appear at the text 'dim the shadows gather'. The music preceding the actual prophecy has several seemingly truncated gestures, sometimes as short as two notes (see Fig.3). The melody by which Orbin describes his vision is again transitional (see Fig.4). The first phrase begins in E flat major and quickly shifts to the relative minor, after which it uses the G natural to eventually prepare for the F minor following his vision.

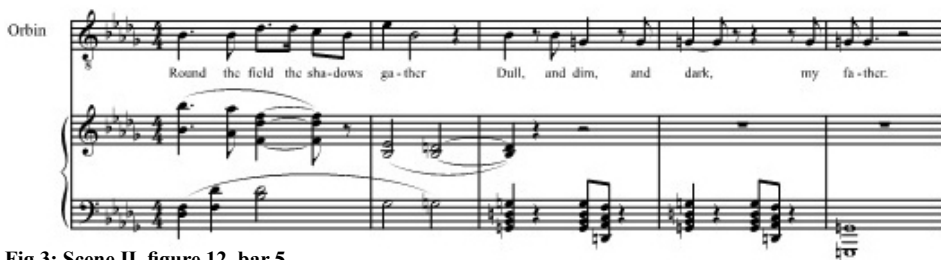


Fig.3: Scene II, figure 12, bar 5

Fig.4: Scene II, figure 14

Elgar's musical representation of Orbin makes his character seem unrefined. His melodies lack the well-crafted phrases sung by either Caractacus or Eigen, nor are the complex chromaticism and seemingly truncated phrases characteristic of the English folk tradition. This complex of characteristics portrays Orbin as the 1900s version of 'uncivilized'. Though in love with Eigen and working toward the victory of the Britons, he has not yet developed as the chivalrous, heroic character he will become later in the story.

The Moment of Conversion

The moment when Orbin decides that he will stand and fight with Caractacus prompts a dramatic change of character – a change that occurs in the middle of his singing. His moment of conversion comes when he shouts 'No! Meet them with our war cry ringing!' in the third scene. Following this declaration, he is given well rhymed, metric poetry to sing:

Orbin

Shall we greet them? Shall we meet them? And with

might - y spell de - feat them?

Orbin

No! Meet them with our war cry ring - ing.

Tenor

Meet them with our war cry ring -

Bass

Meet them songs of tri - umph sing - ing.

ing. Meet them songs of tri - umph sing - ing.

Fig.5: Scene II, figure 35

Meet them with our war cry ringing.
 Meet them songs of triumph singing!
 In thy hand thou bear'st the omen,
 Trust to that against the foemen;
 Spell and charm will fail thee ever,
 But thy sword deceive thee never.

Orbin has given up on the power of the druid's omens, deciding instead to trust the strength of the sword. Also, rhymed couplets (AABBCC) stand in stark contrast to all his past dialogues (which are uniformly ABAB). Most dramatically, the three lines preceding Orbin's change of heart are significantly shorter, do not rhyme, and use the same word at the end of each sentence. Taken together, these texts portray an uneducated, unrefined man:

Shall we greet them?
 Shall we meet them?
 And with mighty spell defeat them?

While there is penultimate syllabic rhyme, the repetitive use of the same word to end each phrase sets the stage for the comparatively elegant poetry that follows.

Elgar makes a similar dramatic change in Orbin's music (see Fig.5). At his cry, 'No!' Elgar suddenly modulates from Eb major to G major – the dominant key of the Eb's relative minor, and the same key used for Elgar's portrait of the English countryside. The following music suddenly begins to imitate English folk song. Orbin's phrases are heroic and have a more organized structure which is echoed almost literally by the chorus of soldiers. These six phrases, reminiscent of Caractacus' singing a few measures earlier, effectively suggest that Orbin has joined the group of civilized men led by Caractacus. In addition, Elgar refers to this new theme as 'Orbin's exaltation song' while Herbert Thompson calls it his 'heroic song', suggesting a significant change in Orbin's personality.⁹ The music preceding his 'No!' highlights the contrast: these melodies are grouped in short, truncated phrases similar to his phrases at the beginning of the scene (see Fig.3). This dramatic contrast of Orbin's characterization reflects Elgar's possible intention to present Orbin as a changed being, a true representative of the altruism of the British Empire. In fact, Orbin's theme undergoes a change from this point on (see Fig.6) that Elgar characterizes as 'noble and bold.'¹⁰



Fig.6: 'Orbin Transformed', Scene II, figure 44

After the Conversion

To solidify the change in Orbin's character, his dialogue in scene three resembles the dialogue heard just after his conversion in Scene II:

9 Rushton, Julian. 'Caractacus Thematic Table.' Personal email from author, 1 September 2012.

10 *Ibid.*

Eigen, my lady lov'd, I go,
And but for thee no tear should flow;
Pray to the gods to grant my arm
To guard thy father's head from harm,
And pray this parting may not be
Our last beneath the greenwood tree.

While the simple rhyme scheme mirrors the music of his conversion, his speech is very altruistic. Instead of asking Eigen to pray for his safety, he implores her to ask the gods to help him protect her father. Unlike his bureaucratic dialogue in scenes one and two, here his speech is permeated by chivalrous thoughts, worthy of one who has evolved into a civilized being and a gentleman.

Elgar's music validates this transformation. As he recounts the previous scene's events to Eigen, Orbin reprises Caractacus' chivalrous battle theme from Scene II (see Fig.7). Such a quotation casts Orbin as upstanding soldier. Later, as Orbin professes his love for Eigen, his melody imitates folk song (Fig.8):



Fig.7: Scene III, figure 19, bar 4



Fig.8: Scene III, figure 21, bar 2

The harmonic progression follows predictable patterns and the conjunct melody full of gentle neighbouring tones and suspensions strengthens the simple folk-like melody that is representative of Orbin's new chivalrous nature.

Orbin's evolution from savage to soldier in scene three confirms the British belief that their pursuit of Empire actually improved the lives of their new colonists, if not willing fellow citizens. The message of Social-Darwinism which dominated the pro-imperialist propaganda at the time of the Diamond Jubilee, clearly influenced Elgar and Acworth's development of the libretto and Elgar's powerful music. The evolution of Orbin stands as a powerful example of the positive effects of Social-Darwinism and ultimately the altruism of British colonial expansion.

Dr. Bryson Mortensen is an Assistant Professor of Choral Music and Director of Choral Activities at the University of Wisconsin – Rock County. He is also Artistic Director of the Festival Choir of Madison and Chorus Master for the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra Chorus.

MUSIC REVIEWS



ISBN
978-1-904856-32-0

313 pp. + lxi.

Elgar: *The Concertos (second edition)*

Elgar Complete Edition Vol. 32, edited by John Pickard (Rickmansworth: Elgar Society Edition Ltd., 2014)

Elgar wrote only two concertos and it is sensible and useful that they are published together as an entity. The Volume begins with two 'Forewords'; that which accompanied the first edition of the concertos volume published in 1988, and a foreword to the second edition, discussing the reasons for producing another edition along with new information on the concertos that has come to light since the first edition (for instance, in the piano score of the Violin Concerto given to Ysaÿe). This is followed by extensive analysis of the sources from which the edition is compiled along with a commentary on alterations that have now been made to the score which are different from the Copy Text, this being the Original published score of 1921 by Novello.

As a conductor or soloist coming to a work in order to study it in preparation for a performance, one has a choice as to which edition will provide the most informative and useful guide to the concertos. This new edition provides an abundance of useful information for the studious performer. The very enjoyable forewords give a thorough insight into the background of both works and also bring a further understanding to the complexities of the compositional process surrounding both of these works therefore bringing certain difficulties to the editorial process. This in turn puts more onus on the performer to research their own decisions when interpreting these concertos. The commentary, and preceding analysis of sources, gives a clear insight into the editorial decisions made. The important historical nature of the sources used to make these decisions, for example the Beatrice Harrison solo 'cello part used for the recording with Elgar, proves particularly interesting. A clear key for the sources being used would have been useful at the beginning of the commentary. Although this was given in the Analysis section, this became slightly awkward as we tried to navigate between three sets of pages to understand the source from which a change had been made.

John Pickard explains at the end of the foreword to the second edition why this new volume is so large. This was felt necessary due to the doubling of the number of pages in the Violin Concerto in order to reconcile the layout of this concerto with that of the later published Cello Concerto. This does however make the edition, as a score, quite a substantial size, and maybe a little unwieldy for practical purposes on the conductor's stand.

Other practicalities of using the score seemed to have been sacrificed for the cleanliness of the edition. Due to the new layout of the bars, important tempo changes often came at page turns for the conductor (which is not the case in the original Novello edition) – and there are many more page turns.

Although manageable, this does not seem ideal, especially in the rubato-inclined music of Elgar. Turning pages at just the point when more control of the orchestra is needed does not seem advisable. Furthermore, the rehearsal letters are small (3mm in height compared to the original 5mm) and not very clear, often placed just before, and melding into the following text above the stave. (When arranging music for orchestras on music writing software, we often need to move the rehearsal letters upwards to make them more prominent.) The rehearsal letters and other text relating to the whole score only appear twice on the page, the original repetition at the bottom having been omitted.

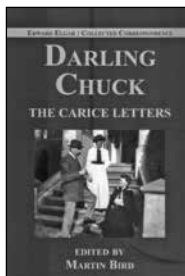
The music also appears very sparse (staves are 1mm less in height than before, and the space between the staves is 2.5mm more than in the original!). Although the appearance is therefore very clean, the notes are noticeably small and may be hard for a conductor to see easily when at a distance from his score, compared with the normal heavier, more condensed print where, also, similar musical lines in different parts of the orchestra are more easily identified. This lighter print and more spacious score also makes the solo line less obvious, as the notes are not so densely packed.

On the positive side, it is wonderful to have bar numbers but, until all the orchestral parts are re-printed with numbers, this won't be of much use in rehearsal. However, we found that the bar numbers were extremely useful when identifying all the changes which had been made.

When editing the work of a composer who historically seems so close to us through sources such as recordings, testimonials and marked scores from performances, the editorial process is a complicated deciphering of all the sources. However, the resulting edition gives us a clear guide to how these decisions have been made. Through the many sources considered a thorough insight into not just Elgar's own compositional process, but the impact of his colleagues and friends on these works emerges and gives today's performers a chance to respond to the rich creative process of Elgar in their own performances.

Jenny and Michael Wigram

BOOK REVIEWS



493 pp + xi

ISBN 978-1-904856-54-2

Martin Bird (editor): *Darling Chuck: The Carice Letters*
Rickmansworth, Elgar Works, 2014

I was delighted when the Editor asked if I would review *Darling Chuck*, the latest volume of correspondence in the series, being the letters between Carice and her parents. However, on reflection I wondered if the letters would throw any light on Elgar's music: from all I knew of his compositions he did not seem to consult Carice. Yet there are more than 550 letters and postcards: Edward and Alice were very good at keeping in touch with their daughter when they were in London, other parts of Britain, or abroad. The volume also contains reproductions of drawings which often occurred in Elgar's letters.

The correspondence begins in February 1897 – when Carice was 6 – with a note and drawings by Elgar of his having a tooth out! A few of the early letters in the book are from Elgar's mother to Carice: Ann Elgar was clearly an intelligent and caring person, but sadly she died in 1902. As Elgar's fame grew and he was in demand to conduct his own works, both at home and abroad, he would send Carice a postcard. When Alice went with him it was common for both of them to write.

Carice was obviously highly intelligent, with a wide vocabulary and mature expression for her age: in September 1897 – a month after her seventh birthday – she wrote following the Hereford Three Choirs, at which Elgar's *Te Deum & Benedictus* were first performed: 'I often think of you and imagine how lovely it must be, seeing father stand up and conduct them all, and all sorts of lovely sounds'. In August 1899 the Elgars were at Birchwood – Carice's first visit as she had been in Scotland with a schoolfriend the previous year – and she helped Elgar with setting traps for wasps and making paths through the woods: he called her 'my Man'. As Carice grew older the letters from her parents gradually became more adult; although it probably seems strange to us now to sign off 'zus own faser Ed: Elgar' to a twelve-year-old; and for Alice to write 'Dearest dear love, yrs C.A.E.': and from Alassio in December 1903 Elgar told her that he was 'dood & cein & cever'[sic].

Reading Rosa Burley's book *Edward Elgar – the record of a friendship*, it is possible to believe that the Elgars came close to being guilty of child neglect, but given the need for Elgar to acquire income by conducting, lecturing and so on, they were clearly loving and caring parents. Elgar's increasing fame continued to take him away from home, but either he or Alice would normally keep Carice informed, especially when they were out of the country, attending concerts in Europe. On his visit to Germany and Holland with Frank Schuster towards the end of 1904 he sent Carice postcards from Mainz, Rotterdam (two), Amsterdam (two), and Köln (three): hardly a neglectful parent! The Elgars first visit to America in 1905 was to

receive an honorary degree from Yale University: most of the letters were written by Alice as Elgar was in demand for social occasions. Later overseas visits to America and Europe all elicited postcards or letters home. The letters and cards from Capri, Naples and Rome in the first months of 1907 are full of interest: and in November that year the three of them went to Rome for the winter: Carice kept a diary from November to the following May (this will be included in a later volume).

Space precludes more details, except to say that life continued in much the same way, until the family moved to London in 1912. During the war, Carice worked in the War Office; and after Alice's death in 1920, she became engaged to a farmer, Samuel Blake: they married in January 1922, and she went to live at his farm in Surrey. The number of letters to and from Elgar obviously increased, as he was now living on his own. The following year he moved back to Worcestershire, and the correspondence increased again. As the years went by, Carice was torn between her farm in Surrey and her ageing father.

This a fascinating book: I have not mentioned the details of the puzzles and crosswords that father and daughter exchanged, and Elgar's quirky humour, of which there is a great deal. My favourite was a hymn which was sent to him in 1922, the last two lines of which read 'Let not your faith be dim/Hope on! Hope on!' but the typewriter failed to write the 'e' in 'hope'; Elgar comments 'The typist's machine drops 'E' with good effect'. There is so much more I could have mentioned, but space does not permit. Buy the book: I guarantee you will not be disappointed.

Geoff Hodgkins

CD REVIEWS



CHANDOS

CHSA5149

Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf, The Banner of Saint George

Emily Birsan (soprano), Barry Banks (tenor), Alan Opie (baritone), Bergen Philharmonic Choir, Choir of Collegiūm Músicūm, Edvard Grieg Kor, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Sir Andrew Davis

Pride of place this time must go to what are only the second complete recordings of *King Olaf* and *The Banner of Saint George*. Incredibly, it is 30 years since the first recording of *Olaf* was made, sponsored by the Elgar Society and, in particular, by one of its members. It had taken a mere 89 years from the first performance to achieve that milestone. The first recording of *Saint George* was made the following year, again, 89 years after it was written. Yet in the first ten years of their lives these pieces were performed regularly all over the country: with determination and a *Bradshaw's Guide* you could hear *Olaf* once a month if you so wished. Now we're lucky to hear of a performance somewhere in the world every five years. What went wrong? Well, that's a question I attempt to answer in an essay elsewhere in this issue. In the meantime let us consider the riches that Chandos have laid before us.

There are bound to be readers who are thinking, 'I've got the EMI versions, I don't need to buy another'. Believe me, you do! It may have taken me forty years to realise it, but *Olaf* is one of the pivotal choral works of the late 19th century – perhaps even more so than *Gerontius*. I've been lucky enough to conduct both, and I must admit to having seriously underestimated the worth of *Olaf*, both as a piece of music in its own right and as a turning point in the development of British choral music.

I hear that at the end of the live performance in Bergen with the same forces 'there was such a roar of enthusiasm you would have thought that Norway had just won the World Cup'. Its success is due in no small way to Sir Andrew Davis, who, in my humble opinion, has come of age as an Elgar conductor in the last few years to the extent that he is now unmatched. It is no exaggeration to say that these performances sound as if Elgar himself had returned to wield the baton. Davis's skill and confidence is such that he enables Elgar's music to speak for itself – or rather, through Elgar's mind and imagination – rather than feeling that he, as the conductor, has to emphasise this or that point to make us appreciate it.

The Bergen Philharmonic was, needless to say, playing these scores for the first time. This is certainly not a case of an orchestra going through the motions with an obscure piece of Victorian music: there is real and obvious enthusiasm here, which comes across with some immaculate playing.

The choral forces, too, are first-rate. Three choirs are involved, totalling,

I am told, around 100 singers. Their English is excellent – not necessarily an advantage when the words are by Longfellow – and they, too, seem to have enjoyed every minute of their opportunity – even in the tub-thumping *Ballad of Saint George*. I must say that my experience of conducting *Olaf* with a scratch choir from all over the country resulted in a determination on the part of the singers to try and persuade their own choral societies to take it up – it's an infectious piece if you give it a chance, as North Staffordshire found in 1896! The choir as recorded doesn't sound as if it numbers as many as 100 – a few strident individual voices stick out in the louder passages – but listen to 'As torrents in summer' to get a good idea of their quality. In fact, listen to the complete *Epilogue* if you want to get converted to *Olaf* as surely as he was converted to Christianity: young Mr. Elgar certainly knew how to build a final climax, and this is one of his best.

A feature of that final climax is the four bars of top C given to the soprano soloist, sung thrillingly and fearlessly on this recording by the young American soprano Emily Birsan. Her write-up in the booklet commences 'On the brink of an international career ...' which sounds to me rather apologetic. Make no mistake, with such a glorious voice and musicianship, performing English music in Norway, she has an international career already, and deservedly so. Teresa Cahill on the Handley recording is a bit 'mumsy' by comparison.

Handley's tenor soloist was Philip Langridge, a late substitute for Anthony Rolfe-Johnson. He did a fine job with a part that wasn't ideally suited to his voice. Davis has Barry Banks, strangely enough, from 'Olaf country' – Stoke-on-Trent – and now based in America. His many roles at the Metropolitan Opera, ENO and Covent Garden make him an ideal choice for this most operatic of Elgarian tenor roles. I see he was a trumpet and cornet player for many years: as lovers of the singing of Fritz Wunderlich will know there is nothing like playing a brass instrument in one's youth for expanding the lungs and improving the breath control.

The operatic nature of both piece and performance is cemented by the choice of the now veteran Alan Opie as Ironbeard, Malvern's equivalent to Bayreuth's Hagen. In the early pages he sounds to be suffering from a slight cold, but very quickly warms to his task. I much prefer his view of the part to that of Brian Rayner Cook (Hagen goes to Malvern Priory?).

The trio make a superb team of soloists, and their and Andrew Davis's operatic approach to this most Wagnerian of Elgar's works makes the entire tale almost believable.

The Ballad of Saint George was written, at Novello's request, for the Jubilee celebrations of 1897, setting words by their part-time house-writer, Shapcott Wensley. This was the *nom-de-plume* of one Henry Bunce (1854-1917), a clerk in a Bristol soap works! Elgar was not the first choice for the job: Frederick Bridge, organist of Westminster Abbey, had already declined the opportunity. Nearly half an hour in length, Elgar himself recorded its *Epilogue* 'It comes from the misty ages'. It receives a suitably stirring performance from forces perhaps conscious of the fact that their own King's grandfather was a grandson of Queen Victoria. Rather naughtily I pressed

the ‘shuffle’ button when listening to the second CD and can report that the various sections of *Saint George* fit seamlessly in the latter portion of *Olaf*, though that may only indicate that here we have a rollicking good performance of a rollicking good piece.

Those who do not know either work well may like to download, free of charge, the Novello edition of the vocal scores, long out of print (and copyright), from the Petrucci Music Library website. I find it as easy to follow a score on a laptop or tablet as on a piece of paper, and it certainly enhances the listening experience to see what is going on, if only by following the words.

Chandos’s presentation is all one could wish for. The booklet contains the complete libretti, plus extensive notes by their own part-time house-writer, Andrew Neill. The recording quality is splendid, though I did find I had to turn the volume up more than a few notches for it to make a suitable impact.

Having listened all the way through (in the right order!), my first thought was that this tremendous achievement must easily surpass EMI’s efforts of thirty years ago. Well, I am pleased to say that it doesn’t: there is a place for both. Vernon Handley’s *Olaf* remains impressive, if different, both as a performance and recording, and Richard Hickox’s performance of *Saint George* remains one of his better Elgar recordings. The only problem is that Warner/EMI would not seem to agree: their versions are no longer available on CD but only as MP3 downloads.

None of which affects my verdict on the new Chandos recording: buy it immediately, it’s fabulous.

Martin Bird



The Dream of Gerontius

Felicity Palmer (mezzo-soprano), Arthur Davies (tenor), Norman Bailey (bass), London Symphony Chorus, USSR State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Yevgeny Svetlanov

Melodiya
CD1002266

One of the most memorable performances of *The Dream of Gerontius* that I have attended was at London’s Royal Festival Hall about thirty five years ago. Ronald Dowd, then nearly at the end of his career, was the tenor soloist, but the surprising star of the show was the great Soviet conductor Yevgeny Svetlanov. Surprising, because at that time little notice was taken by foreign conductors of Elgar’s music, especially major choral works, and especially by Soviet musicians. Svetlanov was renowned as an interpreter of Russian music, but he developed a special affinity for Elgar. The ‘Enigma’ Variations, *Sea Pictures* and the Cello Concerto were certainly in his repertoire, and his blistering account of the Second Symphony with the crack USSR State Symphony Orchestra is available on CD. He had been bowled over by hearing *Gerontius*, and after his London performance he was determined to take it to Russia. This, then, is a recording from April 1983 in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the work’s first performance in Russia.

The soloists and chorus are English, the orchestra Svetlanov's own USSR State Symphony Orchestra. Again, I found the performance very moving. The soloists are excellent. I've always liked Arthur Davies (he was particularly fine in the Hickox recording of *Caractacus*) and here he is in splendid voice, his ringing tones passionate and forthright, encompassing the extremes of emotion with absolute clarity of diction. This must be one of the finest interpretations of this taxing part on record. Felicity Palmer, once a soprano but now settled into mezzo territory, is the Angel, and brings a heartfelt and consoling presence to the work's second part. Her voice hardens somewhat at the top of her range and I have heard more emotional warmth in this part, but there is no denying her commitment or absolute security in the music. Norman Bailey's sonorous voice is imposing as the Priest, and suitably imploring as the Angel of the Agony.

The London Symphony Chorus is at the top of its form, excellent throughout, whether as snarling demons or heavenly beings. Their diction is superb and this must be some of the finest choral singing in this work on disc.

But the high point of the performance must be Svetlanov's conception of the work, and I must say I was moved by it. I have seen him criticized for rather brutal music making, but there is no evidence of that here. He has noticed that Elgar's direction at the very beginning is 'mistico', and as the strings start from the depths of pianissimo that instruction is clearly evident. Incidentally, there is a small glitch from the cor anglais player in bar 5. Seeming to start flat, he adjusts and comes in a couple of notes later. The Prelude is wonderfully played, with a really devout and mystical aura over it, and Svetlanov is alive to those heartfelt moments of Elgarian rubato which are so important to the rhythmic ebb and flow. The climaxes (around Fig.16 for example) are finely judged, with none of the raucous brass timbre that often afflicted Russian orchestras. 'Sanctus Fortis' is taken at a cracking pace, although Arthur Davies copes well, and the chorus 'Rescue Him' (Fig.63) has real urgency. In fact what sizzles through all this performance is the operatic fervour that I missed in the recent recording from Belgium, yet the rapt stillness is still there, at such moments, for example as the dying Gerontius's 'Novissima hora est'. Norman Bailey's forthright Priest then leads to a majestic and stately final chorus, with the organ clearly audible.

The usual cohort of professional coughers is in the audience, usually tuning up in the quieter sections, like the opening of Part Two – lovely string playing with real attention paid to the intertwining violin parts around Fig.2. Lovely orchestral accompanying throughout, and notice the horns in their passages of thirds during the Angel's first entry, horns which are mercifully free of the Slavonic wobble that marred some Russian orchestras at this time. The Gerontius/Angel duet at Fig.26 and the following orchestral passage generate real fervour and passion, the following Demons sneer and snarl effectively (I imagine Svetlanov's speed in the Demons' fugue gave the string players something to worry about!) and the Angelicals in 'Praise to the Holiest' are rich-toned and suitably grand and majestic. Although the sound is generally good, it is in these climaxes that the live recording shows its limitations, the

percussion attacks not registering as clearly as they would have done under modern conditions, although later the glockenspiel and jingles are audible.

The final 'Softly and gently' section is too slow for my taste, although it is more often done like this as not, and presumably it suited Felicity Palmer who sings it well. The whole builds inexorably to a final cadence that is prolonged to daring lengths, but fades to an impressive stillness. This is the third *Gerontius* recording I have received in the last year (that's not a complaint!), all of them individual and well worth seeking out. To any one new to the work I would recommend Andrew Davis's recent account on Chandos for its all round excellence. But this new heartfelt Russian version is a must for those who know the work and wish to hear new light shed on a favourite score. But I must end by mentioning one flaw, caused possibly by slipshod Melodiya engineering. These CDs were obviously transcribed from the original LPs, so what we have are the side breaks from those LPs which are on the CDs too. Were the master tapes of the original recording no longer available? If not, surely in this day and age modern technology could have overcome this problem? To be honest, it is not a desperate worry to me, but it is an irritant which I would think is unnecessary.

The CDs are set in an attractive double folding case, with a booklet containing notes by Elena Kuznetsova in Russian, English and French. The notes are good, but the translation comes up with gems such as 'Brief (from one to a few sounds) timbre tints of the dominating lines facilitate the creation of a changeable space and allow emphasizing the glimmering of semantic nuances'. Well, I suppose that's English of a sort, but I've no idea what it means.

Barry Collett



Elgar: Cello Concerto

Walton: Cello Concerto

Britten: *Peter Grimes* – *Sea Interludes*

Li-Wei Qin ('cello), London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Zhang Yi

ABC Classics

481 1423

I'm particularly partial to the Walton Concerto, so was quick to contact ABC Classics to ask for a review copy. My request fell on deaf ears – I did not even get a reply – but to my delight a copy came a few weeks later from quite another source. I fear I'd never heard of either the 'cellist or the conductor, and on making enquiries within the Society received the following: 'I was at the LPO concert on Wednesday and asked about this CD. Apparently the general view was that both soloist and conductor were fine but easily forgotten!' While I can sympathise with those feelings when it comes to the Britten – I've known the waves whipped up on Worcester Cricket Ground in winter give a more dramatic performance than this gentle plod-through – I disagree most emphatically when it comes to the two concertos.

I can't ever remember hearing more alert or beautifully poised playing in the Elgar than that delivered here by the London Philharmonic. The

woodwind playing is a particular delight, and time and again I found myself smiling with pleasure over a particular turn of phrase. The recording, made in the Henry Wood Hall in July 2013, delivers a perfect orchestral balance, with every strand clear yet blended into the whole sound. The placing of the soloist into the overall sound is not, to my ears, ideal. He's never sitting in your lap, but when a complete 'cello section playing *forte* produces less sound than a soloist playing *piano* all is not quite right. And now it may sound as if I am damning with faint praise when I say that this is a performance of the Elgar for everyday use. I don't mean to be. We can all name recordings where the soloist is larger than life, and in adding his or her emotions to what is already present in the music produces a highly convincing, if draining, performance. What we have here is a performance with no additives. Li-Wei Qin is a good enough musician to discover everything that Elgar put into the score, and to present it as Elgar's concerto pure and simple.

He is also an extraordinarily accomplished player technically. His playing of the Walton is quite incredible: there is just no sense of the tremendous difficulty of the piece, and his phrasing and sense of tone colour is impeccable. The Concerto was commissioned by Gregor Piatigorsky, and I've known and loved his recording for years, but it's amazing just how much he fluffs or fudges.

Such was the impact of the present performance that I bought a score so that I could see precisely what I was enjoying. It was the first score I'd seen in the impressive William Walton Edition. One can only congratulate OUP on the presentation of the edition, and on actually having the willpower to see it through to completion, rather than abandoning it at a relatively early stage. I happened to hear this disc soon after the arrival of the revised ECE edition of the Elgar Concertos, and took equal delight in the quality of that. It's a lot cheaper, too!

Martin Bird

Elgar: Cello Concerto

Dvořák: Rondo; *Klid* ('Calm')

Tchaikovsky: *Variations on a Rococo Theme*

Jean-Quihen Queyras ('cello), BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jiří Bělohlávek

Jean-Quihen Queyras and Jiří Bělohlávek partnered in one of the finest versions of the Dvořák Cello Concerto that I've ever heard, so I was eager to hear their recording of Elgar's. David Horvitz praised their 2005 performance of the Dvořák with the Prague Philharmonic for its 'freshness, poetry and spontaneity of utterance' (*Classics Today*, October, 2005). Edward Greenfield noted Queyras's 'imagination in phrasing melodic writing, subtly individual yet never self-conscious' (*Gramophone*, November 2005).

Born of French parents in Montreal in 1967, Jean-Guihen Queyras has one of the most distinguished and diverse discographies of any 'cellist today.



Harmonia Mundi

HMC902148

His recordings range from Vivaldi and Haydn to Bartok and Britten, and his reading of the Bach Cello Suites is considered a benchmark. Queyras plays a 1696 Giofreddo Cappa instrument, producing rich tones in the lower register; a full-throated middle one; and a silvery upper register that any violinist would be proud of. What's more important is that he plays with a rare sensitivity to a composer's sensibility, as reflected in the score.

A single listen to this Harmonia Mundi recording, made with the BBC SO at Maida Vale in 2013, shows that Queyras and Bělohlávek have taken a fresh approach to how this most beloved of all Elgar's works should be played. In the accompanying notes, Queyras explains that they wanted to emphasize the concerto's contradictory moods: 'Elgar and Tchaikovsky play on contrasts to elucidate their respective intentions ... Thus the profound nostalgia of Sir Edward Elgar's concerto stands revealed in its lighter themes, which gain the upper hand in the second movement and a fair bit of the finale.' A key element of their version is the use of tempos similar to those used by Elgar and Beatrice Harrison in their 1928 recording; Queyras and Bělohlávek are close to their pacing in the middle movements and in many passages of the outer ones.

Queyras plays the concerto's first five bars austere yet makes the most of the dramatic drop to *piano* in the fourth bar, followed by an immediate rise to *fortissimo*. The first subject flows more gently than we're accustomed to, allowing the *sostenuto* passage to have greater effect. Note, too, how Queyras slightly underscores the dotted crotchets in bar 31 (2:33); this is the kind of unobtrusive means through which he makes his voice felt. The swaying cello melody at 48 (3:42) is lovingly phrased, as is the *dulcissimo* solo that follows. Bělohlávek guides the BBC SO to an impressive climax at bar 92 (7:12).

After the Lento's searching introduction, the Allegro molto's darting melody brings echoes of the *Introduction and Allegro for Strings*, and Queyras gives it all the freedom of a bird in flight. He plays the fastest passages with dazzling skill; and his treatment of the *cantabile* theme, which first appears at bar 40 (2:05), is delightful.

The third movement is played with great simplicity; like the slow movement of Elgar's Violin Concerto, it is in B-flat, and in Queyras's hands, it breathes the same middle-of-the-night atmosphere. His *pianissimos* are rapt and hushed, with the BBC SO strings providing a delicately shaded accompaniment.

Queyras's approach is especially effective in the final movement; he finds more fantasy and less swagger than other interpreters do. I love the conversational tone of the cello's *nobilmente* theme at bar 9 (0:11). I also like the fact that the Allegro beginning at bar 20 (1:12), with its echoes of *Falstaff*, is true to Elgar's *risoluto* marking. These high spirits continue in the section that begins at bar 83 (2:35) and continue to bar 281 (6:33), with colourful contributions from the BBC SO woodwinds.

When the skies darken, Queyras's willingness to play these earlier sections with a lighter touch make the ensuing pages, which culminate in the anguished cry at bar 332 (10:03), all the more tragic. Bělohlávek reins in

the orchestra in the final bars so we can hear the cello's voice clearly, and the work's conclusion sounds more defiant than stoic.

Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* and the two Dvořák works are played with the same rhythmic vitality and attention to nuance, and they round out the programme nicely. All three works are recorded in a natural-sounding acoustic, with orchestral textures of exceptional transparency.

In reviewing this recording for *Fono Forum*, Germany's leading music magazine, Andreas Friesenhagen wrote that Queyras's interpretation showed that 'this last, great Romantic concerto was infected by something classical' (December 2013). This begs the question: what is the benefit of emphasizing that aspect of the work?

I once thought of the concerto as a lament for a lost world. This new reading has helped me understand that it is also the testament of a resilient survivor. As Elgar wrote the concerto in the spring of 1919, he had just completed and launched his first three chamber works. If Europe's old world had indeed disappeared forever, Elgar's artistic resources seemed capable of dealing with the new one.

Elgar called the concerto 'a man's attitude to life'. What was that attitude? Queyras's reading of the score reveals that, side-by-side with a profound sadness, it also contains much fantasy, ardour and compassion. No wonder Elgar thought the concerto 'good and alive'. This superb performance by Queyras and Bělohlávek ensures that all the qualities in the music are heard, and for me it was a revelation.

Frank Beck

Elgar: *Introduction and Allegro; Serenade for Strings; Sospiri; Chanson de Matin; Chanson de Nuit*

William Lloyd Webber: *The Moon*

Howard Goodall: *And the Bridge is Love*

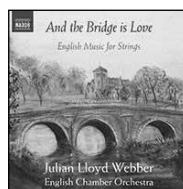
Vaughan Williams: *Charterhouse Suite – Prelude*

Delius: *Two Aquarelles*

Walton: *Henry V – Passacaglia, 'Touch her soft lips and part'*

Ireland: *A Downland Suite – Minuet*

Julian Lloyd Webber ('cello), English Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Julian Lloyd Webber



NAXOS
8.573250

Here we have absolute delight tinged with a touch of sadness. Delight that the Society's President has given us such a wonderful disc as conductor: sadness that it includes his final recording as a 'cellist.

Howard Goodall's *And the Bridge is Love* was composed in memory of a young 'cellist, Hannah Ryan, who died in 2007, and it was premièred by Julian Lloyd Webber in 2008. It is a most moving piece, around 12 minutes long, and receives a most moving performance on this disc.

A 'cellist, John Barbirolli, first recorded the *Introduction and Allegro*

in 1927 and made the piece his own: now another takes on his mantle and proves a worthy successor. Lloyd Webber's years of experience as a string player, combined with his natural sense of how the music should flow – and especially where it should breathe – give these performances by the English Chamber Orchestra a vibrant quality. Just listen to the *Introduction and Allegro's* final pizzicato chord – a full, ringing, sound, perfectly balanced – and you will see just what one string player's supreme ability can bring to a string group. *Sospiri* tugs at the heart-strings, at it should, and the *Serenade* sounds newly-minted. The two *Chansons* are given in arrangements for string orchestra by Billy Reed: well worth hearing, particularly as you'll probably have recordings of Elgar's orchestrations already.

To my mind, the other gem on this disc is the short piece by Lloyd Webber senior, arranged by him from a part-song of 1950, but not performed until last year. I happened to be playing the disc while others were in the house, and they were all drawn to the music room by *The Moon*.

The disc was produced by Andrew Keener, engineered by Mike Hatch and recorded in the Watford Colosseum – a triple guarantee of quality. It is, however, a shame that no-one thought to name the players in the solo quartet. The second violinist, in particular, is outstanding, both individually and as a member of the quartet. I remember my ten-year-old son telling me that playing second was much harder than first, as you didn't just have tunes to play. There's a lot in what he said.

Richard Wiley



Cockaigne, Symphony No. 1

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vasily Petrenko

Looking back over the years since I first began listening to Elgar's music I recall how once I rejoiced when anyone (well almost anyone) made a new recording of his music and because recordings were rare I rejoiced once more even if it was a new recording of a work already on my shelves. Not that my shelves groaned under an Elgarian weight, but, slowly, they began to bend. Then we worried that Elgar was only performed and recorded by we British. Why wasn't he performed abroad? Why did non-British record labels ignore Elgar's music? Slowly it all changed and we now have the comparative luxury of American, Australian, German, Norwegian, Russian, Swedish and even Italian orchestras (at least) performing and recording Elgar's music.

In the same month that the CD transfer of the famous Svetlanov recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* landed on my doormat, along comes a recording by a distinguished compatriot of Svetlanov's, Vasily Petrenko, conducting his own orchestra in Liverpool. These recordings were made in September 2009 and I wondered at first whether Petrenko's feeling for Elgar and his idiom will have matured since then. Not long ago I heard him conduct a performance of *In the South* that was far too slow and lumpy, losing any sense of impetus, thereby destroying any interest I might have had in the performance. Readers

ONYX

4145

who are familiar with Petrenko's other recordings with his orchestra such as the Shostakovich symphonies will be aware of the potency of the relationship. Was this potency, I wondered, maintained in these recordings of Elgar, or was I about to hear a repeat of the *In the South* experience?

I began by comparing timings with Elgar's recordings. These were (for the Symphony) reasonably encouraging: 1st movement – Elgar 17:21, Petrenko 18:41; 2nd movement – 7:37, 6:55; 3rd movement – 10:18, 11:48; 4th movement – 11:12, 11:28); *Cockaigne* – Elgar 1926: 13:03, Elgar 1933: 13:28 and Petrenko: 14:26. As is clear Petrenko's tempi are generally slower than those of Elgar in his electrical recordings. This is of no consequence provided that the phrasing, pulse and colouring are constant and 'feel right'. This I found to be the case – mostly. However, they count for nothing if the performance does not seem right and that, in the end, is what this review is about!

Recorded in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall, the sound is warm and clear, giving an attractive bloom to the recording. The engineers have achieved a natural balance even when the organ enters towards the end of *Cockaigne*. The only time when this becomes slightly out of kilter is at the end of the Symphony when the brass tends to obscure the strings. It happened that I sat down to listen to the recording after Petrenko had performed the Fourth Symphony of Shostakovich the previous evening with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. This performance displayed Petrenko's credentials as a master of a complex and little known score and was remarkable for the way he brought out the exceptional variety of emotions within the Symphony. This mastery is evident in this recording, too.

All goes well in the Overture with a fine balance between the instruments but then, for the last seven bars, Elgar varies the tempo: *allargando*; *a tempo*, *stringendo*, ending *a tempo*. Initially I felt Petrenko rushed these last bars but, after frequent hearings, now feel this makes sense and the clarity of recording and quality of playing allows the momentum to fall into place, the timpanist completely in tune with what is going on around him.

The Symphony is given a beautifully balanced performance that I enjoyed greatly. You can hear the harps and all the inner detail of Elgar's scoring such as when the back desks of the strings play alone. Another example of beautiful balancing in the performance and recording is the *meno mosso* passage at Fig.29 in the first movement as the orchestra goes from *pp* to *fff* over two bars. The movement ends as I had by now expected with the solo instrumentation leading precisely to the *ppp* in the penultimate bars and the pizzicato ending.

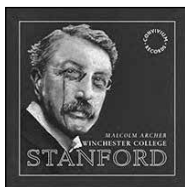
The second movement works brilliantly and despite its swiftness did not appear to be rushed: the magical lead into the *adagio* seems judged to perfection, the Liverpool strings offering a splendid richness of sound as the movement begins. Petrenko understands that this is music of consolation: neither of grief nor self-pity. As Michael Kennedy puts it 'there is no *Angst*

here, instead a benedictory tranquillity ...'¹ and at cue 104 we are, to quote Jaeger, 'brought near heaven' as the new theme works its magical way to the hushed conclusion.

The fourth movement maintains the tension in the opening *lento* before the *allegro* leaps away as if Petrenko is impatient for the end. The march theme and its transformation (again by the lengthening of the notes) works well and sets up the move to the climax, the orchestra pulling at the theme as if to delay its inexorable triumph: *Grandioso (poco largamente)*. Petrenko manages this as if brought up an Elgarian from birth.

It will be clear that I enjoyed this recording and performances and I can recommend the disc whole-heartedly. The notes by Daniel Jaffé are excellent, too. Coincidentally, I will hear Petrenko's performance of the Symphony (with the RLPO) at this year's Prague Spring Festival in June. Comparisons, I hope, will be rewarding.

Andrew Neill



Stanford: *Benedictus in C; Beati Quorum Via; Watts' Cradle Song; Te Deum in C; Justorum animae; A Song of Wisdom; Oh! For a closer walk with God; When, in our music, God is glorified; For lo, I raise up; Coelos ascendit hodie; Come, ye thankful people, come; If ye then be risen with Christ; The Lord is my shepherd; Psalm 150*

Winchester College Chapel Choir, directed by Malcolm Archer

Convivium Records

CR 027

You know me (at least you should do by now): a glutton for anything by Stanford. Winchester seems to be cornering the market in recordings of his choral music: following Hyperion's three CDs with David Hill and the Choir of Winchester Cathedral (now available as a box set, CD 44311/3) comes this new CD from Malcolm Archer and the Winchester College Chapel Choir, recorded in the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford. Much as one might lament the demise of the traditional record shop, online retailing make the impulse buy even easier: a matter of moments after I discovered this disc I had parted with my money and it was on its way to the backwaters of Watford. (Don't tell anyone, but so was the Hyperion set.)

I'd not heard the Winchester College Chapel Choir before. They're certainly not your 'bog-standard' (to coin a current educational phrase) secondary school choir: they've been singing services for the past 625 years, for a start. Their Director, Malcolm Archer, is no 'bog-standard' music teacher, either, having been Director of Music at St. Paul's Cathedral for three years before going to Winchester in 2007. They give us a programme that brings out the best in them and, in particular, highlights their outstanding treble section.

The disc opens with a performance of the *Benedictus* from *The Service in C* of 1909 that brought me out in goose-bumps of pleasure, so stirring was

1 Kennedy, Michael, *Elgar Orchestral Music* (London: BBC, 1970), 56

the impact of the singing. The three motets from Stanford's time at Trinity College, Cambridge, of which *Beati quorum via* is the perennial favourite, show just how good this young choir is: sensitive singing, well-balanced, beautiful phrasing and placing, and an impressively wide dynamic range. Isaac Watts' *Cradle Song*, sung to the tune of Stanford's early Carol *Golden Slumbers*, gives the trebles a chance to shine, especially their Head Quirister Angus Armstrong.

The varied and constantly interesting programme includes a hymn, 'When in our music, God is glorified', sung to Stanford's 1904 tune for 'Bonk – For all the Saints' – so similar in outline to his pupil Vaughan Williams' slightly later one for the *English Hymnal*, and a stirring Psalm – number 150 – that brings the programme to an end.

The choir shows occasional signs on tiredness, not least in the somewhat bombastic setting of *For lo, I raise up* of 1914, attacking 'that bitter and nasty nation which march through the breadth of the earth'. It also has a tendency to snatch at the end of phrases, a particular bug-bear of mine.

Overall, though, this is a thoroughly enjoyable disc, well recorded. The 'new Dobson organ in Merton College Chapel' is a little too backward in the mix for my liking, especially as the playing of Winchester College's organist, Jamal Sutton, is excellent.

The booklet contains the full texts and extensive notes by Jeremy Dibble, giving the background to each piece alongside technical descriptions ('choral-prelude-like fantasia of strophic variations'; a 'thematic germ ... that rises and falls conjunctly through a tetrachord'). While I'm all for the former, I fear the latter rather overwhelm the essential simplicity of Stanford's creations. My copy, incidentally, had four pages duplicated and others missing.

Martin Bird

LETTERS

Michael Kennedy

From Andrew Neill

When the Society created its medal in 1992, something with which I was closely involved, I was one of those who felt strongly that it should only be awarded to non-British citizens. I now realise that I was wrong and those citizens of our country who have, subsequently, been awarded the medal have been more than worthy of the honour. It was one of my proudest moments as a member of this Society to present the medal to Michael Kennedy on the stage of the Bridgewater Hall in 2011, following the decision of the Council to make the award. No doubt the Council will continue to consider others in Britain, as well as others overseas, who are also worthy of the Society's highest honour.

Carl Newton

From John Norris

No more will regular readers of the *Journal* turn to this page and be confronted with the familiar words 'From Carl Newton'. Carl, a regular contributor to the letters column, sadly died on Boxing Day 2014 after a valiant fight against leukaemia. His letters were always interesting, sometimes challenging and controversial, occasionally trenchant but always to the point, an editor's dream in enlivening the column and stimulating debate. More particularly, they were always constructive and well aimed. The column, and the Society, are the poorer for his passing. A fuller obituary appears in the accompanying issue of the *News*.

Dream Children

From William A. Mackinnon-Little

Sometimes decisions have to be made by Editors which are not always easy, as was the case with 'Dream Children'.

My wife and I found it a most moving and informative article. My wife has had many miscarriages so it was more interesting to her, but does affect the husband as well, and no doubt it profoundly affected Elgar.

To his email William attached a further letter, for which publication on 1 April seems entirely appropriate.

With reference to the letters section in the December 2014 *Journal* regarding correspondence on the 'Dream Children' and in particular the Editor's note to the letter from Wendy Hill.

Yes indeed, 'Three cheers for the Elgarian Community'. I keenly try to advance my better appreciation of the music of Elgar. This is enhanced by a greater knowledge of the composer himself.

I am currently researching a book on underwear worn by famous composers. It is a combination, though to date a brief work. I would be delighted to avail other members of our Society of my initial research regarding Elgar and the influence of the underwear worn by him and the link with the scoring and tempo of his works.

I have, so far only applied myself to a detailed study of 'Variations on an Original Theme', Op.36 'Enigma', and I have established a possible, though some might say a tenuous link.

The work is well known for the use of a falling seventh and that the opening and closing sections commences on the second beat of the bar. The rendition of the respective variations of Elgar's friends 'pictured within' is not only determined by the composer's interpretation of his own assessment of their characters but, I contend, the tempo is directly linked to the underwear worn at the time of the composition.

No synthetic fabric materials used for the manufacture of underwear were in existence in the 1890s when the work was written, so underwear would have been made of silk, wool, cotton or flannel (which is made from carded wool or worsted yarn).

To illustrate this, it is probable that Elgar was wearing silk underwear when he wrote Variation 6, 'Ysobel', the amateur violinist Isabel Fitton and Variation 10, 'Dorabella' a word picture of Dora Penny, with its dance like gentle sweetness.

Contrast this with Variation 7, 'Troyte', the architect Troyte Griffith and Variation 11, 'G.R.S.' George Robertson Sinclair, the Hereford Cathedral organist, both of which have a boisterous, animated and exuberant personality to them. It is obvious that Elgar was wearing coarse woollen undergarments when these were composed.

Consider Variation 13, headed with three asterisks, and some claim to be Helen Jessie Weaver, a former love of Elgar, who emigrated to New Zealand where the Merino breed of sheep is produced and prized for its wool. It is highly plausible that the composer was wearing Merino wool underwear during the composition.

I acknowledge and appreciate that I need to continue with arduous research before I am able to publish a learned detailed work on this subject.

Elgar had a good sense of humour and enjoyed a 'jape'.

Arthur

From John Edwards

I read Martin Bird's review of 'The Binyon Settings' with much interest, especially the new recording of the music from *Arthur*. Like Martin, I am reluctantly critical of the disc.

I was present at the first performance of Ben Palmer's edition of *Arthur* in Dorchester Abbey over two years ago and it was very different from what we have here. It included narration of parts of Binyon's play by Robert Hardy, which would have made enough for a disc on its own. Thus 'the brief snatches of music, some less than 30 seconds' could have been avoided. The recording we get is like a piano concerto without the piano.

I can only assume that *Arthur* was crudely fitted in to accommodate the other works of the disc when it should have been the most important. *The Spirit of England* here was certainly no better than Hickox, Gibson, or Lloyd-Jones.

As for the so-called minimal vibrato on the *Arthur* tracks, this did not worry me. Back in the 80s I attended a rare performance of *The Starlight Express* in London with more minimal resources

than Ben Palmer's, but it did include the voices in the play and was not chopped up and mutilated as in the new recording. The old George Hurst recording of a suite from 'King Arthur' is, therefore, more pleasant to listen to, but this is not the fault of Ben Palmer. This was a brave venture, but flawed. A pity!

William Foxell piano music

From Peter Foxell

I wonder if I might clarify a point that has been raised by a cousin? The subtitle (a criticism of atonalism) to the piece *Fünf Kleine Klavierstücke* (reviewed in the December issue) was mine, and not W.J. Foxell's, as I knew from family discussions that Foxell was saddened by the move towards atonalism and away from melody. Despite this it is quite possible that he was experimenting in these pieces in a non-critical way.

I would welcome any comments on his music at pwfoxell@hotmail.com. I hope to start to put the scores online this year.

100 YEARS AGO ...

'The Year opens laden with anxieties. May God keep England & may a glorious peace crown the year & our splendid Army & Navy', wrote Alice on 1 January. Next day they heard that HMS *Formidable* had been torpedoed, with the loss of over 500 men. On the 10th Sidney Colvin wrote with a suggestion that was to bear fruit: 'Why don't you do a wonderful Requiem for the slain – something in the Spirit of Binyon's For the Fallen?'

On the 12th Elgar gave a lunch at Severn House for the committee of the Union of Graduates in Music, of which he was President: 'They played Indian Pool after lunch & seemed to enjoy themselves immensely'. A week later the Elgars were at the Albert Hall to hear Albert Sammons play the Concerto at Landon Ronald's Sunday concert with the New Symphony Orchestra: 'Quite delighted with A. Sammons' playing ... Beautiful rendering, much enthusiasm'. Two days later there was a Zeppelin raid on Yarmouth. Elgar, still a 'Special Constable' (he was to resign on 22 February) was 'called out about 10.40 – Roamed around till a telegram released [them] about 1 a.m.'. At the end of the month he was in Hayes to record *Carillon*: 'They gave tea & we brought Mr. Ainley & Mr. Elkin back in car'.

A notable highlight of February was Alice's trip 'to Harrods to try dress, first since the war'. On the 12th Elgar travelled to Bradford to rehearse the Festival Choral Society for a concert on the 19th, which was to include Berlioz's *Te Deum* and the final scene from *Caractacus*. Back in London he visited Clara Butt to go through *Gerontius* which she was to sing with the Royal Choral Society at the end of the month: 'E. thought C. Butt sang 'Gerontius' very well'.

On 1 March Elgar embarked on a Percy Harrison tour with the LSO. Alice joined him for the first concert in Birmingham, and went on to Wolverhampton to see the Pennys. The programmes included the 'New World' Symphony and, rather inevitably, *Carillon*. The tour covered the North of England and Scotland, finishing in Leeds on 9 March. *Carillon* was played again on the 18th at Queen's Hall, with the Second Symphony. 'E. conducted splendidly & most vehemently. The 2nd movement is the greatest thing in all music, indeed so is all the Symphony.'

On 24 March he went to Stoke Prior to stay with his sister Pollie and her family, returning on 1 April: 'such joy to have him back'. On 5 April he was 'Induced to join Hampstead Volunteer Reserve', and had his first drill two days later. On 13 April Emil Mlynarski 'came to see E. longed for him to write something for Poland as he did for Belgium'. The outcome was *Polonia*. For the moment, though, he was working on *The Spirit of England*.

Carice, meanwhile, had applied to work for MI9, the Postal Censorship Branch of the Secret Service, attended an interview at the War Office on 15 April, and started work on the 29th. On the 26th Elgar and Alice went to Stratford-upon-Avon for the annual Shakespeare Festival, given by Frank Benson and his Company. They returned to Severn House on 1 May.

ISSN 0143-1269

*Printed by
John Price Printers
Brook Street, Bilston
West Midlands, WV14 0NW*