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18 Holtsmere Close, Watford, Herts., WD25 9NG
Email: journal@elgar.org

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Front Cover: Dora Mary Powell, née Penny (1874–1964) portrayed in 1913 (Adrian Partington Collection, image kindly supplied by Arthur Reynolds) and in 1952 at Sheffield (Royal College of Music).

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

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At the end of the essay, add about a hundred words about the author, please.

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Piers Plowman – Elgar's Bible

Peter Sutton

Some readers may have seen the play *Elgar and Alice* which I wrote for the anniversary celebrations in 2007. Five years later I began work on a modern verse translation of William Langland's fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, which Edward knew and valued highly. This article describes the poem, giving an insight into some of what Edward was reading around the turn of the century, and explores the possible connections with his work.

Elgar's direct references to 'Piers Plowman'

Jerrold Northrop Moore's *A Creative Life* refers to the poem *Piers Plowman* three times. The first reference is to the early autumn of 1900, when 'the *Musical Times* editor F.G. Edwards arrived in Malvern to write a big article on Edward's career, for publication at the time of the *Gerontius* premiere on 3 October. The journalist was immensely struck with the creative surroundings, and at Edward's suggestion headed his piece with a quotation from the Middle English poem *Piers Plowman*.'¹

The quotation that Edward chose is the opening few lines of the poem:

In a somer seson whan soft was the sonne,
I shope me in shroudes as I a shepe were,
In habite as an heremite unholy of workes,
Went wyde in this world wondres to here.
Ac on a May mornynge on Malverne hulle
Me byfel a ferly of fairy me thoughte.
(Prologue 1-6)²

Secondly, 'For Christmas [1900] Edward...sent Jaeger a copy of *Sea Pictures*, and wrote on the last day of the old year and the old century: "I have given up sending cards, so sent the score of the miserable Mal de Mer – I forget what quotation I put on – from Piers Plowman's Vision I expect – that's my Bible, a marvellous book."³

- 1 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 323-324.
- 2 The spelling and wording differ between versions. Quotations from the original used here are from the 1370s version as it appears in W.W. Skeat (ed.), *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts together with Richard the Redeless by William Langland*, Vol. I: Text, Vol. II: Notes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, f.p. 1886, 10th ed., 1923, final reprint 2001).
- 3 JNM, *A Creative Life*, 341.

The third reference to the poem also relates to the period just after the premiere of *Gerontius*, when Edward had plans to write a symphony in honour of General Gordon who, curiously enough, also possessed an annotated copy of Newman's poem, which he carried with him. But the symphony was a step too far, and Edward shifted his attention to *Cockaigne*. This was, he said, 'cheerful and Londony: stout-and-steaky',⁴ and superficially nothing to do with *Piers Plowman*. However, when he finished the score in March 1901, he inscribed on the final page the line from the poem 'Metelees and monelees on Malverne hulls' – a nice contrast with the stout and steak.⁵

Edward would have appreciated this line not only because it matched what he saw as his impoverished situation, but also because it was a piece of word-play, and his fascination with puns, pet names, cryptography and verbal jokes is well known. The word 'meteletes' ('meat-less' or 'food-less') is very similar to the word 'meteles' in the next line of the poem, meaning 'dream':

Metelees and monelees on Malverne hulls,
Musyng on this meteles; and my waye I yede.
(*Passus VII* 141-142)

The Malvern Hills

The Malvern Hills themselves, located between the Severn (or Habren) and the distant mountains of the Silures, may be seen as forming another link between Edward and Langland. They are mentioned by name three times in *Piers Plowman*, not just in the opening lines and in the rueful comment on poverty, but also in a reference to lawyers which Edward must have found equally amusing, given his early experience of working for a solicitor:

You could sooner measure the mist on the Malverns
Than persuade them to speak unless paid in silver.
(*Prologue* 127-128)⁶

In 1899 the Elgars moved to the house they named Craeg Lea, on the side of the Hills, but Edward would have been aware of them long before then. They are visible from Worcester, and indeed from Lower Broadheath, and at his mother's suggestion he finally took them as a subject in 1897. The result was *Caractacus*, it being believed at the time that the earthwork known as the Herefordshire Beacon or 'British Camp' towards the southern end of the Hills was the site of the Celtic leader's last stand.

The final few words of Acworth's opening chorus are:

Watchmen, behold the warnings dire,
Writ eastward far in signs of fire...
Before us Habren's thousand rills,
Behind, the dark Silurian hills.

4 Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 93.

5 See JNM, *A Creative Life*, 346.

6 The quotations used from now on are all drawn from my modern translation of Langland, which preserves the alliterative style of the original: William Langland, *Piers Plowman. A Modern Verse Translation*. Translated by Peter Sutton (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2014).

Caractacus then cries out:

O spirits of the hill, surround
With waving wings this holy ground.

It is holy ground. At the beginning of *Piers Plowman*, the narrator looks up at the Herefordshire Beacon and imagines that the fortress which stands there is the abode of God, while the 'dale with a dungeon' that lies down below is the dwelling of the devil: the tower is naturally in the east because God is associated with enlightenment, and the devil lurks in the west where the light dies. Edward would have appreciated this conceit, which is typical of the religious symbolism in the poem, and if we walk up the Hills we too can follow Langland's thinking: although the Norman fortress is long gone, the sun still shines on the summit and there are several houses at the shadowy foot of the Hills which retain the vestige of a moat. We, as ever, are caught between the two.

The content of 'Piers Plowman'

So what is this poem known as *Piers Plowman*, the 'marvellous book' that was Edward's 'Bible'?

It is in essence a quest for how to live a good Christian life which combines practical activity with spiritual reflection, that being the medieval ideal. It is also a commentary on greed and corruption which remains astonishingly topical today. Conscience complains, for instance, that:

...mischievous Miss Money persuades many mayors
To pocket the payments from pestering traders...
Money now makes many miscreants lords,
Who believe they're above and have bought the law.
(*Passus III* 85-86, 293-294)

The style, inherited from Old English, is alliterative. That is, three of the four stressed syllables in each line begin with the same consonant, or with a vowel, and there is a caesura or break at the mid-point of each line, ensuring a regular rhythm. This is quite distinct from the end-rhymes which are more familiar to us and were employed by Chaucer, Langland's near-contemporary, and many others at the time. A typical rhyming couplet of the period which would have appealed to Langland is, in modern English:

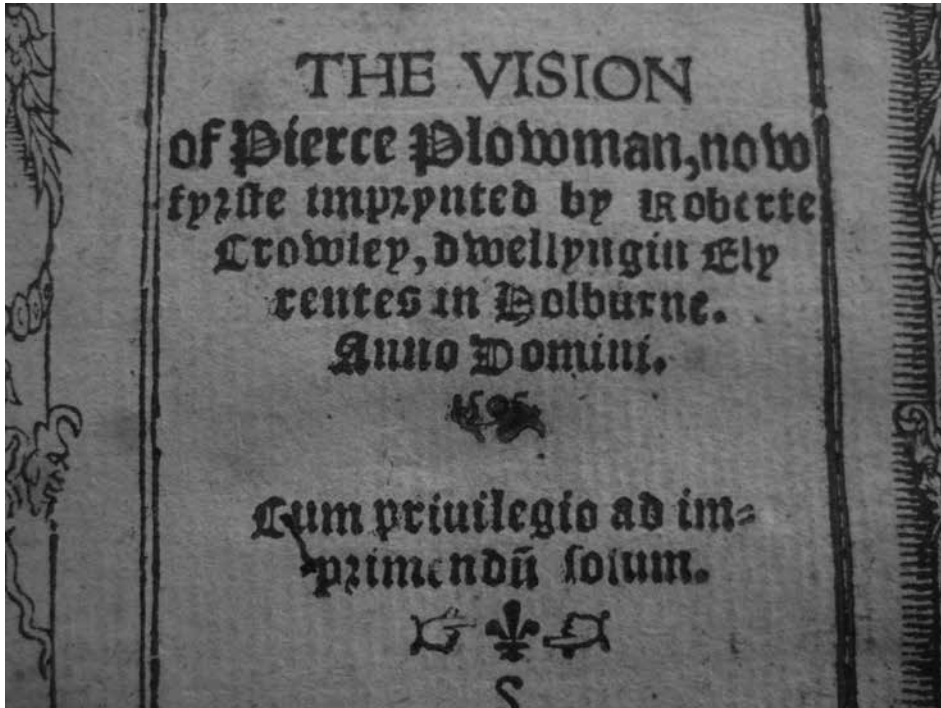
Alas! that friars the roads should roam
When husbands are away from home.⁷

Some fifty-two manuscript copies of *Piers Plowman* are still extant, an exceptionally large number which attests to the poem's popularity when Langland wrote it. We also have copies of the four printed editions which appeared in the mid-sixteenth century, a hundred and fifty years after the author died. These various versions differ in length, content and structure, and were divided in the nineteenth century into three groups by the first modern scholar to study the poem in depth, the

7 Adapted from *A Song against the Friars*, in Thomas Wright (ed.), *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III*, Rolls Series vol. 14 (London 1859) I, 224-226. Reprinted in Jeanne Krochalis and Edward Peters (eds.), *The World of Piers Plowman* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 103-104.

Rev. Walter W. Skeat. He was Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge University and a founder member of the Early English Text Society, which continues to publish works to this day. Through the Society, Skeat published the three versions of the poem separately between 1867 and 1885. The Oxford University Press then brought out a comparative edition of all three texts in 1886, and this remained in print for over a century.⁸

The three versions of *Piers Plowman* can be dated from their historical references to the early 1360s, the late 1370s and the mid-1380s. The first version is only two and a half thousand lines in length, but the later versions extend to between seven and eight thousand lines. The 1380s version, written after the mob violence of the Peasants' Revolt of summer 1381, which Langland would have witnessed while living in London, is slightly less acerbic in its social criticism, and the appearances of the figure of Piers himself are much reduced. The quotations in this article are taken from the 1370s version, which consists of a Prologue and 20 *Passus* or *Steps*. It is, as will be explained, very probably the version that Edward knew and admired.



The printed edition of 1550 (private collection)

The Piers of the title is an honest ploughman who appears to the narrator in a series of dreams, a literary device that other writers used at the time. It is employed, for example, in Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose* and *The Book of the Duchess*, and in poems by other authors whose names

8 See Note 2.

have been lost.⁹ However, *Piers Plowman* is unusual in containing not just one dream, but as many as eight, and another two 'dreams within dreams'.

All versions of the poem open with the narrator falling asleep on the Hills and having his first vision, of a 'fair field full of folk'. Here are the first six lines again, this time in modern English:

One summer season when the sun was still soft,
I set off like a sheep in a shaggy woolen smock,
The unholy habit of a wandering hermit,
And went seeking wonders in the wide, wide world.
And one morning in May on the Malvern Hills
I witnessed a wonder which I warrant was magic.

The poem continues:

Quite weary with walking I wanted to rest
On a broad grassy bank beside a small brook.
As I lay down I leant and looked in the water,
Which babbled so sweetly I soon fell asleep...
And high in the east, looking up at the sun,
Saw a tower on a toft, built sturdy and true;
To the west, further down, were a dale and a dungeon
With deep, dark ditches that I gazed on with dread.
Between them I found a fair field full of folk...
(Prologue 7-15)

A rowdy wedding is about to take place between Money and Falsehood, but Theology steps in to refer the matter to the King, and the crowd of revellers sets off for Westminster. The King threatens to arrest Falsehood and his friends, who flee, and he asks Conscience to marry Miss Money instead. Conscience refuses, and Reason supports him. The King undertakes to be guided by them in future.

In his next dream, the narrator sees the Seven Deadly Sins make their often humorous confessions, which incites the people to set out in search of Truth. Piers the honest Plowman offers to lead them once he has finished the harvest, but he has to call up Hunger to punish the carousing idlers who decline to work. The quest for Truth nevertheless leads to a dead end when Piers is offered a written pardon for those who help him. He tears it up, arguing that what matters is not a scrap of parchment but to 'do well', and preferably to 'do better' or 'do best'.

Most of the second part of the poem, in which the narrator seeks to discover what this means, is peculiar to the longer versions. In his dreams the narrator consults Thought and Intelligence, Study, Learning and Scripture, but finds their obscurantism frustrating. He idly follows Fortune for a time, and eventually meets Fidelity, Nature, Imagination and Patience, who teach him the merits of poverty and the wonders of creation. He sees further visions of greed and the self-serving nature of social engagement, in the figure of a master tradesman, and at length he is relieved to meet his guide Piers again, and encounters Faith, Hope and Charity.

The high point of the poem is reached towards the end, when the narrator dreams of the terrifying Harrowing of Hell, which releases the souls of the penitent, including the heathen, from the clutches of the devil. But then, in the final two sections, the forces of Antichrist gather, against

9 These poems include *Pearl*, *The Golden Targe* and *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, in which Youth, Middle Age and Old Age appear in a vision.

whom the only defence is true Christian values. Conscience and Grace seek to withstand the onslaught of Sloth, Covetousness and Falsehood, but Courtesy causes them to admit a fraudulent friar, who brings corruption to the very heart of the Church. Conscience sets off in despair to seek the help of Piers once more, and the narrator awakes for the last time.

Many of the characters, such as Conscience, Thought and Intelligence, are given abstract names, but the human strengths and weaknesses that they depict are shown in real situations, and they are recognisable as people we encounter today. Merchants, bankers, bishops, priests, farm-workers, shopkeepers, lawyers, gentry and scholars come tumbling out of the text alongside fraudsters and vagabonds, thieves, drunkards and whores. For example:

Brewers and bakers and butchers and cooks,
...these are the traders who treat most unfairly
The poor who must purchase portion by portion...

I drifted into drapery and learnt such dodges
As stretching the selvage till it seems far longer.

And deceitful physicians are assassins, God help them!
Folk die from their drugs before destiny wills it...

He made loans that were harsh and looked for loop-holes
To keep the property that people had pledged.
(*Passus* III 77-79; V 203-204; VI 270-271; XIII 361-362)

The poem also speaks of the natural world:

On the mountain I remember as Middle Earth
I saw both the sun, the sea and the shore,
I beheld the birds that were building in bushes
Nests which we want the wit to weave.
I saw flowers in the forest with their feast of colors,
And the hues that grow in the green of the grass,
Some sour and some sweet; a miracle, it seemed,
For I cannot describe all their colors and kinds.
(*Passus* XI 309, 312, 330-331, 350-353)

And it comments on domestic life:

As is found in the Bible, three factors may force
A man to walk out of his house and home.
The first is a wife who is wicked and willful,
And the fellow flees for fear of her tongue.
The second is rain through a ruinous roof,
When he drags his bed up and down to keep dry.
The third is smoke and smoldering smuts
That attack his eyes and trouble his throat,
And he coughs and curses the cur who failed
To blow a good blaze or who brought in wet wood.
(*Passus* XVII 315-324)

Any of these statements could have been made in the 1890s when Edward read the poem, and most of them (although it is not only wives who may be wicked) could still be made today. And consider this:

The grounding of grammar is greeted with stares
And no schoolchild I see can construct a letter
Or a satisfactory stanza of verse.
(*Passus* XV 372-374)

That complaint could have been made at any time since schools were invented, but like present-day readers, Edward would still have found his jaw drop with astonishment at its contemporary relevance.

On a more spiritual level he would also have been attracted by the eschatological conflict between Good and Evil that runs through the poem as the narrator tries to establish what doing well means. Edward's interest in such matters is evident from the titles of books displayed (at least until 2016) in the Birthplace Cottage:

H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John*
W. Bousset & A.H. Keane, *The Antichrist Legend*
Burns & Oates, *The Apocalypse the Antichrist and the End*
Renan's *Antichrist* translated by W.G. Hutchinson
Charles, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (The Schweich Lectures 1919)
James Mew, *Traditional Aspects of Hell*
The Apocrypha
The Apocryphal New Testament

However, it is clear from Geoffrey Hodgson's two articles entitled 'Everything I can lay my hands on' that these only represent a small selection of Edward's books on religion.¹⁰ *Piers Plowman* would therefore have stood alongside others, or maybe among his collection of poetry. Next to *Gerontius*, perhaps.

The Dream of Gerontius

There is considerable common ground between Newman's and Langland's poems. Holy Church is both a character in *Gerontius* and one of the fifty characters with abstract names in *Piers Plowman*. In Part I of *Gerontius*, Newman writes:

And I hold in veneration,
For the love of Him alone,
Holy Church, as His creation,
And her teachings, as His own.¹¹

10 Geoffrey Hodgson, 'Everything I can lay my hands on: Elgar's theological library' *Elgar Society Journal* 13 No. 2 (July 2003), 9-18 & 14 No. 5 (July 2006), 21-36.

11 Cardinal Newman, *The Dream of Gerontius* (London: De la More Press, 1908), 9.

Langland depicts her thus:

A lovely lady dressed in linen
Came from the castle and graciously called me.
(*Passus* I 3-4)

And her teachings include the dictum, to which Newman would have subscribed, that:

When all treasures are tried, Truth is the best.
(*Passus* I 134)

Angels galore and the character *Soul* also appear in both works, an angel being, as described by Newman's *Soul*:

... a member of that family
Of wondrous beings, who, ere the worlds were made,
Millions of ages back, have stood around
The throne of God...¹²

Langland agrees, explaining in accordance with the Apocryphal story:

Lucifer, whose light was second to our Lord's,
Thus learnt with his legions to be loyal to heaven,
But abandoned obedience and was cast out from bliss,
Falling from fellowship in the form of a devil
To inhabit for ever a deep dark hell.
And many, many more, a multitude of thousands,
Leapt out with Lucifer in loathsome shape,
Believing the lies of the angel who misled them.
(*Passus* I 111-118)

However, angels good and bad also have their comic side in both poems. The Prologue of *Piers Plowman* shows what can happen when good angels descend from heaven and consort with humans:

Then high in the air an angel of heaven
Bowed down to say a sentence or so
On behalf of the artless who have no Latin
To speak for themselves but must suffer and serve...
So everyone started to spout Latin sayings –
Everyone who could – to the King and his council.
(*Prologue* 48-51, 163-164)

And in the Harrowing of Hell, Langland's fallen angels are reminiscent of the comedy of the Miracle Plays:

'...he, King of heaven, he it was said
That if Adam ate the apple, all should then die...'
'That is so,' Satan said, 'but I'm strangely afraid,

12 *The Dream of Gerontius* (1908), 17-18.

For you got them by guile, breaking into his garden.
You sat in the apple tree, shaped like a serpent
To egg Eve on and entice her to eat.
And what's gained by guile is not fairly got.'
And Goblin agreed. 'God won't be beguiled;
They were damned by treachery and our title's not true.'
(*Passus* XVIII 277-278, 283-286, 289-291)

Similarly, singers and audiences invariably enjoy Edward's 'demons' chorus' from Part IV of *Gerontius*:

We are now arrived
Close on the judgment-court; that sullen howl
Is from the demons who assemble there.
It is the middle region, where of old
Satan appeared among the sons of God,
To cast his scoffs and jibes at holy Job.
So now his legions throng the vestibule,
Hungry and wild, to claim their property
And gather souls for hell...¹³

Despite the similarities, however, there are also many differences between *Gerontius* and *Piers Plowman*. The latter is about eight times as long and far broader in scope, and the two poems end very differently. *Gerontius* concludes:

Softly and gently, dearly-ransomed soul,
In my most loving arms I now enfold thee,
And, o'er the penal waters, as they roll,
I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold thee
...
Farewell, but not for ever! brother dear,
Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;
Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,
And I will come and wake thee on the morrow.¹⁴

Piers Plowman, on the other hand, ends not with the hope of resurrection but with the coming of Antichrist. The final, inconclusive lines are:

'By Christ,' said Conscience, 'I'll become a pilgrim
And walk the whole width of this wide, wide world
To seek Piers the Plowman, who will put down Pride,
And to find work for friars who flatter out of need
And no longer know me. So Nature, requite me
With health and good heart till I hail Piers the Plowman.'
He groaned then for Grace, and I gradually woke.
(*Passus* XX 381-387)

13 *The Dream of Gerontius* (1908), 26.

14 *The Dream of Gerontius* (1908), 53-54.

Echoes of 'Piers Plowman' in other compositions

It is nonetheless evident that *Piers Plowman* had a considerable influence on Edward while he was working on *Gerontius* and the other compositions mentioned so far: *Sea Pictures*, *Cockaigne* and *Caractacus*. It is therefore reasonable to wonder whether echoes may be found in more of his works.

At first sight, the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches have little to do with medieval morality. However, there is a link between *Piers Plowman* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, from which the title of the marches is taken:

Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all the quality,
Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!
(Act III Scene 3 lines 355-358, Othello speaking)

The irony is sometimes missed by concert audiences, but it was not missed by Edward. Like the 'meteles' line which he appended to the score of *Cockaigne*, it matched his disappointment over the Gordon symphony and *Gerontius*.

In the play, Othello continues:

And O ye mortal engines whose rude throats
Th' immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone.

Those lines would not have been lost on the despairing composer either, and nor would the chilling phrase that occurs at the end of the play when the Moor murders Desdemona: 'Put out the light, and then put out the light' (Act V Scene 2 line 7). When he read this, Edward must have recalled the lines in *Piers Plowman*:

A man's worst sin is committing a murder,
And a murderer must, I know in my mind,
Put out the light that our Lord most loves.
(Passus XVII 277-279)

It is often thought that Shakespeare remembered them.

Further references to death can be found in other works composed in the early 1900s. *May Song* was completed in 1901 (though not orchestrated until 1928) and it is, like *Cockaigne*, cheerful. But the two songs that Edward wrote for voice at that time are melancholy. *Come, Gentle Night* has words by Clifton Bingham, including:

Come, holy night!
Long is the day, and ceaseless is the fight;
Around us bid thy quiet shadows creep,
And rock us in thy sombre arms to sleep!

And *Always and Everywhere*, with words by the Polish poet Krasinski translated by Frank Fortey, though ultimately a love song, plumbs the realm of death. It begins:

Oh say not, when my earthly days are o'er
That I have only caused thee sorrow sore...

And later it continues:

But say, when soft the grasses o'er me wave,
That God is kind to hide me in the grave:
For both my life and thine I did enslave,
Always and Everywhere.

Is there a link with *Piers Plowman*? Yes, in that death also features in the poem, which is not surprising, given that Langland lived through several outbreaks of the Black Death. Dame Scripture reminds the narrator:

Do not be selfish with skills and possessions
For no one knows how near he is to death.
(Passus XI 199-206)

And Piers the Plowman says:

'Now I'll go with these people,' said Piers, 'as a pilgrim,
But before I set forth I shall frame a will.
My soul I present to him who deserves it,
To defend from the devil as I doubt not he'll do.
And the Church shall keep my carcass in care
For it took a tithing of my corn and my takings,
And I paid up promptly for the peril of my soul,
Expecting the priest to include me in his prayers,
With a mention in the Mass when remembering all Christians.'
(Passus VI 83-95)

As a Roman Catholic, Edward would have understood the importance of these concerns.

His faith was also self-evidently in his mind when he was composing *The Apostles*, and there are references to several of these gentlemen throughout *Piers Plowman*, though not of the kind we might expect:

A plowman appeared. 'By Saint Peter, with Truth
I'm as closely acquainted as a cleric with his books!'

'By Saint James,' the knight said, 'I certainly consent.
I'll obey you as long as my life may last!'
(Passus V 538-539; VI 55-56)

The Passion story itself, on the other hand, is treated with the deepest respect, and is rehearsed twice in the poem, including the lines:

Pilate came with a crowd to *sit in his courtroom*,
 To determine by trial whether Death would triumph.
 The Jews and the judges were all against Jesus,
 And the cry of ‘*Crucify!*’ filled the courtroom.
 They put him in a pillory before Pilate and said,
 ‘This Jesus joked about our temple of the Jews,
 Pretending he could topple it – there the mocker stands! –
 And in three days’ time he undertook once more
 To rebuild every brick as beautiful as before,
 As high and as wide, in all aspects equal.’
 A sergeant cried, ‘*Crucify!* He’s a sorcerer, I swear!’
 ‘*Take him!*’ cried another, and took some sharp thorns
 And criss-crossed them quickly, producing a crown
 Which he set on his head, and he said with envy,
 ‘*Hail to the Rabbi!*’ Then they hit him with a reed,
 They nailed him naked to the cross with three nails,
 And put up poison on a pole to his lips,
 And told him to drink for his days were done.
 (*Passus XVIII* 36-53)

Surely these lines are one of the sources that inspired *The Apostles*.

And, since *Piers Plowman* is full of dreaming – like *Gerontius* – what about *Dream Children*, composed early in 1902? Edward found the title in an essay by Charles Lamb: ‘...and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding, till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance....: “...We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all.... We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been...”’¹⁵

There are echoes of Shakespeare here again, probably reflecting Lamb’s earlier work retelling stories from the plays, but what is intriguing to Elgarians is the reference to Alice. As Lamb’s biographer commented a few years later, ‘It has generally been supposed, in the essay “*Dream Children*,” written in 1821, that Lamb was imagining what might have happened had he married Alice W—.’¹⁶ Could Lamb’s essay have put Edward in mind of *Helen W* – Helen Weaver? And although the Alice in his life was his wife while he was working on *Dream Children*, by a curious coincidence he met his own Alice W a few months afterwards.

There are yet more dreams later in his career. *Serenade*, a part-song written early in 1914 to a translation by Rosa Newmarch of a Russian poem by Maikov, contains the insistent refrain:

Dreams all too brief,
 Dreams without grief,
 Once they are broken, come not again...

It is also likely that the Malvern Hills remained in Edward’s mind after he moved away from Worcestershire. In the part-song *Death on the Hills* written in Hereford in 1913 to another translation by Rosa Newmarch of words by Minsky, he may well have been thinking back to Malvern, and

15 Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 145-146. *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb was published in 1807.

16 E.V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* in 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1905), Vol. II 516.

perhaps to Langland’s ‘dale with a dungeon’.¹⁷ The song begins:

Why o’er the darkening hill-slopes
 Do dusky shadows creep?
 Because the wind blows keenly there,
 Or rain-storms lash and leap?

So we can perhaps add *Dream Children*, *The Apostles*, *Pomp and Circumstance* and several songs to the list of works connected in some way with *Piers Plowman*. All together we have found around a dozen, and we could find more if we enumerated all the references to hills and death.

How and when did Edward learn about the poem?

As suggested above, it was Skeat who brought the poem to widespread attention in the mid-1880s. However, in 1887, a revised edition was also published of a 1370s version of the poem that had been edited by Thomas Wright back in the 1840s.¹⁸

Then in the spring of 1895, the vicar of Great Malvern Priory, the Rev. Dr Isaac Smith, gave a series of lectures on the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, as the title was then expressed, and a series of six weekly articles on the poem was subsequently printed in the *Malvern Advertiser*, written by someone calling himself Aldwynus Malvernensis. He was no doubt Dr Smith himself, Aldwyn being the legendary founder of the Priory.¹⁹

From Alice’s diary it is clear that Edward did not attend the lectures, nor is there any reference to them in Edward’s letters. He was busy with the *Bavarian Highlands* and *King Olaf* at the time, he was intermittently unwell, and he was obviously not a member of the Anglican Priory congregation. However, he would have read the articles in the *Advertiser*.

It is apparent from these that Dr Smith was referring to Thomas Wright’s edition rather than the new work by Skeat since he sets out quotations from the poem in the same way as Wright, splitting each line into two, although from the form of Edward’s quotations it would seem that he read Skeat rather than Wright. It matters little, however, since Skeat’s 1370s version is broadly similar to the text published by Wright.

In order to read that text Edward would have needed a grasp of Middle English. The first modern English prose translation appeared in the same year as the lectures, but Dr Smith does not refer to it and it is unlikely that Edward knew it. The language would not have presented too much of an obstacle, however, since Wright and Skeat both provided extensive footnotes and a glossary.

Furthermore, the more one reads, the more familiar the language becomes, and the less impenetrable the spelling. And given what we know about Edward’s appreciation of language – he would scarcely have become a friend of Shaw or a member of the Literary Society alongside Hugh Walpole, Walter de la Mare, John Murray, Buchan, Galsworthy and others if he were a clod, despite his occasional poor choice of libretto – it is easy to believe that he understood the subtleties of the poem as well as many fourteenth-century readers and listeners.

17 See JNM, *A Creative Life*, 660.

18 Editions of individual versions of the poem were published by T.D. Whitaker and T. Wright in 1813 and 1842 respectively.

19 Aldwynus Malvernensis, *Malvern’s Monk: a series of articles on the vision of Piers Plowman*. Reprinted from the *Malvern Advertiser* (Malvern: Malvern Advertiser, 1895).

The identity of William Langland

Nonetheless, one aspect of the poem might still have puzzled Edward: who was William Langland, its author? The articles in the *Malvern Advertiser* are headed ‘Malvern’s monk’, in line with the unfounded but well-established tradition followed by Wright that Langland was a member of the Great Malvern monastic community. Edward probably believed this, although Skeat is more cautious, saying only that Langland was possibly educated at Great Malvern Priory but probably never took final vows.

Opinion has changed over the last century, and although Skeat’s belief that Langland only took minor orders is now generally accepted, it is thought more likely that he was educated at Little Malvern Priory, a few miles south of Great Malvern on the same side of the Hills as Craeg Lea and the Catholic church of St Wulstan’s. The most striking piece of evidence for this is Langland’s mention of Gluttony grunting like two sows, an unusual carving of which beasts can still be found among the choir stalls.

Beyond that, as little is known today as was the case in 1900. Brief notes on manuscripts state that Langland was born in Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire, and that his father was Stacy de Rokayle, a ‘gentleman’ who held land in Oxfordshire from the Despensers, one of whose residences was Hanley Castle, very near to Little Malvern. These details were known to Wright and Skeat and would therefore have been available to Edward, but then and now there is no certain explanation for the poet using the name Langland rather than Rokayle, and all other biographical details have to be inferred from the poem. These include Langland’s marriage and his move to London, where, as Skeat says, ‘he tells us that he was loath to reverence lords and ladies, or persons dressed in fur or wearing silver pendants; he would never say “God save you” to serjeants whom he met, for all of which proud behaviour, then very uncommon in a poor man, people looked on him as a fool, and few approved of his mode of life.’²⁰

It is therefore probable that it was not only the imagery, humour and humanity of the poem which appealed to Edward, and the serious religious debate, but also the fact that its author was a fellow awkward spirit.

Peter Sutton is the author of the play Elgar and Alice, first performed in 2007 and most recently staged in 2016-17, and his modern verse translation of the poem ‘Piers Plowman’ was published by McFarland of North Carolina in 2014. He is a freelance writer, translator and editor and former Head of Publications at the Unesco Institute for Education. His article on Elgar’s religious beliefs appeared in this Journal in 2013. For more information see www.petersutton.eu



Little Malvern Priory as it is today (photo by the author)

²⁰ Skeat Vol. II, xxxv.

Edward Elgar and Gustav Mahler: ‘who is virtually unknown in England’ (part two)

Alexander Odefey

In the last issue, I investigated the question whether Elgar and Mahler might have ever met. Following the lives of both composers thoroughly, I was able to ascertain the only possible dates for such an encounter. From the existing sources it could be assumed, however, that it is not very probable that they indeed came to know each other personally.¹ In this second part of my reflections and in a third part following in the forthcoming issue, I intend to explore to what extent Elgar and Mahler were acquainted with the other’s career and oeuvre. In addition I will examine correspondences between some of the compositions of these two highly individual composers. Both topics will be discussed alternately in roughly chronological order. Although the main emphasis in part two will be laid on the first topic, we start with two examples for the second.

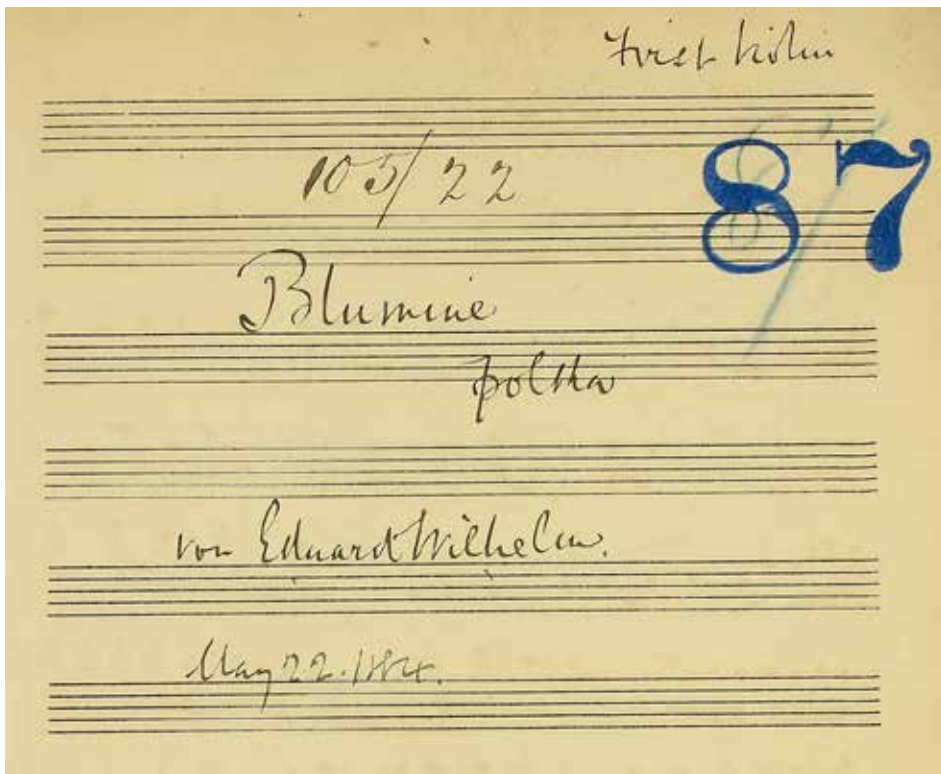
‘Blumine’

Elgar’s relations with the County and City of Worcester Pauper Lunatic Asylum in Powick have been thoroughly researched in recent years. We have got Andrew Lyle’s excellent edition of the music, several illuminating articles and a fine new recording.² In January 1879 the 21-year-old composer was appointed Bandmaster at Powick, succeeding his violin teacher Frederick Spray. In the six years he held this post, he taught the players, composed music to be performed at the Friday evening dance for the patients, and conducted the band.

Interestingly, Elgar gave titles to all his dances. Three sets of quadrilles from May and September 1879 are named *Die junge Kokette* (dedicated to Jessie Holloway, the daughter of the resident engineer at the Asylum), *L’Assomoir* (referring to Émile Zola’s novel *L’Assommoir*) and *La Brunette*. A set of Lancers from February 1880 is called *The Valentine*, and the final set of

¹ Alexander Odefey, ‘Edward Elgar and Gustav Mahler: The possibility of an encounter (part one)’, *The Elgar Society Journal* 20/1 (2017), 5–33 [hereafter: *Part one*].

² Andrew Lyle (editor), *Music for Powick Asylum*, Elgar Complete Edition, Vol. 22 (Rickmansworth: Elgar Society Edition Ltd., 2008); Andrew Lyle, “‘When I was at the Lunatic Asylum...’: Elgar at Powick, 1879–1884”, *The Elgar Society Journal* 15/3 (2007), 13–28; Barry Collett, ‘Elgar’s Music for Powick Asylum’, *The Elgar Society Journal* 18/3 (2013), 53–54; Martin Bird, ‘Powick People’, *The Elgar Society Journal* 18/4 (2014), 40–47; Ken Crump, ‘Edward Elgar at Powick Mental Hospital’, *The Elgar Society Journal* 19/2 (2015), 25–30; Music for Powick Asylum, Innovation Chamber Ensemble, Barry Collett, conductor, SOMMCD 252 (reviewed by Martin Bird and Andrew Neill, *The Elgar Society Journal* 18/4 (2014), 48–50).



Title page of one of the 1st violin parts for 'Blumine' (The Elgar Birthplace Museum, MS 148 f.23)

quadrilles from October of that year has the title *Paris* (again dedicated to Jessie Holloway).³ The other five surviving dances are polkas. The first – *Maud* – was composed in May 1880. The next three are connected with Helen Weaver, to whom Elgar was engaged in summer 1883. *La Blonde* from October 1882 is explicitly dedicated to her ('H J W vom Leipzig gewidmet'),⁴ while *Nelly* (October 1881) and *Helcia* (October 1883) bear Elgar's pet names for her.

The last polka is at the same time the final composition Elgar wrote for Powick. It is dated 22 May 1884, named *Blumine* and ascribed 'von Eduard Wilhelm'. The scoring comprises a flute, a clarinet, two cornets, violins I and II, bassi and piano. Barry Collett called it 'a gem', and Andrew Lyle 'one of the finest of the set, with a wistful first section contrasted with more energetic music, and a typically broad tune for the Trio'.⁵ Apart from the fact that Daniel M. Grimley in his review of

3 In August 1880 the French capital had been the destination of Elgar's first journey abroad. He had spent a week there, accompanied by his friend and future brother-in-law Charles Pipe; see *Part one*, 6.

4 Helen was studying at the conservatoire in Leipzig where Elgar visited her in January 1883; see *ibid.*, 6f.

5 Collett, 'Elgar's Music for Powick Asylum', 54; Andrew Lyle, booklet notes to SOMMCD 252, 11.

Lyle's edition characterised the title of this polka as 'disconcertingly Mahlerian',⁶ to my knowledge there haven't yet been made any comments about the name. Before discussing its possible meaning let us take a look at the connection with Mahler. The title *Blumine* can be found in his music, too, namely in the original version of his First Symphony.

Mahler wrote down his symphony between January and March 1888 in Leipzig where he was working as second conductor at the *Stadttheater*. In October he took up the post of the director of the Royal Hungarian Opera in Budapest, and here he conducted the first performance of his new composition on 20 November 1889. In the programme it was designated as 'Symphonic Poem in two parts', with five movements, among them an Andante as the second. As the reception was extremely negative Mahler put the manuscript aside for more than three years. He finally revised it in 1893 in Hamburg where he had been appointed chief conductor (*Erster Kapellmeister*) at the *Stadt-Theater* two years before. Having particularly changed the instrumentation he presented his symphony on 27 October 1893 in Hamburg, now under the title '*Titan*. Eine Tondichtung in Symphonieform' ('*Titan*. A Tone Poem in Symphonic Form'). Again the work was divided in two parts, now named '1. Theil. *Aus den Tagen der Jugend*. Blumen-, Frucht- und Dornstücke' ('Part I. *From the Days of Youth*. Pieces of Flowers, Fruit and Thorn') and '2. Theil. *Commedia humana*' ('Part II. *Commedia humana*'). Mahler gave additional programmatic explanations for most of the movements, but for our aims it is sufficient to note that the second movement now reads '*Blumine* (Andante)'. For the third performance that took place on 3 June 1894 in Weimar at the Tonkünstlerfest of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein, Mahler had this programmatic information printed again, though with some modifications and corrections, among them the correct plural 'Dornenstücke' and the title '*Blumine-Capitel* (Andante)' for the second movement. As he experienced a lot of misunderstanding and irritation with his remarks on the 'content' of his music, Mahler decided to abstain from them. Hence in all thirteen performances of the symphony he was to conduct from then on in his lifetime, he had it announced simply as 'Symphony No. 1'. He also discarded the original second movement, leaving a work in four movements.⁷

In this version it was published in 1899, and subsequently the *Blumine* movement fell into oblivion and later was considered lost. Only in 1966 Donald Mitchell rediscovered the whole autograph of the five-movement Hamburg version. On 18 June 1967 at the Aldeburgh Festival no less than Benjamin Britten conducted the first performance of *Blumine* since 1894. From Mahler's manuscript it was also possible to recognize that the movement derives from an older composition: the incidental music he wrote in 1884 for a presentation of the popular dramatic poem *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen* by Joseph Victor von Scheffel at the Royal Theater in Kassel.⁸ In a letter of 22 June 1884 Mahler told his friend Friedrich Löhr that in recent days he had to write in a hurry music for the *Trompeter* which was to be performed 'tomorrow' in the theatre 'with living pictures'. He also mentioned that the whole task then was accomplished within two days and that he took much pleasure in the result.⁹ Later he was less sure about the quality of his music and took to Leipzig only one of the seven orchestral pieces he had composed: the serenade-like movement he eventually named *Blumine*. But about this he ultimately was in two minds, too, which led him to remove it from his symphony.

6 *The Elgar Society Journal* 16/2 (2009), 45.

7 See Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 1993), 26–30; Knud Martner, *Mahler's Concerts* (New York: Kaplan, 2010), 67, 87–89, 95–97, 113–115.

8 See Donald Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler: Volume II. The Wunderhorn Years. Chronicles and Commentaries* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, reprint 1995), 217–224.

9 Gustav Mahler, *Briefe*, hrsg. von Herta Blaukopf (Wien: Zsolnay, 1996), 53.

One of Mahler's lifelong favourite authors was the German writer Jean Paul (pen name for Johann Paul Friedrich Richter). In July 1883, some days before attending the Bayreuth Festival for the first time, Mahler even visited Wunsiedel, Jean Paul's birthplace.¹⁰ Three titles to be found in the early version of Mahler's First Symphony reveal connections with writings of this author. Firstly, of course, with *Titan*, the eponymous novel which was published in four volumes between 1800 and 1803. Then *Blumen-, Frucht- und Dornenstücke* that appears in the full title of the novel *Siebenkäs* (1796/97): *Blumen-, Frucht- und Dornenstücke oder Ehestand, Tod und Hochzeit des Armenadvokaten F. St. Siebenkäs im Reichsmarktflecken Kuhschnappel*. And finally our *Blumine* clearly points to Jean Paul's collection of his shorter articles and reviews, published in three volumes in 1810, 1815, 1820 as *Herbst-Blumine, oder gesammelte Werkchen aus Zeitschriften*.



Gustav Mahler (editor's archive)

Returning to Elgar and his final polka written for Powick, one has to note that he not only entitled it *Blumine* but also signed it with the German version of his own name: 'von Eduard Wilhelm'. Indeed, he had connections with Jean Paul, too. Jerrold Northrop Moore has pointed out that from a very early age Elgar – just as his mother Ann – had a great affinity with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's prose romance *Hyperion*. Much later, when the famous premiere and further performances of the *Enigma Variations* under Hans Richter in 1899 had brought Elgar to national prominence, he enclosed a copy of *Hyperion* with the letter of appreciation he sent to Richter on 25 October, writing:

My Dear Dr. Richter:
I must keep my promises – so I send you the little book about which we conversed & from which I, as a child, received my first idea of the great German nations.¹¹

The crucial point now is that the protagonist of the book, the young American Paul Flemming who travels through Germany and Switzerland, is an admirer of Jean Paul.¹² In fact, the fifth chapter of Book I has the heading: *Jean Paul, the Only-One*. Elgar therefore came quite early in contact with the name of the German writer and must at some time have heard or read of his *Herbst-Blumine*. Anyway, it is a remarkable coincidence that both Elgar and Mahler used the title *Blumine* for one of their works. And it is perhaps even more remarkable that these two compositions were written down within a couple of weeks in May and June 1884.

¹⁰ See his letter to Friedrich Löhr; *ibid.*, 47.

¹¹ Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar. Letters of a Lifetime* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2012), 95.

¹² See Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 64 (and 65–69).

Early cantatas: Mahler's 'Das klagende Lied' and Elgar's 'The Black Knight'

Staying with Longfellow's *Hyperion* for a moment, this leads to another analogy between Elgar and Mahler. In 1892 and 1893 Elgar composed *The Black Knight* op. 25, a setting of Ludwig Uhland's ballad *Der Schwarze Ritter*, which Longfellow had included in *Hyperion* in his own translation. Along with the Serenade for Strings op. 20, on which he had worked simultaneously, and the *Froissart* Overture op. 19 of 1890, *The Black Knight* represents one of Elgar's first major compositions. With a performance time of about 35 minutes it was his longest work hitherto. And being based on sketches dating back to 1889 (or even earlier), it actually can claim to be his very first 'big' opus.

After having attended the Conservatoire in Vienna from 1875 to 1878, Mahler began to compose his cantata *Das klagende Lied* in autumn 1879. By November next year he had completed it. Apart from a movement for piano quartet in A minor probably dating from 1876, this is his earliest extant work. In a letter to the Berlin critic Max Marschalk of December 1896, Mahler declared it 'my first work in which I found myself as "Mahler"' and his 'Opus 1'.¹³ He had also written the text for his cantata himself, taking the eponymous fairy tale by Ludwig Bechstein and *Der singende Knochen* ('The Singing Bone') by the Brothers Grimm as a basis.

Thus for both Elgar and Mahler a cantata became the first major musical creation of their careers. In addition, the storylines of both works are not unlike, being definitely gripping, but quite sinister and leading to a gruesome ending. And, while both composers already in these early works clearly show their distinct musical languages, they share making use here of leitmotiv techniques. Obviously, there are differences between the two pieces, too. Elgar's cantata requires only choir and orchestra, while Mahler needs no fewer than six soloists (including a treble and a boy alto), a choir, a very large orchestra and offstage instruments. Furthermore the three parts of his cantata last almost twice as long as Elgar's four scenes.¹⁴

Richard Strauss

A list containing the name of every fellow composer Gustav Mahler met in his life would be quite a long one. And a comparable list for Edward Elgar might not become much shorter. There are, however, not so many colleagues who had an encounter with both Mahler and Elgar. Indeed, it seems that Richard Strauss was the only composer in those times to have had a closer, almost cordial relationship with both men.

Mahler and Strauss got to know each other as early as 1887, when 23-year-old Strauss came to Leipzig to conduct his Symphony in F minor with the Gewandhaus orchestra on 17 October. Their correspondence, which surely has survived in incomplete shape, comprises letters from 1888, 1891–1895, 1897, 1900–1907, 1909 and 1911.¹⁵ From time to time they also met during these

¹³ German original: 'Mein erstes Werk, in dem ich mich als "Mahler" gefunden, ist ein *Märchen* für Chor, Soli u[nd] Orchester: *Das klagende Lied!* Dieses Werk bezeichne ich als Op. 1.'; Gustav Mahler, *Briefe*, 205.

¹⁴ See Richard Smith, "'A sort of symphony in four divisions': The Black Knight and its first performances", *The Elgar Society Journal* 18/5 (2014), 4–20; Florian Csizmadia, *Leitmotivik und verwandte Techniken in den Chorwerken von Edward Elgar. Analysen und Kontexte* (Berlin: Köster, 2017), 190–202; Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler. Visionary and Despot. Portrait of A Personality* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2012), 108–117.

¹⁵ Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, *Correspondence 1888–1911*, edited with Notes and an Essay by Herta

years. Mahler conducted Strauss's opera *Feuersnot* in 1902 and 1905 in Vienna,¹⁶ and tried in vain to get the permission to perform *Guntram* in Hamburg (because of the disapproval of his impresario Bernhard Pollini) and *Salome* in Vienna (because of censorship). Moreover, between 1895 and 1911 he conducted several of Strauss's orchestral works in his concerts: *Aus Italien* and *Sinfonia domestica* in Vienna; *Don Juan*, *Tod und Verklärung*, *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Ein Heldenleben* in New York; the Preludes to Acts 1 and 2 of *Guntram* in Hamburg, Vienna and New York; *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* in Rome and in America; and finally the orchestral songs *Hymnus* and *Pilgers Morgenlied* from op. 33 in Munich, St. Petersburg and New York.¹⁷

Conversely in 1900, 1901 and 1909 Strauss conducted Mahler's First and Fourth Symphonies, the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and the *Wunderhorn-Lieder* *Rheinlegendchen*, *Verlor'ne Müh* and *Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen*.¹⁸ And particularly, he helped Mahler on several occasions finding a place to present his symphonies. The earliest example of this attitude pertains to the First Symphony. As we have seen above, Mahler conducted it in its revised form under the title *Titan* on 27 October 1893 in Hamburg. Inviting Strauss he wrote to him from Hamburg:

My dear Friend

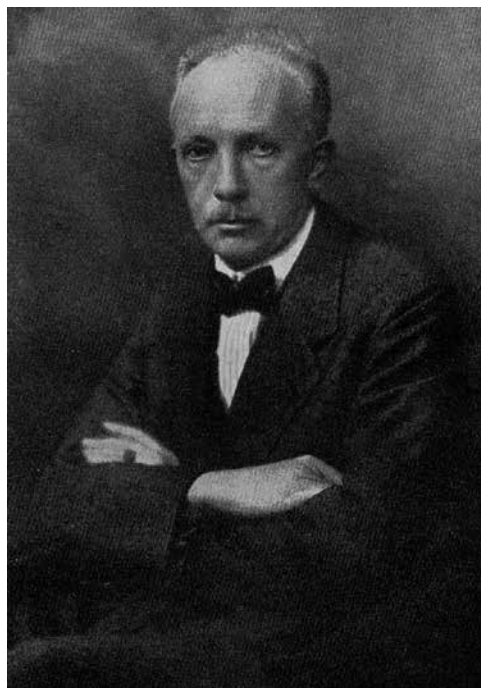
On Friday the 27th of this month I am conducting a concert in Hamburg in which a number of my own compositions will be performed. (I am the only living conductor who is interested in my compositions, and am therefore taking the first opportunity that presents itself.) –

It would be a great pleasure to me if you would do me the honour of being present. [...] ¹⁹

Strauss replied from Weimar on 22 October:

My dear Friend

It is unfortunately quite impossible for me to accept your kind invitation. I should have been delighted to come, but on 27th and 28th I have to conduct *Lohengrin* rehearsals and cannot get away.



Richard Strauss (editor's archive)

Blaukopf (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996); Gustav Mahler, „In Eile – wie immer!“ *Neue unbekannte Briefe*, hrsg. und kommentiert von Franz Willnauer (Wien: Zsolnay, 2016), 413–419.

16 See Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 2. Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897–1904)* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 479–486; Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 3. Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904–1907)* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 224.

17 See Martner, *Mahler's Concerts*, 335.

18 See Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, *Correspondence*, 165.

19 Ibid., 23. Mahler also performed six of his *Wunderhorn-Lieder*.

I thank you most warmly for thinking of me – but that you are the only living conductor interested in your compositions is simply not true: when I asked you two years ago to send me something from your symphonies you turned me down, don't you remember? [...] ²⁰

Mahler gladly accepted the renewed proposal of support, and with Strauss's influence he could present his symphony once again on 3 June 1894 at the Tonkünstlerfest of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein in Weimar. The first performance of Mahler's Third Symphony eight years later at another Tonkünstlerfest, this time in Krefeld, was also made possible by Strauss, who had been elected president of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein in the previous year.

Strauss likewise attended the premieres of Mahler's Sixth and Eighth Symphonies 1906 in Essen and 1910 in Munich, respectively. When he learned of Mahler's early death on 18 May 1911, Strauss recorded in his writing calendar: 'The death of this aspiring, ideal, thrusting artist is a severe loss.' And on 20 May he told Hugo von Hofmannsthal in a letter that he was deeply moved by it.²¹



Edward Elgar (editor's archive)

Elgar saw Richard Strauss for the first time in summer 1897 during his holiday in Bavaria with his wife Alice. On 12 August in Munich they went to the Residenztheater to hear him conduct a performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Three weeks later, when they were on their way back from Garmisch to England, they stayed for another three days in Munich and on 1 September heard again a performance conducted by Strauss, now Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. As Alice's diary entries tell nothing about an encounter with Strauss it is very probable that the Elgars just saw him from the auditorium.²² The first contact between both composers then occurred when Elgar on 2 January 1902 sent a letter to Strauss. He wrote from Malvern:

My dear Sir:

Will you forgive me for writing in English as I understand German very little.

It gave me the greatest pleasure to hear from my friend, Mr. Edward Speyer, that you are going to play in Berlin my overture 'Cockaigne'. May I say, at once, how deeply I appreciate your kindness & how honoured I feel that its first performance in Germany should be under your distinguished direction. It gave

20 Ibid., 23f.

21 See Rainer Boss, 'Gustav Mahler und Richard Strauss. „Gegenpole der neuen Magnetachse“', *Nachrichten zur Mahler-Forschung* Nr. 46 (2002), 28f., quotation in my translation.

22 See *Part one*, 16; Edward Elgar, *Road to Recognition. Diaries 1897–1901*, edited by Martin Bird (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2015), 46, 48.

me the keenest pleasure, when lately in Düsseldorf [,] to hear of you & your many great works – some of which are known to me from my dear friend Buths.

There are several omissions in the score of ‘Cockaigne’ regarding indications of Tempi: these I venture to send on the enclosed paper

Believe me, with again many thanks,
Yours very truly
Edward Elgar²³

Strauss conducted Elgar’s *Cockaigne* on 21 January in the fourth concert of the Berliner Tonkünstler-Orchester. This was the first time he performed a work by his English fellow composer. In regard to Mahler it is important to notice that Strauss only three days after this concert travelled to Vienna where he stayed for a full week. He attended the rehearsals and the first performance in Austria of his new opera *Feuersnot*, that Mahler conducted on 29 January at the Hofoper. Strauss was delighted with the result and thanked him exuberantly.²⁴ As they saw each other regularly during this week, it might very well have happened that Strauss talked to Mahler about Elgar’s overture which he had performed just a few days ago.

Elgar and Strauss then met at the Lower Rhenish Musical Festival in May. The story of the triumphant success that Elgar received when Julius Buths conducted *The Dream of Gerontius* on 19 May (followed by a performance of Liszt’s ‘Faust’ Symphony under Strauss as the second part of the concert) and of Strauss’s speech the next day, has justly become famous.²⁵ As Elgar met Strauss again only two weeks later and Mahler comes into play, too, let us have a closer look at the course of events: Edward and Alice Elgar left Düsseldorf on 22 May for a trip to Dresden via Kassel, Eisenach and Leipzig. On 3 June they returned to Düsseldorf and were in London the next day. Strauss on 21 May travelled from Düsseldorf to London, where he arrived the next morning. He had a short meeting with an artist agent, and in the afternoon reached the Isle of Wight. After one week of holiday he returned to London on 29 May to give – together with the German actor and director Ernst von Possart – four concerts at Queen’s Hall. During this time he stayed at the Langham Hotel, as did the Elgars from 4 to 6 June. Alice’s diary entries read:

Arrived at Langham about 9.30, after very good crossing. [...] Saw R. Strauss at Hotel. Rodewald, Jaeger & Klingsor dined with us & to the Strauss Possart Concert. Fine. Saw him after & Speyers, H. Wood &c. E. to supper with Strauss. (4 June)
at Langham. [...] In evening E. & A. to Meistersinger – [...] not very good performance – Met R. Strauss during the day. (5 June)
A. nice talk with R. Strauss. [...] (6 June)²⁶

Edward and Alice were back in Malvern on the evening of 6 June. Strauss left London the following day and arrived in Krefeld on 8 June, where the annual Tonkünstlerfest of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein took place in that year. As already mentioned, Mahler there gave the first

23 Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 128.

24 See Franz Trenner, *Richard Strauss. Chronik zu Leben und Werk*, hrsg. von Florian Trenner (Wien: Strauss, 2003), 218f.; de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 2*, 480–484.

25 See *Part one*, 18, for a summary.

26 Edward Elgar, *The Path to Knighthood. Diaries 1902–1904*, edited by Martin Bird (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2016), 52–54.

performance of his Third Symphony. He had travelled to the Rhineland at the end of May and had conducted rehearsals in Cologne on 3 and 4 June and then further rehearsals in Krefeld. Finally, on 9 June he presented his symphony and achieved a stunning success.²⁷

In summary, it can be stated that during the period of three weeks beginning with the Lower Rhenish Musical Festival in Düsseldorf and ending with the Tonkünstlerfest in Krefeld, Strauss was in close contact at first with Elgar and then, immediately afterwards, with Mahler. It seems, indeed, to be highly probable that Strauss did tell at some point Elgar about Mahler’s music, or Mahler about Elgar’s music.

There were further encounters between Elgar and Strauss over the course of the following years. Already in early December 1902 they met again, when Strauss had come to London to conduct the first performance in England of *Ein Heldenleben*. Edgar Speyer and his wife, the violinist Leonora von Stosch, gave a dinner for Strauss at their house in Grosvenor Street that the Elgars attended as well as the concert next day (Elgar was at the rehearsal, too). Afterwards they saw Strauss at the home of Edgar Speyer’s cousin Edward Speyer who was a common friend of both composers.²⁸ Elgar wrote about it to August Jaeger on 10 December from Malvern:

We rushed off to Ridgehurst immediately: Strauss tore himself out of the crowd & said to me ‘Freund, sind Sie Zufrieden?’
Ja! gewiss!²⁹

The same day Elgar also sent a letter to Strauss, addressing him as ‘Dear Friend: *Richard Coeur de Lion!* Ein Held!’ He then continued:

We are now home in our quiet country & I must tell you – which in the hurry & crowd after the concert I could not do – how tremendously I felt your music & how I rejoiced to see & hear how the audience appreciated your gigantic work & your genius.

I regret more than ever that I cannot speak to you in your own tongue; I want to say so much – *all* of which wd. be in praise & thankfulness for your work.

My wife joins me in kindest regards to you & congratulations – we should like also to include the gnädige Frau, but as we have not yet had the great pleasure to meet her are rather afraid to do so.

With the greatest esteem
Your sincere friend
Edward Elgar³⁰

Three months later on 4 March 1903, Elgar once more wrote to Strauss to tell him that ‘last week’ he had ‘had the pleasure to hear’ his composition *Wandrer’s Sturmlied* (for six-part mixed choir and orchestra, based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s poem), performed by the Worcester Festival Choral Society under the direction of Ivor Atkins. At that concert Elgar himself had conducted

27 See again *Part one*, 18f. and the references given there; in addition see Trenner, *Richard Strauss. Chronik zu Leben und Werk*, 222–225.

28 See Elgar, *The Path to Knighthood*, 122f.; Moore, *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life*, 383f.

29 Quoted from Moore, *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life*, 384.

30 Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 145.

the *Coronation Ode*.³¹ In June 1903 both composers briefly met in London, and this time Alice Elgar got to know Pauline Strauss who, according to Alice's diary, was 'much struck' with Elgar and spoke of his 'fine handsome face'.³² On 18 December 1904 the Elgars received the guests at a reception given by the Concertgoers Club in London in Strauss's honour; before that they dined with him. And two days later, when Strauss conducted some of his works in Birmingham, the Clef Club gave a supper afterwards at which Edward made 'a long speech' of welcome to Strauss 'wh. made a great effect'.³³

When – on the way back from their stay in Italy with their friend Julia 'Pippa' Worthington – Edward, Alice and Carice got to Garmisch, they went to see Strauss on 11 June 1909.³⁴ Carice remembered:

We paid a solemn call on Richard Strauss and his wife, my mother being their interpreter. We were amused when Strauss wanted to show my Father some score or paper of interest, he called out to Frau Strauss who produced a bunch of keys from her underskirt, & duly locked it all up again when they had finished.³⁵

Some weeks after that meeting, Strauss visited Mahler in Toblach in South Tyrol and played parts of his new opera *Elektra* for him.³⁶ Was it perhaps that score that Strauss had shown his English visitor in Garmisch? Interestingly, Elgar saw Thomas Beecham's production of *Elektra* at Covent Garden in March 1910 and was, according to Alice, 'much impressed' by it. In April then, he met Strauss again at a reception for him given by Edgar Speyer.³⁷

How deeply Elgar esteemed his friendship with Strauss becomes clear, too, in a touching letter written after the First World War, in August 1920 to Adrian Boult:

I am glad you are extending your tour in Germany & I shall be grateful if you will give my warm greetings to Strauss: it is difficult to know how feelings have stood the wear & strain of the last few years, it may be, that S. will not be too 'receptive', anyhow it will be kind to *me* if you can assure him of my continued admiration &, if he will, friendship. I have followed, as well as broken communications could allow, his later compositions; I cannot expect him to be interested in mine – he has probably forgotten the good old days when he was named (by me) Richard Coeur de Lion, but I hope not.³⁸

In January 1922 both composers finally met again. I will come back to this encounter in part three of these reflections.

31 See Elgar, *The Path to Knighthood*, 147f.

32 Ibid., 176f., 182 ('was für ein feines schönes Gesicht', Alice wrote in German).

33 See ibid., 367, 369f., quot. 370; Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*, 449f.; Trenner, *Richard Strauss. Chronik zu Leben und Werk*, 260.

34 See *Part one*, 29.

35 Edward Elgar, *Darling Chuck. The Carice Letters*, edited by Martin Bird (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2014), 177.

36 See Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 4. A New Life Cut Short (1907–1911)* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 500–502.

37 See Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*, 572f., quot. 572.

38 Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 387.

As a result of the above-mentioned considerations it is possible to confirm that Strauss had quite close relations with both Mahler and Elgar for many years. It seems reasonable to assume that his conversations with them could have touched on the career and the music of the one not present.

Julius Buths

The German conductor, pianist and composer Julius Buths was musical director in Düsseldorf from 1890 until the end of 1907. Repeatedly he also chaired the Lower Rhenish Musical Festival, at times jointly with Richard Strauss or Hans Richter. His commitment to Elgar's work is well known, but he was very interested in Mahler's music, too. Here is a chronological list of the concerts given by the Städtischer Musikverein zu Düsseldorf which included compositions by Elgar or Mahler and were conducted by Buths. All concerts took place at the Tonhalle:³⁹

7 February 1901

Elgar: *Enigma Variations*

First performance in Germany

19 December 1901

Elgar: *The Dream of Gerontius* (in German)

First performance in Germany

19 May 1902

Elgar: *The Dream of Gerontius* (in German)

Lower Rhenish Musical Festival

2 April 1903

Mahler: Symphony No. 2

5 November 1903

Mahler: Symphony No. 4

12 June 1905

Mahler: Symphony No. 2

Lower Rhenish Musical Festival

15 February 1906

Mahler: Rückert songs *Um Mitternacht, Ich atmet' einen linden Duft,*

Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen

Otto Süsse, baritone

10 May 1906

Elgar: *The Apostles* (in German)



Julius Buths

39 Information on these concerts is available at the digitalised archive: <http://musikverein-duesseldorf.de/chronik-der-konzerte/> (20 May 2017).

Mahler and Buths knew each other from the first performance of Mahler's Third Symphony in Krefeld in June 1902.⁴⁰ There are only two extant documents from their correspondence. In the first letter Mahler replied on 25 March 1903 from Vienna to suggestions that Buths had made concerning his imminent performance of the Austrian's Second Symphony in Düsseldorf.⁴¹ Half a year later, the subject of Mahler's answer of 12 September was the projected performance of his Fourth Symphony which Buths was to give on 5 November. He expressed his great pleasure that his colleague was interested in this composition.⁴² They met again in May 1906 in Essen at the Tonkünstlerfest of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein, where the first performance of Mahler's Sixth Symphony took place.⁴³

After Elgar had become acquainted with Buths in October 1900 at the Birmingham Triennial Festival, they had remained in contact. The conductor then gave in February 1901 in Düsseldorf the first performances in Germany of the *Enigma Variations*, and he and one of his daughters even stayed – together with August Jaeger and his wife – for some weeks at the Elgars' home Craeg Lea during the following summer. Conversely Edward and Alice were guests of the Buths family in December, when they travelled to Düsseldorf to attend the German premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius*. Next year they met again there for the performance of *Gerontius* at the Lower Rhenish Musical Festival, and there were further encounters in the next years.⁴⁴ Buths also produced fine German translations of *The Dream of Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom* and the *Greek Anthology* Partsongs. Elgar's piano piece *Skizze* of 1901 is dedicated to him. It was published early in 1903 as a music supplement to the *Neue Musik-Zeitung*. The dedication reads: 'Meinem lieben Freunde, Professor Julius Buths, Düsseldorf.' Finally, there exist no fewer than 57 letters from Buths (and 5 from Mrs. Buths) to Elgar.⁴⁵

Very instructive is Julius Buths's letter to Elgar of 19 July 1902 from Düsseldorf.⁴⁶ It comprises sixteen handwritten pages. On the first twelve of them Buths described carefully and evenhandedly his impressions of Mahler's Symphonies No. 2 and No. 3. The Third he had heard only six weeks ago in Krefeld, the Second he was just studying. It would be, of course, quite interesting to know what Elgar thought of Buths's remarks about Mahler. But unfortunately the situation is more difficult. Firstly, all the letters that Elgar surely had sent to Buths have never been found; perhaps they are no longer existent. And secondly, on page twelve of the letter – at the end of the deliberations on Mahler – one can read the words 'Begin here!'; added with blue crayon by Alice Elgar. The letter arrived in Malvern on 23 July (post mark) when Elgar was in Bayreuth.⁴⁷ He returned home on 29 July, and it may well have been that Alice meanwhile had read Buths's letter to verify how important the content would be. As Buths had written in German and her

40 See *Part one*, 19.

41 Gustav Mahler, *Briefe*, 301–303.

42 *Ibid.*, 305f.

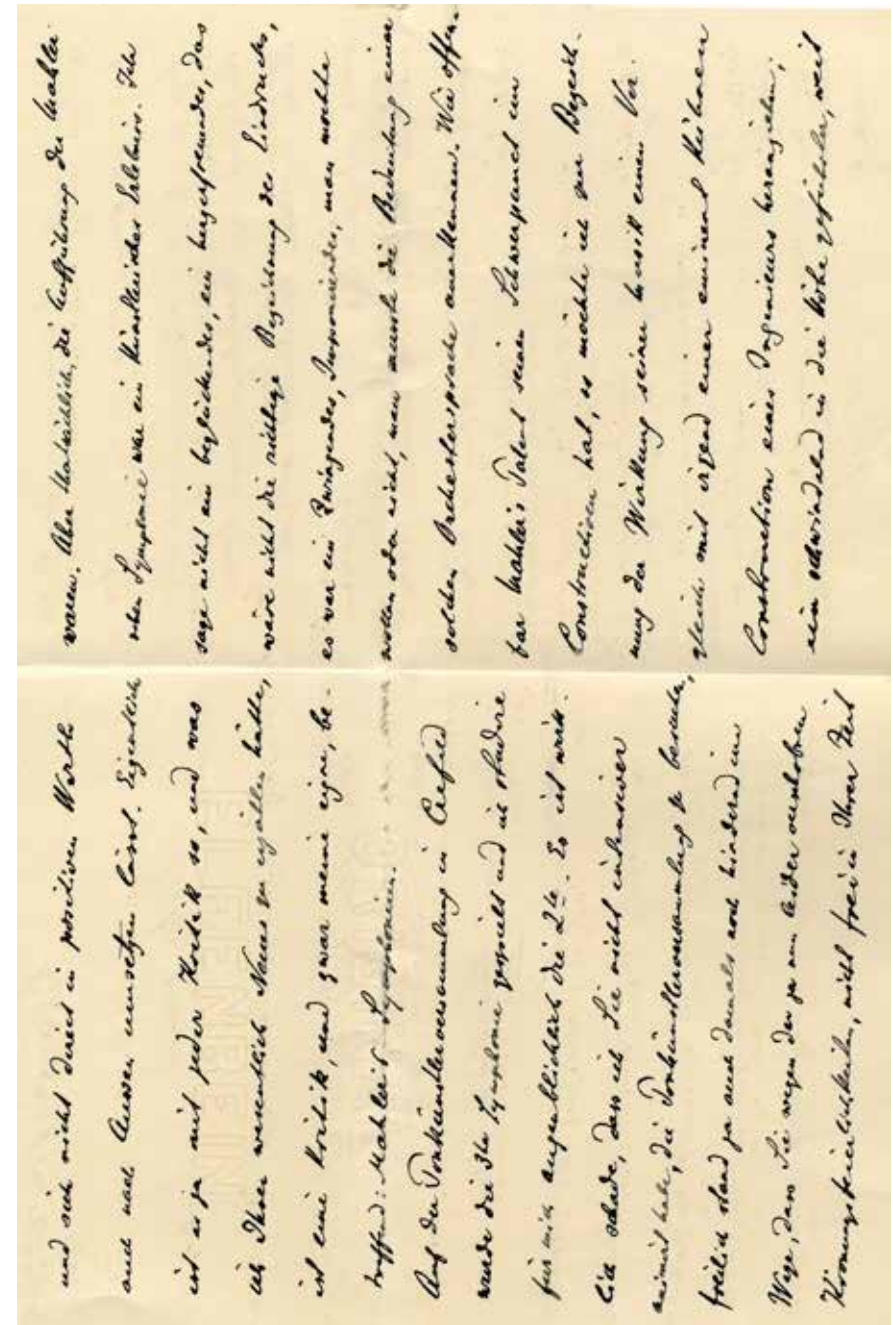
43 See de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 3*, 405.

44 See *Part one*, 16–19, 31; Elgar, *Road to Recognition*, 348–354; Elgar, *The Path to Knighthood*, 295f., 361.

45 Many thanks to Martin Bird for this information.

46 Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 7606. The letter has been partly reproduced in Michael Gassmann, *Edward Elgar und die deutsche symphonische Tradition. Studien zu Einfluß und Eigenständigkeit* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2002), 198–201.

47 See *Part one*, 20.



knowledge of that language was much better than her husband's, such an approach would have been reasonable. Therefore some questions remain: Has Elgar ever read the first twelve pages? Did he at some point ask his wife to translate the whole letter for him? From the letter it is apparent that Buths had advised him to come to the Tonkünstlerfest in Krefeld. Had they then talked already on Mahler and his music?

Two and a half years later, Mahler is again mentioned in Elgar's correspondence. August Jaeger reminded him in a letter of 19 January 1905 from Davos, that the previous September he had proposed to Elgar to compose a work for Buths's Lower Rhenish Musical Festival of May 1905. He then continues that he had recently called on the Buths family and talked to Mrs. Buths when her husband had a rehearsal:

[...] when I asked whether an orchestral work especially written would be welcome, Mrs. B. said she felt quite sure B & the Committee would jump at it: But it must be a Uraufführung, see? First production anywhere. Now seeing what B has done for Your fame, I think you ought to see whether you cant do something. But it must be of your Best entre nous, because You will be matched with Mahler whose 3rd Symphony with chorus will form an important part of the Fest. most likely (this is a secret at present).⁴⁸

In fact, Mahler's Second Symphony was played at the Festival. And Elgar seems not to have responded to this challenge. He was engaged in working on his *Introduction and Allegro* for Strings at that time, and told Jaeger of it in a postcard of 26 January.⁴⁹ The first performance of his new composition was then given by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Elgar on 8 March at the Queen's Hall.

Hugo Conrat

The wealthy Viennese businessman Hugo Conrat (originally: Hugo Cohn) constitutes another interesting connection between Elgar and Mahler. Born in 1845 into a family of Hungarian descent, he had been a close friend of Johannes Brahms who had set for four voices and piano (*Zigeunerlieder* op. 103 and op. 112/3–6) fifteen of the twenty-five gypsy songs which Conrat had published in his own German version. Conrat and his wife Ida were very musical, and Brahms visited them frequently in their flat at Walfischgasse 12. They had three daughters – Ilse, Lili and Erica – who all received an excellent education. While Erica Tietze-Conrat became a renowned art historian, her sister Ilse von Twardowski-Conrat built up a reputation as sculptress. For example, she created the monument for Brahms's tomb at the Zentralfriedhof of Vienna.

Hugo Conrat seems to have been regularly in London. On 25 October 1902 he wrote to Alice Elgar:

I asked my correspondent in Germany, if they would accept an article about Dr. E. and not earlier than to-day I get the answer, which I enclose.

He had got the approval, and continued his letter:

Now, dear Mrs Elgar, I ask you to arrange an interview with Dr. Elgar [...].

48 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers. Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 606.

49 Ibid., 607f.



Neue Musik-Zeitung, 24 December 1902 (The Elgar Birthplace Museum)

The interview then took place in London at the Langham Hotel, and on 7 January 1903 Alice noted in her diary:

Mr. [Sidney] Loeb sent a 'Neue Musik Zeitung' with portrait & 1st part of article on E.⁵⁰

This first part of Conrat's article had been published on the first two pages (with his portrait on the title page) of the issue of 24 December 1902 of the *Neue Musik-Zeitung*. The concluding second part appeared two weeks later in the next issue.⁵¹ Conrat gave a comprehensive, well-written and cordial depiction of Elgar's life and work. It appears that he had received a very positive impression of the composer. Incidentally, Conrat mentioned that he had been present at the famous first performance of the *Enigma Variations* under Hans Richter on 19 June 1899 at St. James's Hall in London.

However, Conrat and his family were also part of Gustav and Alma Mahler's circle of friends in Vienna. Alma had been in their house regularly even before her marriage as she and Erica Conrat were close friends. In August 1904 Erica then came for a visit to Maiernigg am Wörthersee, where the Mahlers spent their summer holiday. But there are also recorded quite frequent evenings on which Gustav and Alma were guests at the Conrats' home in Vienna.⁵² Since Hugo Conrat apparently often travelled to London and Mahler had been fascinated by that city during his stay there in 1892,⁵³ they could very well have talked about their respective experiences in the British capital. And that, for instance, might have been a good opportunity for Conrat to present Mahler with a copy of his article on Elgar.

Performances of Elgar's music in Vienna

Edward Elgar never visited Vienna. Although he had written to Hans Richter on 25 October 1899 'I trust some day my wife & myself may have the pleasure to call upon you in your home in Vienna',⁵⁴ this plan was never realised as Richter only a few months later – at the end of January 1900 – left the Austrian capital to take up his post with the Hallé Orchestra.

Anyhow Elgar's music was performed in Vienna. His main advocate was Ferdinand Löwe with the Wiener Concertverein. This orchestra – today known as the Wiener Symphoniker – had been founded in 1900. Löwe, who remained its chief conductor until 1925, gave the first performance in Vienna of a composition by Elgar when he conducted the *Enigma Variations* on 18 February 1903 at the great hall of the Musikverein. But Felix Mottl and Franz Schalk with

the kaiserlich-königliche Hof-Opernorchester (i.e., the Vienna Philharmonic) also presented works by Elgar in that famous hall. Below is a chronological list of all such concerts given by these orchestras in Vienna during Mahler's lifetime. Of further presentations of Elgar's music there by other musicians, I was only able to detect three concerts of the Akademischer Orchesterverein in Wien (the orchestra of the university). It was founded in December 1904 and bestowed the first performance of Elgar's *Serenade for Strings* upon the city in its inaugural concert on 26 November 1905.⁵⁵

date	work	conductor	orchestra	venue
1903 Feb 18	<i>Enigma Variations</i>	Ferdinand Löwe	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal
1903 Nov 10	<i>Cockaigne</i>	Ferdinand Löwe	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal
1903 Dec 6	<i>Cockaigne</i>	Adolf Kirchl	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal
1905 Mar 12	<i>In the South</i>	Felix Mottl	k. k. Hof-Opernorch.	MV, gr. Saal
1905 Nov 8	<i>Introduct. and Allegro</i>	Ferdinand Löwe	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal
1905 Nov 16	<i>The Dream of Gerontius</i>	Franz Schalk	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal
1905 Nov 26	<i>Serenade for Strings</i>	Franz Pawlikowsky	Akad. Orch.-verein	MV, Brahmssaal
1906 Nov 11	<i>Enigma Variations</i>	Franz Schalk	k. k. Hof-Opernorch.	MV, gr. Saal
1907 Jan 29	<i>Enigma Variations</i>	Ferdinand Löwe	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal
1907 Jan 30	<i>Enigma Variations</i>	Ferdinand Löwe	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal
1907 Dec 4	<i>Serenade for Strings</i>	Franz Pawlikowsky	Akad. Orch.-verein	Sofien-Säle
1909 Jan 20	<i>Symphony No. 1</i>	Ferdinand Löwe	Concertverein	MV, gr. Saal

Two points may be added: four and a half months before his performance in Vienna, Schalk had conducted the *Enigma Variations* at a guest appearance with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Queen's Hall in London on 26 June 1906; and Löwe's performance of them on 30 January 1907 had a famous listener, the Viennese music theorist Heinrich Schenker, who entered afterwards in his diary: 'Elgar's Variations refined and good.'⁵⁶

The question now arises, of course, whether Mahler may have attended some of the twelve concerts listed above. After a careful validation of the dates of his performances at the Hofoper, of the orchestral concerts he conducted himself and of his stays away from Vienna, it emerges that he could have been present at eight of those twelve concerts (excluded are only 12 March 1905, 8 November 1905, 11 November 1906 and 20 January 1909).

Particularly interesting is the first performance in Vienna of *The Dream of Gerontius* on 16 November 1905. Franz Schalk, its conductor, had invited Elgar to witness this event, and the composer replied on 31 October from Hereford:

50 Elgar, *The Path to Knighthood*, 130 (all three quotations).

51 Hugo Conrat, 'Edward Elgar', *Neue Musik-Zeitung* 24 (1902/03), 33–34, 51–52. These issues are the numbers 3 and 4 of the journal's 24th volume, which extended over the period from November 1902 to October 1903. As all numbers of the volume (even the early ones) are labelled with '1903', Aidan J. Thomson erroneously assumes that Conrat's article dates from December 1903 and January 1904. See Aidan J. Thomson, 'Elgar in German criticism', in Daniel M. Grimley, Julian Rushton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 205, 239.

52 See de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 2*, 715–718; de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 3*, 95f., 316f.; Helmut Brenner, Reinhold Kubik, *Mahlers Welt. Die Orte seines Lebens* (St. Pölten/Salzburg: Residenz, 2011), 206–208.

53 See *Part one*, 8.

54 Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 95f.

55 Information on these concerts is available at the digitalised archives: <https://www.wienersymphoniker.at/de/archiv/suche> (20 May 2017), <http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/konzerte/archive> (20 May 2017), <http://www.aov-wien.at/konzerte.html> (20 May 2017). Unfortunately there are to be found several wrong dates in the articles of Kenneth Birkin and Aidan J. Thomson. See Kenneth Birkin, 'Two English Oratorios. Edward Elgar and Vienna', in Michael Jahn, Angela Pachovsky (Ed.), *Festschrift Leopold M. Kantner zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tutzing: Schneider, 2002), 65–98; Aidan J. Thomson, 'Elgar in German criticism'.

56 German original: 'Elgar's Variationen vornehm u. gut.'; Schenker Documents Online, Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection, Special Collections, University of California at Riverside, USA, box 1, folder 6, transcr. Ian Bent, <http://www.schenkerdocumentsonline.org/index.html> (20 May 2017).

My dear Sir

I take the earliest opportunity to thank you for your very kind invitation to come to Vienna & I thank you for all the care & kind trouble you are taking over my work. I have been away so much this year – to America & to Constantinople –⁵⁷ that I fear I cannot possibly allow myself the pleasure to come. It would have been a great pleasure to make your personal acquaintance & to hear the performance of my music under such splendid auspices.

Believe in
Yours very truly
Edward Elgar⁵⁸

The presentation of Elgar's great composition was the first concert of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien in the season 1905/06. It took place at the great hall of the Musikverein. Schalk conducted his Wiener Concertverein and the Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde; as soloists appeared Rosa Stwertka (alto), Felix Senius (tenor) and Richard Mayr (bass). Exactly three weeks later, as the first 'special concert' of the season, Mahler conducted his k. k. Hof-Opernorchester in the Vienna premiere of his Fifth Symphony on 7 December. At the beginning of that evening, Schalk led the Singverein in the only other work of the concert, Johann Sebastian Bach's Motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* BWV 225, perfectly chosen with regard to the symphony's polyphony. Perhaps Mahler was indeed present at the performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*. As we will see in part three of these reflections, there exist some revealing similarities between Elgar's work and Mahler's next symphony, the Eighth, which he was to compose in the following summer. And is it a coincidence that at its first performance in September 1910 in Munich the tenor and bass solo parts were conferred to Felix Senius and Richard Mayr?⁵⁹

Elgar's acquaintance with Mahler's music

As we have seen, Mahler might have been present at performances of Elgar's music in Vienna. It will be shown in part three that the same is true for presentations of Elgar's First Symphony under Walter Damrosch in New York in January and November 1909.

Conversely, it is not very probable that Elgar ever attended a concert with compositions by Mahler. The first performance of one of his symphonies in England was conducted by Henry Wood at a Promenade Concert in London on 21 October 1903; it was the First Symphony. Two years later, on 25 October 1905, Wood gave there the English premiere of the Fourth Symphony, the second performance of which was conducted by 28-year-old Thomas Beecham at the Queen's Hall on 3 December 1907. Wood then presented the *Adagietto* from the Fifth Symphony on 31 August 1909, again at the Proms, and – after Mahler's death – the Seventh Symphony on 18 January 1913 and the *Lied von der Erde* on 31 January 1914. Much later it was also Henry Wood who conducted the first British performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony on 15 April 1930.⁶⁰ Regarding the four concerts

mentioned here that took place during Mahler's lifetime, Elgar cannot have attended those of 1903 (he was in Malvern that day), 1905 (he was at the Norwich Festival) and 1907 (he was in Rome).⁶¹ Only on 31 August 1909 might he have been in London,⁶² but there seems to be no evidence that he indeed went to that concert.

Of course, it is possible that further performances of Mahler's music were given in England at that time, but I wasn't able to find any references. In fact there exists Frederick Delius's remarkable statement – made in November 1908 – that Mahler 'is virtually unknown in England'. This utterance occurred in a context that nearly would have led to an encounter between Elgar and Mahler.

Mainly due to Delius's initiative, in 1908 the Musical League was founded. Its aims were made public in *The Times* on 23 March:

We ask you to give publicity to the fact that we, the undersigned, have formed a new musical society, to be known as the Musical League. The objects of this league may be summarized as follows: –

- (a) To hold an annual festival of the utmost attainable perfection in a town where conditions are favourable.
- (b) To devote the programmes of these festivals to new or unfamiliar compositions, English and foreign.
- (c) To make use, as far as possible, of the existing musical organizations of each district, and of the services of local musicians.
- (d) To establish a means by which composers, executive musicians, and amateurs may exchange ideas.

The letter was signed by, among others, Elgar (as the President), Delius (as the Vice-President), Alexander Mackenzie, Adolph Brodsky, Henry Wood and Granville Bantock. The first meeting of the Musical League's committee was held in Birmingham on 10 April 1908 – when Elgar was still in Italy – with Delius as the chairman. Elgar then chaired the second meeting on 3 July and the third on 14 October in London, when it was determined 'that a Festival consisting of at least one Orchestral and one Choral Concert be held in Liverpool towards the end of April 1909'.⁶³ Not long after that meeting, Delius unfolded a plan in a letter to William Ritter, a Swiss writer, painter and critic, who lived in Munich and was an ardent admirer and friend of Mahler:

You talk to me in such glowing terms of Mahler that I think it would be a good thing to present something of his to the English. Our first festival will be in Liverpool in May. Do you think Mahler, who is virtually unknown in England, would be willing to come and conduct one of his symphonies himself? That would be a splendid chance for him to be heard before all the English musicians! Could you ask Mahler if he would be willing to do this? At the beginning of December I am going to London and we shall be putting our programmes together.⁶⁴

On 21 November Delius wrote to Bantock:

- 61 See Elgar, *The Path to Knighthood*, 224; Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*, 468–470; *Part one*, 26f.
- 62 See Geoffrey Hodgkins, '100 Years Ago ...', *The Elgar Society Journal* 16/3 (2009), 73.
- 63 See Martin Lee-Browne, Paul Guinery, *Delius and his music* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014), 254–256, quot. 256.
- 64 Quoted from de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 4*, 423.

57 See *Part one*, 22–24.

58 Elgar's handwritten letter is reproduced in Birkin, 'Two English Oratorios. Edward Elgar and Vienna', 75.

59 See Martner, *Mahler's Concerts*, 198f., 272–275.

60 See de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 3*, 254–257, 783–785; Asa Briggs, 'Mahler and the BBC', in Philip Reed (Ed.), *On Mahler and Britten. Essays in Honour of Donald Mitchell on his Seventieth Birthday* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 34–39.

Schillings would be willing to come over and conduct one of his works at our Festival. I think I could also get Gustav Mahler – the finest conductor in the world – to come and conduct one of his symphonies – or choral symphonies. Ravel I can get at any time. [...] If Schillings and Mahler come over it would be a splendid set-off.⁶⁵

Mahler accepted the invitation, as did Claude Debussy, Vincent d'Indy and Max Schillings. When there arose questions within the committee about the length of Mahler's works, Delius wrote to Bantock on 7 January 1909:

Debussy, D'Indy and Schillings will not fill up more than half a programme. Mahler's Symphony will take one hour of the orchestral concert. So we have any amount of room yet. The Festival ought to be a great attraction and a pecuniary success. Mahler as a conductor is always a great draw – he is perfectly wonderful. In the symphony I proposed that he should conduct there are many beautiful things. This is No. 2.⁶⁶

Already in December Mahler had heard from Ritter that the festival had been postponed until September. On 1 May 1909 *The Musical Times* was able to report:

The Musical League announces that the first festival under its auspices will be held at the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, on September 23, 24, and 25, when the programmes will consist chiefly of the works of living British composers. MM. Debussy, Vincent d'Indy, Max Schillings and Gustav Mahler have promised to give their support and to endeavour to be present to conduct works of their own. [...]⁶⁷

But – also in May – Mahler decided against taking part. He wrote to Delius:

It is impossible for me to conduct a work of mine without extensive rehearsals – it is for this very reason that I have often been obliged to resign in the past. I should be doing neither you nor myself a favour. The very least that I should need for a performance of one of my works – with an orchestra that has not yet played anything of mine – is 4–5 full rehearsals. I entirely understand that this may not be possible for you, given your as yet still precarious situation, and I would ask you, therefore, to excuse me on this occasion.⁶⁸

Mahler was not the only foreign composer to withdraw from the festival. Actually none of the names mentioned above took part. *The Musical Times* reported on 1 August:

The preliminary notice of the first festival of the Musical League stated that Gustav Mahler, Max Schillings, Debussy and Vincent d'Indy had promised to endeavour to attend and conduct some of their own works. We understand that demands for rehearsal that could not be met, and other unforeseen hindrances have prevented these eminent foreign musicians from attending the festival, although they are still in warm sympathy with the operations of the League. [...]⁶⁹

The festival then took place on 24 and 25 September. Elgar had travelled to Liverpool, where he

65 Reginald Nettel, 'In League for the Sake of Music', *The Delius Society Journal* 60 (1978), 9f.

66 Ibid., 10f.

67 'Occasional Notes.', *The Musical Times* 50 (1909), 311.

68 Quoted from de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Volume 4*, 424.

69 'Occasional Notes.', *The Musical Times* 50 (1909), 516.

attended the three concerts that were given and also made – as the Musical League's president – 'a witty and sympathetic speech' at a festive luncheon.⁷⁰ If Mahler had not cancelled his participation then both composers undoubtedly would have become acquainted with each other. And in addition Elgar would have witnessed Mahler conducting his Second Symphony.

More than twenty years later, Mahler's name may have appeared again in a conversation between Elgar and Delius: When Elgar made a short trip to Paris in spring 1933 to conduct his Violin Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin in the Salle Pleyel, he visited Delius on 30 May at his home in Grez-sur-Loing.⁷¹ Eric Fenby reported how Delius had described to him his meeting with Elgar. Interestingly, Delius's views on some fellow composers can be found here, and Mahler is mentioned, too:

Elgar came. It was really delightful. He stayed from tea-time until nearly seven o'clock. He was very genial and natural and altogether quite unlike what I had expected him to be. I never knew him well. I had seen him for a moment now and then in London and once at the Birmingham Festival in 1912 when he conducted a new thing of his – *The Music-Makers*, I believe. Anyhow I didn't care for it – it was too rowdy and commonplace. That was the time they did *Sea-drift* and Sibelius came over to conduct a new work of his, the Fourth Symphony – fine music with a genuine feeling for Nature. I like Sibelius, he's a splendid fellow. I had often met him at Busoni's house. Elgar brought me an album of his records – the Fifth Symphony, *Tapiola*, and *Pohjola's Daughter* – very good in their way, but he always uses the same procedure to get the music going and that irritates me. A lot of his work is too complicated and thought out. I've got no use for that sort of writing. I've written pages of it myself – paper-music – but I had the sense to burn them. If you knew the amount of music I've written and burned you would be amazed. It is against my nature to write music like that. The English like that sort of thing just as they like vogues for this and that. Now it's Sibelius, and when they're tired of him they'll boost up Mahler and Bruckner. There's an album of Wolf songs that Elgar also brought. I've played one or two on the gramophone, but I never liked Wolf. Herbert Janssen sings them beautifully with the deepest feeling, every syllable declaimed perfectly, with just that graveness of voice that gets to the very heart of the words, but what a sad and morbid fellow poor Wolf must have been! I've never been able to understand why people like Ernest Newman rave so much about his music!⁷²

Although from this description it is not quite clear if Delius actually shared all his views with Elgar, he might very well have done so in the case of what in his opinion 'the English like' and which composers 'they'll boost up' in the future. If so, what would Elgar have said about Mahler?

However that may be, half a year after Elgar's visit Delius wrote to Newman:

It was the first time that the real Elgar was revealed to me and that I could talk intimately with him and that I had the opportunity of appreciating his fine intellect and affectionate nature.⁷³

(To be continued)

Alexander Odefey graduated from the University of Hamburg in mathematics and with a PhD in musicology (on Mahler's Kindertotenlieder). He is a member of the committee of the Gustav Mahler-Vereinigung Hamburg and the editor of its 'Mahler-Studien'.

70 See Moore, *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life*, 555.

71 See ibid., 811–814; Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 526–530 (with Elgar's article 'My visit to Delius' for *The Daily Telegraph*).

72 Eric Fenby, *Delius as I knew him* (London: Bell & Sons, 1936), 123f.

73 Quoted from Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 530.

From Keeper of the Archives to Keeper of the Flame: the ‘Dorabella’ Bequest at the Royal College of Music (Part 2)

Kevin Allen

No one will give 6d let alone 6/- to hear another word about Elgar after this cataract of cold water & sob stuff. It is partly Basil Maine’s fault and partly Mr Reed’s.

Dora to Carice Elgar-Blake, 1937

I fear I cannot sympathise with “Dorabella’s” effusions. She seems to think that hers is the only variation, and to my mind it is the worst and weakest of the lot . . .

Ralph Vaughan Williams to Michael Kennedy, 1953

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne?

*For auld lang syne, my jo,
For auld lang syne,
We’ll tak’ a cup o’ kindness yet,
For auld lang syne*

Burns

Carruthers and Burley, and a Secret Divulged

Another of Dora’s occasional correspondents was Frank Collings Carruthers (1892-1957), whose name is known today, if at all, attached to that of Rosa Burley as joint author of a revelatory book, *Edward Elgar: The Record of a Friendship*,¹ which has attracted praise and blame in equal measure but which remains an indispensable source for any student of the composer. (It has been long out of print and is overdue for republication in a version which includes Elgar’s letters to Miss Burley.) Carruthers studied piano at the Royal Academy of Music between 1920 and 1922, but a nervous temperament seems to have precluded life as a performer and instead he pursued a career as a music critic until the Second World War, when such work dried up due to paper restrictions.

¹ Rosa Burley and Frank Carruthers, *Edward Elgar, the Record of a Friendship* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972).

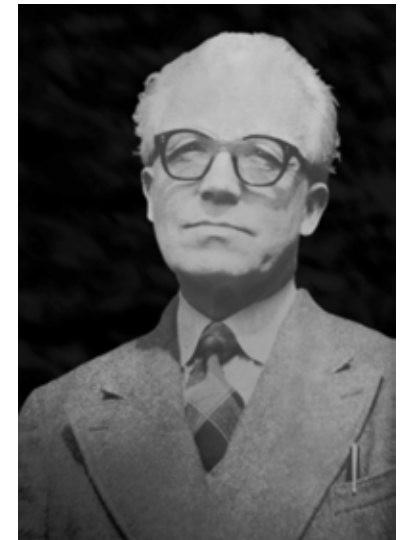
Between 1941 and 1954 therefore he found employment as a temporary male clerk in Exchange Control Department of the Bank of England, where his fluency in drafting ‘difficult’ letters was valued. He found further outlets for writing in the high-powered monthly Staff Journal, *The Old Lady*, to which he contributed well-regarded music and theatre criticism over a period of three years. Carruthers was remembered as a man of wit and charm:

a stylist and enemy of the commonplace. For this reason ... we treasured his company; any conversation in which Frank took part never followed a predictable course and if the participants, himself included, ever looked like taking themselves too seriously, Frank was there ready to lance the over-inflation and resume discussion in a more seemly fashion.²

The initial impetus for a book on Elgar might seem to have come from him alone; he paid Carice a research visit in January 1944. That month Carruthers had a letter published in *Radio Times*. Dora sent him one of her own which the Editor failed to publish, and a short correspondence began. Carruthers offered news of mutual acquaintances in Wolverhampton, compliments on her book, and carefully-worded corrections to ‘two tiny mistakes’ which he found in it. The letter was headed 75, Oxford Gardens, London W.10., ‘but written in a Warden’s Post at Barnet, hence a certain scrubbiness!’ Dora immediately sought confirmation of Carruthers’ *bona fides* from Carice, who replied supportively.

Many thanks for yours. Mr Carruthers has done a lot of musical criticism but has given up for the time being as so little space is available. He works in the Bank of England & came to Malvern for his holiday & to see me. He wants to write about Father & is finding out things dates etc. So he wanted to come again & did so a fortnight ago. I never knew him before, but he knows a lot of people I do. I have no idea what he was doing in Wolverhampton but I do happen to know he has some cousins there – but I don’t know their name. I think you would like him.³

There was no mention of a co-author at that stage, but collaboration with Rosa Burley had evidently already begun. It seems that she had in fact been searching for a co-author for some years without success. An approach she made to the leading music critic of the day was firmly rebuffed. In a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* of 1st September, 1972, the late Dr. Percy Young wrote ‘It should be noted that Rosa Burley had the intention of writing about Elgar almost immediately after his death. In a letter to her, dated August 12, 1935, Ernest Newman, while agreeing that “the real Elgar would make an interesting study ...”, registered his strong disapproval of



Frank Carruthers (*Bank of England*)

² Obituary by Frank Daly, *The Old Lady*, June 1957, 114-115. Courtesy of the Bank of England Archive, Ref E8/147.

³ Carice to Dora, 23rd January, 1944. All letter references are to the Mrs. Powell Collection in the Library of the Royal College of Music, Reference 5571.

the lady's intention and his unacceptance of her invitation to collaborate on that project'. And in a letter published in the June 1973 number of *Music & Musicians*, Dr. Young wrote of Miss Burley being 'prepared to cash in on her acquaintanceship [with Elgar] at an early date.' In the event, the book on which she collaborated with Frank Carruthers was withheld from publication for over twenty years after her death in April, 1951.⁴

Meanwhile the fruits of their collaboration were considered useful in an official sense only. The Elgar Birthplace archive holds a five-page typescript headed 'Elgar, by Rosa Campbell Burley in collaboration with Francis Carruthers', with an annotation assigning copyright to the Ministry of Information. It is dated June, 1944, but was evidently written at about the same time as Carice's letter, as it refers to the tenth anniversary of Elgar's death being observed 'during the present month', i.e. February 1944. It offers a necessarily brief account of Elgar's life, emphasizing the composer's slow apprenticeship, his early reliance on the choral festival system, his wife's private income, and his later flowering as an orchestral master. Miss Burley recalled their joint cycle rides, her many opportunities 'of sitting, as it were, in Elgar's workshop', and added an entirely characteristic touch in referring to him as 'a volcano which erupted through the thin crust of polite English musical life'.

The next mention of Carruthers' name in the Dorabella Bequest is not for another two years, when a regular correspondent, Reginald Nettel, the biographer of Havergal Brian and authority on the social history of music in the Midlands, told Dora what he had heard of the book.

Do you know a man named Carruthers, in London? He is writing a life of Elgar. I don't know him, but I've heard about him. Apparently he has dug up some scandal. His main argument is that Elgar had a considerable income and did not get on with his wife. Both these facts seem crazy to me, and if Carruthers ever gets in to print (which I doubt) there ought to be some considered judgement brought to bear on the whole business. Elgar said a lot of stupid things at times, and intelligent people knew these were prejudiced, but they might be turned the wrong way.⁵



Reginald Nettel

Whatever the validity of Carruthers' ideas about Elgar as reported by Nettel, he certainly seems to have had a mission to wipe the slate clean. It was a mission he shared with Dora, particularly over the lengthy 'Life and Works' study of Elgar written by Basil Maine, with the composer's assistance, in the early 1930s. One of Carruthers' letters to Dora, for example, mentioned 'Basil Maine's (to me) exasperating flow of distorted information'.⁶ Dora had already heard something about the book which worried Nettel so much earlier that year, and became anxious that it might lead to scandal-mongering, particularly over the dedication of the Violin Concerto, with its Spanish quotation and five dots. Under pledge of secrecy, Alice had told her that the dedication

4 And, be it noted, after Carice's death.

5 Reginald Nettel to Dora, 18th October 1946.

6 Frank Carruthers to Dora, 14th January 1944.

was to Pippa Worthington, the wealthy and cultivated American lady whose friendship was greatly valued by both Elgars. And she was no doubt aware too of possible implications for the revised edition of her own book, which was then in preparation. In July, drawing herself up to full height as it were, she had written to Carice to ask for her approval in revealing what she knew, in order to forestall gossip. While naming no names, Dora was clear that the book was the product of joint authorship.

I want to raise a point for your very serious consideration; it concerns the hidden dedication of the V.C. Perhaps you may not know that a has been finished, but has not yet been published, the authors of which must be in possession of a considerable amount of first-hand knowledge. It follows that there is a possibility, it is no more than that, that the identity of the dedicatee might be given away and, should this happen, it would of necessity be done on a gossip basis. The attendant risks if this should happen will be obvious enough to you without my enlarging on them ... Taking these facts into consideration, I want you to turn over carefully in your mind the question whether it would not be better for me to make a plain statement about it which has nothing at all to do with gossip and stands squarely on what your mother herself told me.

I feel that a certain responsibility rests on me for the very reason that I am the only person who can now speak with authority. I also realise that if the truth should come out in any other way it might be used by an unscrupulous person as an opportunity for scandal-mongering. I do not think that anyone could now be hurt by a plain statement from me whereas it is obvious that a lot of harm might be done if the truth came out in some other way, and the longer this was delayed the greater the possibility of harm might be because it would naturally be harder to combat. Will you think it over and let me know your decision? I gave a promise to your Mother to keep the secret, but I consider that you could absolve me from that if you thought it wise to do so because there must be, in practice, a time limit to the value of any such promise and it may be that you will think that the limit has now been reached.

I should be guilty of a breach of confidence if I told you who are the authors of the book I refer to, so you must not ask me for names. You can take it that the facts are as I have stated and that a certain risk is or will be present, though it may be – and probably is – a very small one.⁷

Anxious she was to include new material Dora was careful to adopt a measured tone about what she perceived as a risk; and in the event the published version of Frank Carruthers' and Rosa Burley's book – for surely this is what is being referred to – contains no discussion of the dedication of the Violin Concerto. But she was incorrect in stating that their book was finished; according to a Note in the published version the typescript was completed 'by 1948,' two years after Dora's alarm bells; certainly Rosa Burley herself wrote to Dora in early September 1947, 'Frank Carruthers and I are grinding away at our little effort but the difficulties caused by the daily "crises" are many and great'.⁸ This brief letter was sent in acknowledgement of Dora's gift of a copy of the second edition of her book. There are two other equally brief letters from Miss Burley to Dora in the collection; one dated 16th September 1947 stating that she has forwarded 'your interesting letter to me to Frank Carruthers ... his criticism would be of much more value to you than mine'; and another of 13th January 1948 apologising that she is unable to give permission for the publication of a photograph of Elgar taken by her sister. 'Personally, of course I am perfectly willing, but we are just in the final agonies of publication of my notes upon Elgar and I dare not move a step without my agent's permission. It is much too complicated for me to understand'. If there can be any doubt as to who

7 Draft typescript, 8th July 1946.

8 Rosa Burley to Dora, 2nd September 1947.

caused the daily ‘crises’, confirmation is found in a review of ‘the little effort’ written by one of Carruthers’ Bank of England colleagues, which appeared in *The Old Lady* for August 1972.

This book, which gave Frank Carruthers much trouble in the writing and in the subsequent attempts to find a publisher, has finally appeared ... When I say that this book was troublesome to write, I and other friends of Frank Carruthers have our memories of the labours that went in to the writing. The endless conferences with his co-author Miss Burley, a very old lady and a very capricious old lady into the bargain, the sheer weight of research that had to be undertaken, the checking and cross-checking of dates, performers, even members of a particular audience and the constant battle to keep this memoir as balanced and indeed, as objective as possible. I feel myself that there is a book to be written on the production of this book ...⁹

The mention of daily problems suggests frequent meetings and some degree of proximity (‘I spend much of my time at present with ... Miss Burley’, Carruthers had written in January)¹⁰ and Rosa’s letter to Dora was headed from 75 Oxford Gardens (a large detached house of which she occupied the second floor) as were Carruthers’ letters to Dora. (In addition to the letter of 14th January 1944 already quoted, he wrote a further letter to Dora, dated 2nd February 1944, mainly containing further discussion of mutual acquaintances in Wolverhampton.)

‘It’s “up to you now”’, Dora had concluded her letter of appeal to Carice, but the agreement that was evidently expected was by no means prompt. Carice seems to have replied with no undue delay¹¹ but sending no definite answer and pleading the usual practical difficulties. ‘Dearest Carice, do not blame yourself for any neglect or forgetfulness’, Dora responded, but went on to remind Carice of a similar previous request she had made on the same subject. (Many of her letters were carefully drafted before being clean copied, and the draft retained.) ‘Here is an extract from a piece I sent you long ago,’ she wrote, enclosing some proposed text from the revised edition of her book, and adding ‘You would of course understand that if I decided to reveal the name – for the reasons I gave you in my letter last week that it must & could only be with your approval ...’.¹² Now Carice replied in agreement. ‘Thank you so much for your letter, & for forgiving my denseness. I think your suggestion is right. We should divulge that secret’.¹³ And so Dora had her ‘scoop’.

‘No one pays the slightest attention to me’

As Dora aged she became more and more vehement in asserting her special position and authority. During the 1946 Three Choirs Festival, piqued by something Harold Brooke of Novello had written, she concluded her letter in response cuttingly, ‘I did not gather from your letter that my presence would have been welcomed yesterday morning so did not come. I wonder if you were

9 Frank Daly, *The Old Lady*, August 1972, pp 171-172. Courtesy of the Bank of England Archive, Ref E8/208.

10 Frank Carruthers to Dora, 14th January 1944.

11 Letter missing.

12 Dora to Carice, 14th July 1946.

13 Carice to Dora, 16th July 1946. Some years earlier, on 27th September 1942, Carice had also written to Dora: ‘it can’t matter saying things now, in fact its much better that we should. They’ll only say them & say them wrong when we are gone’.



Carice at Woodend

at the Woodend tea-party during the 1938 Festival? I am sorry that I did not remember’.¹⁴ There was a suitably contrite apology. Other letters, some privately written to individuals, others to the national press, corrected basic factual errors, important of course, but to Dora which sometimes came to assume the nature of an obsession. Eric Blom and Alec Robertson were both reminded of the proper form of William Baker’s middle name and the precise facts of the story about Richard Baxter Townshend’s voice. The eagle-eyed Dora was adept at tracing errors back to their source. Particularly piqued about ‘RBT’ she told Blom:

This originated in Sir Ivor Atkins’ “Musical Times” lecture reprinted in April 1934. Had [he] ever met RBT this mistake could never have been made. The latter’s ordinary voice was a sort of soft falsetto! I hoped I had made this clear in my 1937 book but no one pays the slightest attention to me, who knew RBT very well, when the Great Ones of the Earth proclaim differently!¹⁵

And to Robertson she traced the original sin, ‘an error in Mr Basil Maine’s “Elgar: His Life and Works,” Works, p.105 – an error which was unfortunately copied by Sir Ivor Atkins’. And in breathless secrecy she added, ‘For your own private information I may remark that this is not

14 Dora to Harold Brooke, 3rd October 1946.

15 Dora to Eric Blom, 24th September 1944.

by any means the only mistake as to fact in Mr Maine's book!¹⁶ Dora had already attempted to challenge Maine publicly in a letter to the *Radio Times* over his assertion that Hans Richter, not Elgar, had conducted the first performance of *The Apostles*. The journal did not publish the letter; Frank Carruthers was sympathetic. 'I'm sorry they did not publish your letter,' he wrote, 'The RT has very little space and the BBC always seem to prefer abuse so idiotic as to arouse sympathy for them or else fulsome adulation'.¹⁷ A similar corrective attempt sent to the *Daily Telegraph* a few years later likewise failed to see the light of day in that journal, although it was accepted by *The Musical Times*. Dora recommended the study of original sources in order to avoid basic mistakes, and concluded, 'It is extremely difficult to overtake mistakes of this description, but the attempt must be made, otherwise they become "permanent fixtures"'.¹⁸ One can only say 'amen' to that; Dora's own book contained various errors, particularly over dates.¹⁹

In her letters Dora returned regularly to several other frequently confused or incorrect statements – the genesis of the *Introduction and Allegro*, for example, the identity of the *** Variation, and the sub-dedication of the Violin Concerto. Here she was forced to admit disappointment with the results of her labours on the revised edition of *Memories of a Variation*. In 1948 she attended a Promenade Concert performance of the Violin Concerto, and found several points to take up with the author of the programme notes, Hubert Foss. '... you do recall, do you not, that Kreisler played the C several times under HJW[ood] besides performances with other conductors? Reading your notes in the Programme it looks as though Albert S[ammons] took it over after K's initial performance on Nov 10 1910!'.²⁰ And she continued:

Surely you are not connecting Variation No XIII (the 3 stars) with the sub-dedication of the Concerto? Doubtless you had no time to read the copy of my 2nd Ed of my Elgar book last August (perhaps the OUP never sent you one after all?) On p 86 I filled the 5 dots gap with the name of the sub-dedicatee – having known it ever since 1910 but being pledged by a promise not to reveal it.

I have warned people in the past that the Spanish quotation referred to a personal friend but I find, with other mysteries revealed in my 2nd Ed that people are so disappointed when their own solution turns out to be wrong that they won't accept the right one!²¹

Foss was an old friend, and Dora could still exert some charm together with the directness. 'Do forgive?' she wrote at the end. Less of a friend, perhaps, was Frank Howes, the musicologist and senior music critic of *The Times*, who reviewed a *Musical Times* article by Dora on the libretti of *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, in which he emphasized their episodic nature compared to *Gerontius*, arguing that this lay behind the public's lack of enthusiasm for them. This called forth a 'Dear Sir' letter of response from Dora, who called Howes' attention to a broadcast she was due to give about the libretti and asked him to be 'kind enough to



Frank Howes

16 Dora to Alec Robertson, 19th April 1944.

17 Frank Carruthers to Dora, 14th January 1944.

18 Undated draft.

19 Corrected by Dr. Jerrold Northrop Moore in an Appendix to the 4th edition.

20 Draft letter of 20th August 1948.

21 *Ibid.*

try to listen' to it. 'If what I say in the broadcast causes you to modify your views – even just a little – I shall be very glad'.²² Howes replied with a magisterial explanation and justification of his approach as a critic.

While the views I express about Elgar's various works & their (in my view) uneven value are personal, I do not proclaim them simply as opinions. What I am anxious to do is to provide some hypothesis which will account for the undeniable fact that *The Apostles* & *The Kingdom* have not the compelling power of *Gerontius*, *Enigma* the Introduction and Allegro, the cello concerto. The public has had 40 years in which to indicate its judgement on the great works of Elgar's full maturity, & it has put these two oratorios below the first rank. When over a long period of time the public sorts out the best from the second-best . . . then there is a critical problem which a critic ought not to shirk. And it is to this problem that I address myself whenever I hear *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* because it challenges me.²³

Dora wrote back with the information that the broadcast was to be delayed, and Howes replied that a typescript would be acceptable, although he feared petrol shortages would prevent their meeting. There the correspondence ends, almost as if she had given him up as a bad job. That she failed in her efforts to persuade Howes to modify his views is evidenced in the Elgar chapter in his book, *The English Musical Renaissance*, published in 1966.²⁴

Dora and Ernest Newman: *Enigma* and an Old Lady

Another matter on which Dora felt she spoke with special authority was the 'Enigma', a lifelong preoccupation. In her letter to *The Times* of June 1942 she had emphasized that Elgar had told her that there was 'another, unheard melody'. And in writing to Eric Blom of the revised edition of her book, she told him that she would be adding a new chapter on the Enigma:

Stressing the fact of there being "a tune" which "goes but is not played." In recent times all sorts of attempts have been made to show that the mystery lies in anything but a tune. The most important effort in this direction is that of Mr Ernest Newman in his 4 articles in the Sunday Times of April 16-May 7, 1939. In these, Mr Newman seems to brush aside all contemporary evidence, while quoting freely the opinions of people who did not know Elgar or what he said & did in 1898-9. I know that the mystery lies in a tune; so does Mrs Elgar Blake.²⁵



Ernest Newman (and Bouboule the cat), 1945

22 Undated draft letter.

23 Frank Howes to Dora, 1st August 1948.

24 London: Secker & Warburg, 1966.

25 Dora to Eric Blom, 24th September 1944.

Once again Dora would trace back Newman's error to its roots, a misquotation from the programme note of the first performance of the Variations, which appeared in his book on Elgar published in 1905. It led him to think that hidden melody went not only with the theme, but with all the variations as well, clearly a musical impossibility, and so he looked elsewhere for an explanation. By the time of his correspondence with Dora, Newman had attained a unique authority as a reviewer and critic, having written for the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Birmingham Post* and *The Observer* before beginning what would be a thirty-eight year stint on the *Sunday Times*. He was possessed of a formidable forensic intellect, had written many well-regarded books, including the one on Elgar, and had known the composer himself. But he could be dogmatic in his opinions and it has been said that 'making a case through carefully selecting information was a feature of Newman's criticism which could be misleading as it was persuasive'.²⁶ No doubt Dora would have agreed, and she held fast to her lifelong view that the mystery lay in a tune. But there was one dissentient of immaculate Elgarian pedigree, Troyte Griffith, who wrote to her, 'If Newman is right, as no doubt he is, that no tune can go with the main Enigma theme and all the variations Elgar must have had something else in his mind and I must say I can't remember that he ever called the hidden theme a tune'.²⁷ Newman had evidently persuaded Griffith to change his mind, for earlier he had been a supporter of the 'hidden theme' theory. Dora's husband Richard, who published his own 'Auld Lang Syne' solution in *Music & Letters* (July 1934) wrote to Newman that 'he was persuaded to recant later; but (and I knew him) he was a very artistic and impressionable person, by no means very logical or tidy-minded'.²⁸

Another theory of Newman's proposed a link between the dedicatees of the 13th Variation and the Violin Concerto. Some years before, he had received a letter.

My informant in 1939 was an old lady who had known Elgar since his early days. She wrote to me giving me a great deal of information about an affair of the heart in his youth – the lady's name & everything & why the affair was broken off. But I gathered that she held that all this was not a matter for the public, & that she disclosed it to me in the expectation that I would keep at any rate the name & the main facts to myself.

She gave me evidence enough that the *** of the Enigma & the of the violin concerto were one & the same person. She scouted the theory that the Romanza had any connection with Lady Mary Lygon, & gave reasons for doing so. Frankly I don't place much reliance on what Lady Elgar said to you about the three stars: she, like Edward, had no desire to let the world in general know more about certain purely private things than it had any right to know. She knew perfectly well who was symbolised by the My informant saw her & Edward immediately after the first performance of the concerto; both were dissolved in tears, & all three of them were thinking of the same thing.²⁹

And he continued with more discussion of the *** variation.

... isn't it rather significant that Elgar, instead of giving it a name or pseudonym or initials, as in the case of others, gave no clue whatever to the identity of the person named but hinted at a "romance" in the title "Romanza." Why "Romance" in connection with Lady Mary Lygon? My informant as a

26 Nigel Scaife, entry on Ernest Newman, *New Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004).

27 Arthur Troyte Griffith to Dora, 21st May 1939.

28 Richard Crofts Powell to Ernest Newman, 20th December 1940.

29 Ernest Newman to Dora, 16th December 1944.

matter of fact, gave me the details of the passing-out of this other lady from Elgar's life by a voyage, from which she never returned to this country, to Australia or New Zealand. (I can't remember which at the moment.) Elgar would be only too glad to let people get off on a wrong scent by their knowing that Lady Mary had made a similar voyage.³⁰

Needless to say, Dora rebutted the letter point by point. 'You do say some surprising things!', she began. Alice herself had told her the name of the dedicatee of the Violin Concerto, who was unknown to the Elgars at the time when the Variations were written; it was unlikely that 'a man and his wife would be "dissolved in tears" at the thought of a former "flame" of the husband'; it was an open secret among their circle that Lady Mary was the subject of the *** Variation; Elgar's letter requesting permission to use her name had not reached her before she sailed to Australia, and he was not accustomed to use the same familiarity with her as with other friends, hence the three stars. Given that Newman had contradicted everything that she knew from personal experience, Dora's response to the great man was remarkably temperate, but she could not resist a parting shot.

In regard to the "old lady" who wrote to you. I cannot of course help being much interested and not a little curious as to who she might be. I knew many of the Elgars' friends in the old days – and the fact that Alice Elgar and my stepmother were friends as girls puts the old friendships further back than the marriage in 1889. When my "Revised Version" is published, with its chapter on the personalities of the Variations (and their portraits) perhaps the same old lady may be alive to favour me also with an epistle! It would be most interesting!³¹

Given the details mentioned by Newman, there would seem every likelihood that the 'old lady' was in fact Edith Wood-Somers, née Groveham, a friend of Helen Weaver and a fellow-student of hers at Leipzig, and one ideally placed to know the story of Elgar's love for Helen and its tragic outcome. She would live for another two years after Dora's plea, but neither she nor Newman were forthcoming with another 'epistle.' In fact the preserved correspondence with Newman comes to an end at this point. Presumably Dora was not impressed by Newman's own parting shot in his letter: 'A little joke to end up with. After I had said in my articles that the concealed a lady's name of five letters, people wrote to me suggesting all sorts of names – Ethel, Madge, Beryl, & so on; but the best of all was a serious enquiry whether it didn't stand for "Venus"'.³²

Dora, the BBC, 'Auld Lang Syne' and the Reverend Maine's Revenge

Nothing seemed to raise Dora's ire more than representations of Elgar that were completely at variance with her experience of him and her memories of the way he behaved in her presence. Her early contacts with the BBC's treatment of him were not happy ones, witness her reaction to Carice about a programme broadcast in 1937, shortly before the publication of her book.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Dora to Ernest Newman, 21st December 1944.

32 Ernest Newman to Dora, 16th December 1944. For further discussion on this point, see, *inter alia*, Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 3rd edn. (Oxford University Press, 1987), 96-97; and also his 'The Soul Enshrined: Elgar and his Violin Concerto' in *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, ed. Monk, (Aldershot: Scolar, 1993); and Kelly, 'Windflowers' in *Cockaigne: Essays on Elgar 'In London Town'* ed. Mitchell, (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2004).

I expect you saw in the Radio Times that they were going to do a "Music in the Air" broadcast on Elgar last night. It was dreadful. It was a tale of fruitless struggle, dreary failure & blighted hope. The only thing they could think of to say of Elgar's love of nature was that he admired a group of dead trees on a wind-swept hill top, stretching eerie arms that beckoned him. The only light relief to this misery was the reading of the part of a letter to Mr Reed, in characteristic vein, but one hardly dared to smile in such a context of woe and defeat ... the whole thing made me utterly wretched. No one will give 6d let alone 6/- to hear another word about Elgar after this cataract of cold water and sob stuff.

It is partly Basil Maine's fault and partly Mr Reed's. In both their books the struggle and difficulties that Elgar encountered have been made so much of that all else has been practically excluded. They neither of them knew him in those days, and what I have to tell in my book might be about another person. When the time comes for you to write your 'blurb' you will remember this won't you.³³

Carice's reply was characteristically a little uncertain, apologetic, even nerve-racked, but diplomatic as far as Reed was concerned.



Basil Maine (Vandyck)

I don't quite know what I thought of it. Being in it & of it all – its so terribly difficult to put oneself outside it & see what it could possibly convey to people who knew nothing of it. Billie gave me some idea of its scope at the very beginning – months ago, & I think it has taken quite a different form since then. I can't imagine why they say there was no Enigma and I felt I ought to apologise at once to you for the way your Variation was introduced – though it was nothing to do with me. I wish they hadn't kept on stressing all about music being finished & all that – its perfectly true but why so much of it – why not the other aspects a little. I wonder if unknowing people would get a picture of a very cantankerous person – with no other outlook ... I liked Billie's own bits. But it always drives me crazy in any of those things when all those different voices chip in – one is subconsciously agitating all the time about which voice is coming next. No, I don't think it was good enough. But I don't want Billie to know that till I can talk it over with him. I mean I don't want it to get to him in any roundabout way. I shall be truthful enough with him when I see him!³⁴

It was inevitable that those who knew Elgar best in the early days were going to find difficulty in accepting the views of those who did not. Ivor Atkins agreed, writing to Dora later 'I hate the picture that is sometimes painted of him – especially these abominable B.B.C. presentations of the man'.³⁵ A special Elgar programme broadcast on June 2nd, 1942 likewise failed to find favour with Dora, whose letter to *The Times* of 15th June, previously quoted, was the result. A further letter to Carice elicited a response which made her own position clear, absorbed as she was in her wartime activities. 'But it's a nuisance being bracketed with a thing one really did not sponsor at all', she wrote, 'but I'm not going to fuss about that. I think its better to let it be now. No cares about

33 Draft letter of April-May 1937.

34 Carice to Dora, 4th May 1937.

35 Ivor Atkins to Dora, 31st August 1937.

anything but work!'.³⁶

Later that year the BBC evidently made an approach to Dora suggesting a joint broadcast with Adrian Boult. Carice was consulted.

I am most interested in your BBC prospects. I think it would be a very good thing if you did do a broadcast, if you can get it your own way, & tell the things your way. Adrian is very easy to talk to, & doesn't as far as I know try to swamp one. If you can say what you want with orchestral illustrations etc it would be delightful & of great interest.³⁷

But nothing seems to have happened at that point despite the sensible advice. Dora continued alert to any BBC transgressions, and two years later a short correspondence with Alec Robertson followed a broadcast of his. By now the mantle had been well and truly assumed. '... as the last survivor of the Variations', she began, 'I feel that a certain duty devolves upon me to try to keep historical statements true & accurate'.³⁸ The ensuing discussion revolved around familiar points – the 'Enigma', and RBT's voice. But gradually Dora seems to have realised the best way to fulfil that 'certain duty' was to follow Carice's advice and tell things her way. In the summer of 1946 she offered the BBC some draft notes on the subject of 'Elgar the Man' and the idea of converting them into an interval talk to be broadcast that December, was taken up enthusiastically by a producer in the Home Talks Department, Michael Bell, a keen Elgarian. Bell was evidently fully seized of the historic importance of the project and steered it through to success with exemplary tact, carefully arranging several lunches and meetings with Dora in order to smooth matters generally and to discuss and agree on the final script.

As the plans progressed that winter, word was evidently getting round at the BBC of Dora's willingness to broadcast. In November she again encountered Roger Fiske, now a producer in the Services Educational Unit, asking her to read a passage from her book, and to add some memories of the 'variants' for a Forces programme to be broadcast in two parts. Fiske mentioned that the Archives Department were keen to preserve a recording of her, and concluded, 'I feel strongly that you owe it to posterity'.³⁹ No doubt Dora, now in her early seventies, felt the same way. So she travelled to London on December 12th, and, suitably fortified by a lunch with Michael Bell, successfully recorded both talks that afternoon. The first part of Fiske's talk was broadcast later that day, with the second part two days later, while Bell's was the interval talk during a concert including the 'Enigma' Variations heard on 22nd December. *The Daily Express* briefly reviewed the broadcast, noting the absence of the famous stutter, and concluded 'Mrs Powell, of East Grinstead, Sussex, grey-haired, hazel-eyed, is as vivacious as if she were still the 20-year old Dora Penny she was when the variation was written 48 years ago'.⁴⁰ Bell was quick to send congratulations. 'Everyone I've seen', he wrote, 'who heard the talk, was delighted with it, and your ears must have been burning quite a lot lately!'.⁴¹ He was careful to continue the correspondence, and was

36 Carice to Dora, 28th June 1942.

37 Carice to Dora, 27th September 1942.

38 Dora to Alec Robertson, 19th April 1944.

39 Roger Fiske to Dora. The BBC Written Archives Centre inform me that sound recordings of Dora are held in the British Library Sound Archive, Website: www.bl.uk/reshelp/inrooms/stp/sound/listening.html.

40 23rd December, 1946.

41 Michael Bell to Dora, 30th December 1946.

eventually on ‘Dorabella’ terms. He would produce further talks by her, on *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* which eventually appeared as a single article in *The Musical Times*.⁴²

But Roger Fiske, in his *Musical Times* article of November 1969 previously referred to, offered a revelatory view of another side of Dora’s character. During his tea-time visit to Poels some years before, the conversation had turned on Richard Powell’s *Music and Letters* article on the enigma in which he proposed ‘Auld Lang Syne’ as a solution. It was a matter on which husband and wife evidently agreed to disagree. Dora ‘aggressively’ said she thought it completely wrong, citing the conversation she had had with Elgar in which he told her so. ‘Her husband, I remember, said nothing, and that seemed to be that’. Then Fiske continued with an account of Dora’s behaviour immediately after her second Forces broadcast, when someone had asked her about the enigma. ‘Immediately she was unresponsive. When pressed, she said gruffly and awkwardly, “I prefer not to talk about it.”’. Then:

I accompanied her to the entrance of Broadcasting House, and offered to get her a taxi to take her to Victoria. She asked me if I would go with her, as there was something she wished to tell me. In the taxi she said that she now *knew* the solution to the enigma, and she asked me to keep to myself what she was about to say. And then, to my stupefaction, this strong-minded old lady started to cry. Richard had been right, it was *Auld Lang Syne*, and only recently had she been able to face up to the fact that, at their very last meeting, Elgar had lied to her. She had known for years that he had stopped wanting her to solve the puzzle. Looking back on the last conversation, she had come to realise that his tetchy behaviour had been quite out of character. He was a bad liar, and had shown it. That he had lied to her of all people was more than she could bear.

Fiske’s article went on to endorse the *Auld Lang Syne* theory, provoking various responses in the *Musical Times*. Most were of a technical nature, but there was an outspoken letter from one of Dora’s *bêtes noir*, Basil Maine – by this time the Reverend Basil Maine – who had earlier earned her contempt for his errors and his failure to respond to her letters of correction. Perhaps too, she had not been entirely happy with his description of her Variation as ‘light-hearted and irresponsible’.⁴³ Now he took the opportunity of putting his side of the story, and with a vengeance.

I admire Roger Fiske’s persistence in seeking to solve Elgar’s Enigma, but I am unpersuaded by his arguments. The story of Mrs Powell weeping in the taxi and then rounding on Elgar, her good friend, by saying that he had lied to her in stating that *Auld Lang Syne* was not the solution, strikes me as melodramatic. She referred to Elgar’s being tetchy on the subject. It was she herself who was tetchy. As Dr Fiske says, she was sensitive. More than that, on this particular subject she could be hysterical. Listening in the past to her broadcasts, I have always thought that, though a source of much staccato but valuable information about Elgar, she was too emotionally involved to be a reliable interpreter...⁴⁴

42 The First Performances of *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*,’ *The Musical Times*, January 1960. She also contributed to that journal ‘The First Performance of *Gerontius*’ (February 1959) and a talk, ‘Elgar’s Friends in the Enigma Variations’ to mark the work’s 50th Anniversary. Michael Bell contributed a major article about this programme to the *Radio Times* of 17th June 1949, in which he wrote that ‘today, Dora has lost none of her wit, vitality, and charm’.

43 Basil Maine, *Elgar, His Life and Works*, Vol.2, (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1933), 111. The index contains just one reference to Dora.

44 *The Musical Times*, January 1970.

Presumably neither party ever came to know of the ‘plague on both your houses’ opinion of Elgar’s successor as the leading figure in English music, Ralph Vaughan Williams.’ That horrible woman “Dorabella” has queered the pitch for reminiscences – also that dreadful book by Basil Maine,’ he wrote to Vera Hockman when she was seeking an outlet for her own memories of Elgar in 1942.

The Sheffield Elgar Society

No wonder perhaps that if this is typical of the kind of reputation the ageing Dora gained, she all the more welcomed her uncritical reception as an Elgarian treasure by the Sheffield Elgar Society. Carice had mentioned the success of the Birthplace exhibition during the 1951 Worcester Festival, and how one enthusiastic visitor, Stanley Thompson, was so thrilled with it that he told her of his intention to start an Elgar Society. He was as good as his word. Some weeks later he wrote to Dora with an account of the fledgling society’s activities in organising ‘Elgar Evenings’ at local music clubs, and in framing its aims. These were ‘to influence musical opinion so that the music of Elgar is better known and understood, to press for more performances of Elgar’s music in our own particular locality, to assist all we can with the upkeep of Elgar’s Birthplace at Broadheath, to establish an Elgar scholarship at some prominent school of music, and to establish a library of books and gramophone records of Elgar’s work’.⁴⁵ Step by step, Stanley Thompson sought to build influential support. Carice had accepted an invitation to be the Society’s President – would Dora agree to become Vice-President?

We all felt that as an Elgar Society we should do all we could to honour the name of Elgar and our first President and Vice-President should be those near and dear to the great name we honour ... We all sincerely hope you will accept as we all know you through your magnificent book “Memories of a Variation” which has been such an inspiration to us all, especially to your humble servant. In fact I never attempt an Elgar evening without having my copy with me.⁴⁶

There could be little doubt about the reply, and Stanley Thompson confessed himself ‘overjoyed’ at Dora’s acceptance. ‘When I announced it and read your letter at our last committee meeting we all stood in your honour whilst “Dorabella” was being played’.⁴⁷ He reported that John Barbirolli had also accepted the offer of a Vice-Presidency, and various other musicians of note were showing interest. He reported too, that there had been some friendly discussions with what he referred to as the Malvern Elgar Society, formed just about this time. While agreeing to work together with the other group ‘for the good of the cause ... it would be best to launch out on our own with our own officers and be an entirely independent body’.⁴⁸ There was going to be a formal launch of the Society in a local hall – would Dora send a message that could be read out at the meeting? Not only did she duly oblige, but volunteered an illustrated talk as part of a proposed Centenary Sheffield Elgar Festival for 1957. Thompson’s account of the inaugural meeting reported a great success, with an attendance of forty, including enthusiasts from Manchester, Rotherham and Barnsley; Dora’s letter was read to ‘great applause.’ Emboldened, he continued:

45 Stanley Thompson to Dora, 28th November 1951.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Stanley Thompson to Dora, 22nd January 1952

48 *Ibid.*

And now I am going to ask you a very great favour. In view of our high regard for you I wonder if you could spare us a photograph of yourself. Please forgive me for being so bold but I can assure you that a photograph would be greatly prized by all of us and given a place of honour at our gatherings.⁴⁹

And so Dora became, literally, an icon. She responded to the request with generosity, as Thompson described.

It was a lovely surprise this morning to open the postal package and find your book, but when I opened the book and found your two photographs and read the words you had written on the final page, I felt as you must have felt when you first heard Elgar play the Variation No. X. To think you should have written anything so lovely about me! It is a grand feeling to have your book and I will prize it as long as the Almighty spares me. It will go with me on all my excursions on behalf of the Elgar Society and will no doubt inspire me to greater efforts ... I feel such a tremendous debt to Elgar for all he has done for me, that in the comparatively few years I have left I need to be very busy to try to repay even though it be in a very small way.⁵⁰

Dora would later send an image of Elgar for display at meetings; it was similarly welcomed. 'We placed Elgar on high over the Radio-Gram with our two photographs on either side and as we played the record of "Dorabella", my wife and I drank your health in grapefruit squash,' he told her.⁵¹ In the same letter he gave ample evidence that his approach to Elgar in his various 'excursions' was very much in the style of *Memories of a Variation*. Writing of a forthcoming talk to the Sheffield Music Club, he told Dora, 'I intend to quote very often from your book and will probably have several orders for its sale. Especially as I intend emphasizing how happy and jovial Elgar was and not the aloof temperamental person that many seem to think he was'. And he continued in heartening style:

I read your book about two years ago and must have re-read it twenty times since. I never tire of it because every time I pick it up I read something fresh that I had not realised the true meaning of before. I bought a copy just over a year ago and since you so kindly presented me with one, I have given my copy to the newly formed Elgar Library and it is now in great demand. There are two copies in the Sheffield Central Library. Six months ago they were to be had at any time, but now since the Sheffield Elgar Society has come into being, they are always out on loan.⁵²

Dora visited Sheffield to give a talk that May. Needless to say, she was given an ecstatic welcome, and returned to Poels to find a gift waiting. Her response was almost regal. 'Very dear People,' she wrote:

I found when I got home a great pot of lovely rose coloured hydrangea with 4 splendid flowers on it – from you and the Society. I do think it sweet of you and thank you so much for it and for all your many kindnesses. It is such a pleasure to meet a *body* of people all keen on Elgar & his work ...⁵³

49 Stanley Thompson to Dora, 29th January 1952.

50 Stanley Thompson to Dora, 7th February 1952.

51 Stanley Thompson to Dora, 23rd February 1952.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Dora to the Sheffield Elgar Society, 22nd May 1952.

And she signed herself 'Dorabella'. In a later letter she referred with evident pleasure a point noted in the local press report of her visit. 'I am so pleased the Star reporter noted my remarks re Gerontius not being an Oratorio – good show'.⁵⁴ Carice herself gave a talk to the Society later in October, but the memory lingered on: 'they were frightfully pleased at having had you. Thrilled with you',⁵⁵ she reported. So the prophet did not go entirely without honour, and her correspondence with Stanley Thompson continued for some years. As he gained her confidence, Dora signalled her friendship by sharing some of her error-spotting complaints with him, most notably over the first edition of Percy Young's *Elgar; O.M.*, which appeared in 1955. While accepting that it was a 'fine biography', she continued:

His views on certain things – to say the least of it – are not mine. Some things he says about Gerontius (tho' he admires it) I take the gravest exception to, and his obvious ignorance & dislike of The Apostles make me pretty wild. He makes a lot of silly mistakes which could easily have been avoided.⁵⁶

Not for the first time, Dora pointed the finger at Carice. 'I am afraid I blame Mrs Elgar Blake' she continued, 'who is supposed to have read the MS. She could so easily (without any offence) have crossed out – or suggested crossing out – ever so many errors'.⁵⁷

A Bone of Contention, and the Setting Sun

It is more or less at this point, in the mid-to-late 1950s, that Dora's personal correspondence, as preserved at the Royal College of Music, comes to an end.

More privately, and with supreme irony, the *Auld Lang Syne* question seems to have come, not only to dominate Dora's life, but to mar her relationship with her now profoundly deaf husband Richard, a relationship which nevertheless continued to be perceived as affectionate by others. Sadly the last years of their marriage were marked by an evidently serious degree of dissension between them over the 'hidden melody' of the 'Enigma'. What might have been seen at the time of Roger Fiske's tea-time visit in the 1930s as an agreement to disagree, gradually deteriorated into something far more toxic. Loyally and circumspectly, Claud Powell outlined the situation in some notes added to the fourth edition of his mother's book.

My father's suggestion of 'Auld Lang Syne' as the Enigma solution had become a bone of contention between him and my mother – something they would never have allowed to happen in earlier years. For Dora the problem was one of divided loyalties, and she let the division prey on her mind. Her strong instinct was to support her husband's proposition, but against that was Elgar's denial, when she had put it to him, that 'Auld Lang Syne' was the solution; she felt she had no alternative but to accept the composer's word. For his part Richard seemed, untypically, indifferent to her predicament: he believed he had probably hit on the right solution and he made no attempt to conceal from Dora his suspicion that Elgar had lied to her in order to preserve the secret. Had this disagreement developed before the effects of infirmity and old age had started to beset both parties, I know they would have

54 Dora to Stanley Thompson, 25th May 1952.

55 Carice to Dora, 17th October 1952.

56 Dora to Stanley Thompson, 1st November 1955.

57 *Ibid.* A similar lack of rigour on Carice's part seems to have been in evidence over her scrutiny of the first edition of Kennedy's *Portrait of Elgar*: see the letters pages of *The Musical Times* of November 1968, and January and February, 1969.

been able to 'laugh it off'.⁵⁸

And he was careful to conclude by emphasizing the good rapport between his parents when he and his brother were growing up, and how they established 'a conspicuously happy family atmosphere'.

At the time of her first visit to Sheffield, Dora was seventy-eight, and had another twelve years to live, although not in the way she would have wanted. In the early 1960s she became incapacitated and spent her final years in St Agnes Nursing Home at East Grinstead, the former long-distance cyclist now bedridden. In 1961 she gave an interview to *The Guardian*, affording us a glimpse of her old age. The writer found Dora 'half recumbent' in her room.

She had repose . . . but an air of unexpended vitality was about her, expressing itself in her gaze, in the alert set of her well-profiled head with its aureole of soft-toned pale hair, and the firmness of her voice. . . she could see the rays of the setting sun filtering through the still midgreen foliage of garden trees which had yet no hint of autumn in them. She could also hear such sounds as came from the common garden birds in late summer, notably that faithful miniaturist in melodic trills, the robin. For these she said she was grateful.⁵⁹

Dora had not been able to walk for some time, a great nuisance, and she complained that it interfered with all her work; but, stoical to the last, 'one must bear it'. Her conversation that day ranged widely, from a summer's afternoon on the banks of the River Wye with Elgar, to Kreisler and the first performance of the Violin Concerto ("Where was he? What was he doing?" The questions came, vibrant, urgent) to various composers from Corelli to Debussy and Vaughan Williams. But with ample time and leisure in which to look back on a treasure-trove of memories, Dora's focus on her book remained undiminished.

Her book of memories ... has been out of print for years, but her own copy lies at her side, recently annotated in pencil, interleaved with press cuttings and photographs zealously pasted in by herself. One has the feeling that Mrs Richard Powell ... the last surviving member of that group of "my friends pictured within", will never be satisfied with that book.⁶⁰

However much Dora might have wanted to keep revising her book, one feels that the confusion and upset over *Auld Lang Syne* would never have found a place in it. Loyal to the last, she seems never to have publicly repeated her taxi outburst, although privately she had ample time to brood on it, and the way Elgar had cut her completely out of his life.

Dora died at the Nursing Home on the twenty-third of May, 1964, at the age of ninety, two years after Richard. In her Will, she had been careful to make proper dispositions for certain possessions which marked the brave new world of music and friends which had opened for her on the marriage of her long-absent father all those years before. A 'spinnel-ruby' ring and three-stone bar brooch given her by Richard Baxter Townshend were willed to her younger son, two rings and a pearl bar brooch given her by her step-mother Min found their way back to Hasfield Court, and a clergyman cousin inherited a wooden cross which formerly belonged to her father, 'made by his carpentry class in the Melanesian Mission in about 1886'.

On the first appearance of *Memories of a Variation* in 1937, Carice had enquired of Dora 'why

58 *Memories*, 4th edn. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), 142.

59 'Memories of a Variation', L.B. Powell (no relation), *Guardian* 8th September 1961.

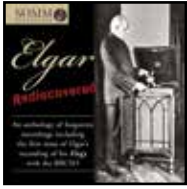
60 *Ibid.*

(if you don't mind my asking – no earthly need to answer if you don't want to) did 1910 bring everything to an end – more or less – of course as I told you before being at school & one thing and another, I hadn't quite grasped what friends you were – or how much you had helped Mother'.⁶¹ What answer she received does not appear to have been preserved.

Unless otherwise noted, all material quoted has been taken from the Mrs Powell Bequest (Reference 5571) held in the Library of the Royal College of Music; any inadvertent infringement of copyright is regretted. I would like to acknowledge my debt to the late Claud Powell, who responded with notable kindness and sympathy to my interest in his mother. Dr Peter Horton has welcomed me to the Library of the Royal College of Music for various photocopying expeditions, and Maira Canzonieri and Jo Lappin cheerfully and promptly procured the right boxes. I am grateful to Adrian Partington for his permission use Arthur Reynolds' copy of the previously unpublished 1913 photograph of Dora from his collection, and to Martin Bird for his picture research for the second part of this article. My further thanks go to Sarah Brimble of the Bank of England Archive, Robin Wiltshire of the Sheffield Archives, Bridget Palmer, Assistant Librarian at the Royal Academy of Music, Tim Stanton of the Crawley Reference Library, Louise North of the BBC Written Archives Centre, and Mr. Simon Fresson. Last but by no means least, I am particularly grateful to Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore for kind assistance over various points.

Kevin Allen has written about several of Elgar's closest friends and supporters, notably August Jaeger ('Portrait of Nimrod') and Winifred Norbury and her family ('Gracious Ladies'). He is currently working on a study of perhaps the most important, if often taken-for-granted of Elgar's early supporters, the progressive Worcester Cathedral Organist Hugh Blair.

61 Letter of 1937, otherwise undated.



SOMM Recordings
SOMMCD 0167

CD REVIEWS

Elegy (BBC Symphony Orchestra/Elgar)
Sonatina (1889) (May Grafton)
Violin Concerto (abr.) Albert Sammons/Henry Wood
Serenade (1932), La Capricieuse (Alfredo Campoli)
Coronation March (1911) (LPO/Landon Ronald)
Coronation Ode (start) (The Imperial Bandmen)
From the Bavarian Highlands, The Dream of Gerontius (exc.) (Sheffield Choir/Henry Coward)
The Fringes of the Fleet (exc.) Fred Taylor
Sea Pictures (exc.) Maartje Offers/John Barbirolli
Salut d'Amour Albert Sammons/Gerald Moore
Edward German: Coronation March (1911) (LPO/Landon Ronald)

I was going to liken this CD – *Elgar Rediscovered: An anthology of forgotten recordings* – to the proverbial curate's egg, but that would to undervalue it grossly. It is more akin to cracking open a dozen eggs and finding to one's delight that all but a couple are double-yokers: three of the recordings at least are essential to any Elgarian's collection and each by itself is worth the modest price of this disk.

The first 'essential' is Elgar's unpublished recording of the string *Elegy* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, transferred from Elgar's recently-discovered test pressing. A single 'take' was made on 11 April 1933 at the same session that produced superb performances of *Cockaigne*, the Fourth *Pomp and Circumstance* March, and the Prelude to *The Kingdom*. Elgar was sent test pressings of all the recordings made that day, with the comment 'they are an excellent set. I ... look forward to hearing your opinion'. He responded 'The records have come & are very good. I still wish for more brilliance from violins'. But by August Fred Gaisberg was writing 'In our conversations about the 'Elegy' you decided that it should be repeated'. It was, on 29 August with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and was the only 'side' made that afternoon to receive three takes. It was this recording that was issued by HMV, as a 'fill-up' for *Froissart*, also recorded with the LPO.

It was natural, therefore, that HMV should choose the LPO recording of the *Elegy* as a coupling for the LPO recording of *Froissart*, but that does not explain why Elgar had become dissatisfied with the BBC version and wished to re-record it.

In his booklet note, John Knowles says of the BBC performance: 'it certainly sounds startlingly different, much more alive – there is a much great sense of ebb and flow ... besides which the LPO record sounds rather pennyplain'. I agree – the BBC version is faster, the playing has more vibrancy, and the performance has more obvious emotion (heart on the sleeve?) than I can

recall in any other record of Elgar's. But I suspect the reasons for re-recording had little to do with the quality and style of the performance, but went far, far deeper than that. I played the LPO version immediately afterwards, and found myself taken back to the first public performance of Anthony Payne's 'elaboration' of the sketches for the Third Symphony when I and others in the audience glimpsed 'for one moment' Elgar's 'insidest inside' at the sketch – a mere six bars long – at bar 39 of the slow movement. The impact created by those bars – the sense of emptiness and utter desolation – will never leave me. A true elegy for what had been and might have been. The same feeling is present in Elgar's August 1933 performance of the *Elegy*, recorded barely a month before he was admitted to South Bank Nursing Home with his fatal illness. No wonder he said to Billy Reed of the symphony: 'no one could understand ... I think you had better burn it'.

The second essential recording is May Grafton's performance of the piano *Sonatina* written for her seventy years earlier. We have Jerrold Northrop Moore (who else!) and his tape recorder to thank for that. His description of how the recording came about is a delight in itself. OK, so she's not a world's best pianist, but this is History At Its Best! Incidentally, while listening to the *Allegro* movement I couldn't place where I'd heard a certain passage elsewhere in Elgar's music, only to hear it half-an-hour later in 'Fate's Discourtesy', one of two songs from *The Fringes of the Fleet* sung with stunning aplomb by Fred Taylor.

The third 'essential' is Sammons' abridged recording of the Violin Concerto, its first ever, recorded in 1916 with Henry Wood. Abridged or not, this is a totally satisfying performance, and one where the beauty of Sammons' sound, never mind his immense technique, loses little or nothing because of the recording's age. We have Lani Spahr (who else again?) to thank for this.

I turned next to the choral items sung by the 'Sheffield & Leeds United Choirs'. Henry Coward was regarded as by far the finest choral trainer in the country – not least by Elgar – and the Sheffield and Leeds choirs as unsurpassed. So I was more than a little intrigued to hear what they could do in two of the 'Bavarian' songs and in *Gerontius*. Sadly, to put it bluntly, I was horrified and not a little perplexed by what emerged from the speakers. I was not expecting a combined total in excess of 600 singers to have assembled around the recording horn – here we have at most eight – but when the gentlemen on the terraces of Leeds United can sing rather better than those assembled in the studio something is amiss! Now at around the time the 'Bavarian' songs were recorded Coward completed his 300-page manual on 'Choral Technique and Interpretation' – my copy has been dated March 1914 by its first owner, Horatio Davies, one-time conductor of the choral and operatic class of the Royal Academy of Music – and it goes into the minutest detail as to how to achieve the best choral effects, both as regards technique and interpretation. Coward uses these very songs as examples, citing them as illustrating Rule 2 of his ten principles for accomplishing musical expression: 'Add the element of variety by making on all possible occasions two-, three-, four-, six-bar, &c., rhythms'. (The whole book takes this 'painting-by-

numbers' approach to choral singing.) The singers do not appear to have read the book, for the songs are sung with little regard for quality either of sound or choral technique. The 'Kyrie' from *Gerontius*, accompanied on the organ by Stanley Roper, at the time organist of the Chapels Royal, is little better. I cannot believe that the full choirs sang this badly in concert.

The other items are all of considerable interest: Landon Ronald conducting Elgar's and German's 1911 *Coronation Marches*; a stirring performance of the opening of the *Coronation Ode* which ends, surprisingly, just before 'Land of Hope and Glory'; *The Pipes of Pan* sung, with Elgar's orchestration, by Frederic Austin; violin trifles played by Campoli and Sammons; and Barbirolli and the Dutch contralto Maartje Offers performing 'Where corals lie' in 1929.

Lani Spahr has worked his usual miracles with the recordings, John Knowles has provided comprehensive and most interesting notes, and Andrew Keener has usefully compared the cuts in the 1916 recordings of the concerto by Sammons and Marie Hall. But we Elgarians must not forget to thank the many who have worked behind the scenes to make this CD possible – not least those who 'saved' the recording of the *Elegy*, and Siva Oke of SOMM for once again supporting an important Elgar project.

Martin Bird

This is a treasure trove of 'forgotten' recordings that will interest and intrigue dedicated Elgar enthusiasts. Unsurprisingly it is the inspiration of devoted, long-standing leading lights in The Elgar Society. Not the least of these is Jerrold Northrop Moore author of the most comprehensive Elgar biography and many other writings on the composer. In this CD's booklet he relates with great charm how he met Elgar's niece, May Grafton, and persuaded her to record Elgar's *Sonatina* written for her when she was eight years old and learning to play the piano. Jerry's recording has never previously been published. May herself introduces her performance telling us that she is playing Elgar's original version, not the published one.

The album commences with another previously unpublished recording of *Elegy* for String Orchestra made in April 1933 and regarded, justifiably, by the booklet note's author, John Knowles, as 'much more alive [with] a greater sense of ebb and flow' than the published LPO recording.

The works performed by Albert Sammons, of *Salut d'Amour* and, more importantly, the Violin Concerto are of strong interest. Here is the earlier 1916 Columbia recording of the latter with Henry Wood conducting. Of necessity, for that period, it was an abridged version to fit four 12" sides yet the consummate artistry of Sammons is very evident. Elgar said of Sammons, 'Nobody plays my concerto, like Albert, he gets to the heart of it.' This was the concerto's first recording and its appearance on Columbia stung HMV so much that they hurried out a rival version, again abridged, with Marie Hall conducted by Elgar. Interestingly, the booklet includes comparative details of the cuts for both recordings.

Another violinist, Alfredo Campoli, who recorded the Violin Concerto with Adrian Boult, is represented here with two short items, both exquisitely performed in a sentimental old style: *Serenade* in which Campoli is joined by his Salon Orchestra, and *La Capricieuse* with Harold Pedlar (piano).

Special mention must be made of two orchestral inclusions conducted by Landon Ronald. He is first heard conducting a dignified, grandiloquent reading of Elgar's *Coronation March* (for George V in 1911). Then Ronald conducts Edward German's *Coronation March & Hymn* – again for King George's 1911 coronation. It is known that Elgar had a high regard for Edward German (unlike for most other British composers of the time) and German's coronation composition is inspired and affecting. Both of these Landon Ronald recordings were made in 1935 a year or so after Elgar died.

Also dating from 1911 is a venerable recording by The Imperial Bandmen (a.k.a. the Black Diamonds band) of the opening section of Elgar's *Coronation Ode* written for Edward VII's 1901 coronation. It is incredible to think that this magnificent, rousing work had to wait 66 more years for a complete recording to mark the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

The vocal music inclusions are interesting. The earliest from way back in 1912 are of the Sheffield and Leeds United Choirs under Henry Coward singing 'The Dance' and 'Lullaby' from *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands*. The sound is a bit wobbly but one can discern why Elgar was so impressed with this choir. One of the stand-out items in this collection is the fine singing – authoritative, nuanced, sensitive to text and line – of Fred Taylor in the two *Fringes of the Fleet* songs. Notable, too, is Fredrick Austin's rendering of Elgar's *The Pipes of Pan* and an intriguing inclusion is Dutch contralto, Maartje Offers singing 'Where Corals Lie' from *Sea Pictures*.

Special mention must be made of the excellent transfers and restorations by Lani Spahr.

Ian Lacey

For many years The Elgar Society has gathered eclectic early recordings and given them new circulation on CD. John Knowles is to be thanked for the present selection with an unmissable *pièce de résistance*, the first ever issue of Elgar himself conducting his *Elegy*. The April 2016 *News* has the story of how the presumed lost test pressing came to light.

Recorded at Abbey Road on April 11th 1933 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Elgar initially seems to have been pleased with the results. He told Fred Gaisberg later, however, that he wanted to re-record the *Elegy* which he did to complete his final recording session on 29th August at the Kingsway Hall with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. This recording was issued shortly after the composer's death and was transferred to CD in The Elgar Edition. The last time Elgar ever conducted, this LPO performance shows him tired; the tempo is slow, yet an extraordinary sense of remote, sad stillness, of Elgar lost in the memories his music evokes, is communicated. In striking contrast, the present BBC SO performance with fine, responsive

string playing and transparent lines, breathes and flows. The pangs of loss are felt more acutely here. Sounding vivid in Lani Spahr's transfer, this is a moving addition to Elgar's recorded legacy.

It remains an enigma why the composer wanted to record the *Elegy* again. Was he dissatisfied with the string sound as recorded? In a letter to Rex Palmer of The Gramophone Company he writes on 4th May 1933 'The records have come & are very good. I still wish for more brilliance from the violins'. 'Brilliance' though is not exactly the first word that comes to mind for the *Elegy*, that 'most concentrated of mourning pieces' as the late Robert Anderson well put it. As with other works where we are privileged to have more than one recording under Elgar's baton, both electrical recordings of *Cockaigne* for example, the differences are notable. Elgar's records of his own music are not definitive templates but irreplaceably vital and moving performances which link us with him across the years.

It is touching to hear May Grafton (1880-1963), play the Sonatina for piano which her uncle had composed for her seventy years previously. As John Knowles writes 'this is the only recording of an Elgar dedicatee performing a piece dedicated to them'. She played from the 1889 manuscript, fuller than the lean textured published revision of 1930. May Grafton's playing has an unpretentious charm to match the piece itself, affectionate in the Schumannesque *Andantino*, smiling not scampering in the *Allegro*. Elgar's niece introduces the piece and vocally signs off. Captured by Jerrold Northrop Moore on a borrowed tape machine, here's another instance of the huge indebtedness Elgarians owe to him. The beguiling story is vividly told by Dr Moore in the admirable booklet.

Alfredo Campoli plays the early *Serenade* [published 1932] with irresistible sweet tone and agility. This piano piece was transcribed by Joseph Szigetti, a great violinist whose style could scarcely be more different. In *La Capricieuse*, Campoli's teasing rubato and endearing slides are wholly persuasive.

Landon Ronald recorded the 1911 *Coronation March* to mark King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935. It comes up vividly on the new disc. Abridged, though not damagingly, the performance has never been surpassed. With menacing LPO brass, Ronald catches the brooding, sombre quality of this great March. Rushing strings recall the *Larghetto* of the Second Symphony. The companion *Coronation March* by Edward German displays a more celebratory panache.

The Imperial Bandmen play an arrangement of *Crown the King* with gusto coming through the 1911 sound. "Selected members" of the Sheffield and Leeds United Choirs, crowded round an acoustic horn in December 1912 to record extracts from *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands* under Henry Coward. The renowned Sheffield Choir do themselves, and Elgar, more justice in their 1920 re-make of *The Dance* (once available on a Dutton CD CDLX7042). Here we have the original coupling, the *Gerontius* Kyrie making its recording debut. Elgar thought very highly of the Sheffield Choir and their inspirational conductor but early choral recordings give little pleasure today.

Fred Taylor relishes the yarns in two *Fringes of the Fleet*, words clearer than Charles Mott with the composer conducting an ensemble on the better known, irrepressible HMV acoustic set. The stentorian sounding Frederic Austin elongates vowels and phrases with freedom in *The Pipes of Pan*. Despite her warmly sympathetic voice, the diction of Dutch contralto Maartje Offers 'Where cow-wals lie' is trying. Appeal here lies with the characteristic ardour of the young John Barbirolli's conducting.

'Nobody plays my Concerto like Albert, he gets to the heart of it' said Elgar of the great violinist Albert Sammons. With Henry Wood, he gave its earliest representation on disc in 1916. Brutally cut to fit two 78 records, it's hard to go crudely from the 'Windflower' theme to the brilliant close of the first movement. As John Knowles points out, these are 'samples, tasters for what was then new and challenging music'. Andrew Keener usefully tables the cuts in both this and the HMV recording by Marie Hall under the composer which rapidly followed, despite the War.

Sammons had been playing the Concerto for two years and his rich tone, firm sense of direction and supple lyricism are readily apparent, although the sound is poor in the *Andante* extracts. Turning to the rightly celebrated first complete recording which Sammons made with Wood in 1929 [finely transferred on Naxos], his reading has matured, more subtly nuanced within an unsurpassed command of line. *Salut d'Amour*, with Gerald Moore in sensitive accord, shows that Sammons retained his quality: it's as if one is encountering this salon favourite for the first time and nothing on the disc gives me more pleasure.

Even if some tracks are of merely historic interest, this is an attractive disc. For the *Elegy* it is moving and indispensable.

William Cole

Enigmas

Solo piano and chamber works
Elspeth Wyllie, Piano
Catherine Backhouse, Mezzo
Claire Overbury, Flute
Alexa Beattie, Viola
Hetti Price, Cello

This offering from Devine Art presents a diverse programme of small works from four British twentieth century composers as well as featuring Elgar's late nineteenth century masterpiece, his *Variations on an Original Theme 'Enigma'*, played on this occasion in his own piano arrangement. Given that one of the glories of the more familiar orchestral original is its masterful orchestration, one may be forgiven for wondering why he bothered to make this reduction in the first place. As the sleeve notes of this CD point out, at the time of their publication the only way that the public could have heard the piece would be in the concert hall unless a piano version, that could be played



Divine Art
DDA 25145

at home, were available. It should also be remembered that the seeds of this music were sown as Elgar sat at his piano improvising!

Clearly, Elspeth Wyllie is a highly accomplished musician, who is very at home in this repertoire. Throughout the theme and its fourteen variations, she displays admirable technique that brings out many details of the score that might otherwise be lost. This results in well-articulated playing that is complemented by the recording quality.

With the theme stated the variations follow and reveal Ms. Wyllie's understanding of the subtleties of the characters 'pictured within'. 'H.D.S-P', for example is both lively and dynamically varied. Similarly, 'Troyte' displays a refreshingly appropriate elasticity in tempo that makes for interesting listening. 'Nimrod', however, would have benefitted from a quieter start. The orchestral score is marked 'ppp' here, but it is a matter of judgement as to how 'p', 'p' really should be.

The variations are followed with Kenneth Leighton's 'Elegy for Cello and Piano'. Here Ms. Wyllie is joined by cellist Hetti Price in a splendid piece of late romantic British chamber music, in which the cellist is admirably supported.

Edwin York Bowen's music has undergone something a revival in interest over the last decade. He is represented here by his 'Sonata for Flute and Piano'. The jazz harmonies in the accompaniment, together with echoes of Ravel, make for a very entertaining listen.

Nicholas Sackman is a name new to me. 'Folio 1' is a series of short pieces written for his children in order to add variety to their piano practice. The main point of interest is the wide range of rhythms he uses over the cycle. Once again, these are excellently played by Ms. Wyllie,

'Two Sonnets by William Alabaster' by Edmund Rubbra complete the programme. Mezzo-Soprano Catherine Backhouse and Violist Alexa Beattie join Elspeth Wyllie to present these two settings which plainly reflect Rubbra's deeply held faith.

Needless to say, the main interest for Elgarians in this disc will be the 'Variations'. Even if the more finely nuanced version of, say, Ashley Wass on Naxos, is more to your taste, you should perhaps consider this new issue, not least because of the enterprise and breadth of the programme as a whole.

Stuart Freed

LETTERS

Felix Salmond and Elgar's Cello Concerto

From Tully Potter

Since my article on Felix Salmond and the première of Elgar's Cello Concerto appeared in the December issue, Pamela Blevins – who has almost completed a book on the great English writer and musical administrator Marion Scott – has sent me the review by Scott which appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* on 13 December 1919, and which provides further support for my thesis:

A New Elgar Cello Concerto

The first concert this season of the London Symphony Orchestra took place at Queen's Hall on October 27. It was rendered remarkable by two events – the production of Sir Edward Elgar's new concerto for violoncello, and the conducting of Mr. Albert Coates. Musicians had marked the program beforehand as one of the most interesting this autumn: when the evening came, an audience representative of every branch of the profession streamed into Queen's Hall, and their expectations were not belied. The concert was interesting – extraordinarily so: it still further enhanced Mr. Coates' renown as a conductor, and if the new concerto did not carry Elgar beyond the heights he has already achieved as a composer, it at least did not fall below the elevation of thought he has taught us to hope for.

Borodin's "Heroic Symphony" in B minor stood first on the program, a work of which the great Russian critic Stassov said: "It owes its strength chiefly to the national character of its subject," and as one listened, one could well believe that Borodin was "a national poet of Russia in the highest sense." The rendering of the symphony under Mr. Coates left nothing to be desired: it was spacious, masterful, glowing with color, and absolutely authoritative.

In the Place of Honor

Second on the program, in the place of honor, came Sir Edward Elgar's new concerto for violoncello and orchestra. He himself conducted, and Mr. Felix Salmond played the solo part with rare finish, refinement of style, and consistency of characterization. It was more like the performance of some actor who completely merges himself in the part he plays than a virtuoso coming before an audience to exhibit his own abilities.

This new concerto is too big a work to analyze or appraise quickly. The most that can be done after a single hearing is to record the salient impressions received. Prominent among these is the one that Elgar's conception of concerto form is totally different to that of the majority of composers. With him a concerto is not a public oration, nor a pyrotechnic display, but a psychological poem. It was so in his violin concerto; it is so in this. He feels the solo instrument to be as much a person as Browning felt his characters to be real in the "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics," and exactly as the characters speak for themselves – unfolding their ideas through his poems – so does the concerto deal with a subjective

drama, the solo instrument expressing a sensitive, intimate train of thoughts in the language of music. This necessitates a wholly different attitude in soloist, orchestra, and audience from that usually taken toward a concerto, and while Mr. Salmond understood and acted upon it perfectly, one had a sense that the London Symphony Orchestra only partially apprehended their role in this work, fine as they are and well though they played.

The concerto had been contemplated by Elgar for some time before he wrote it in the summer of this year, and he bestowed special care on the balance of tone between the 'cello and orchestra. He has solved the problem with singular success. The solo instrument is never entangled nor swamped by the accompaniment, and there is a lucent quality in the orchestration which removes all justification for a coarse or showy tone on the part of the 'cellist.

The Scheme of the Work

The work is in four rather short movements, well contrasted, and it opens with an introduction (*recitativo*), which leads to the first movement proper. This in turn is joined to the scherzo by a bridge-passage of unusual interest and beauty, music that compels one to follow it with close and expectant attention wheresoever it may lead. But on arrival at the scherzo, interest flags, for the scherzo itself is the least satisfactory movement of the four. Though it is sparkling and graceful, it approximates to the type of a "Moto Perpetuo." However, the lyrical adagio which follows is pure "Elgar," and the finale (*allegro non troppo*) is the best and most strongly designed movement in the work, binding the whole thing together. This is largely due to a remarkable passage near the end, in which the solo instrument seems to review the concerto as Abt Vogler did his extemporization in Browning's [1864] poem:

*...and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep.*

Wagner's "Waldweben," next on the program, came as a restful interlude after so much that was unfamiliar. It received a fine performance under Mr. Coates, but the climax of the evening lay in what followed – Scriabine's "Poème de l'Extase." This splendid work, so large that it lies on the borderline between a symphony and a symphonic poem, expresses some of its composer's profoundest conclusions, and while all music lovers may appreciate its beauty and intensity, it must always make a special appeal to composers, for in it Scriabine endeavors to convey the joy of the artist in the shaping of his work. The sequence of ideas and emotions, the harmonic methods and the orchestral structure of the "Poème de l'Extase" are extremely complex, but in Mr. Coates' hands they became lucid and eloquent. The music seemed lambent with meaning, the audience caught the glow and were swept on to such a fervor of enthusiasm that they clapped and cheered long after it was over, recalling Albert Coates to the platform again and again.

It will be seen that Scott thought the members of the LSO played well, although she felt they did not fully apprehend the scope of what they were playing. She also thought Felix Salmond showed a complete comprehension of the new kind of concerto that Elgar had composed. Indeed she went out of her way to praise his performance.

By coincidence, after my article had been submitted to the Journal I discovered that the

première of Walton's Viola Concerto was also under-rehearsed. No one seems to have complained particularly bitterly on that occasion, even if some people had doubts about Paul Hindemith's solo playing.

I am more than ever certain that the characterisation of the Elgar première as a disaster, a fiasco or whatever pejorative word one cares to choose, was the result of a few insiders being overly concerned and sensitive about Elgar's reputation.

Elgar's test pressing of the 'Elegy'

From Martin Bird

In his really excellent and informative notes to 'Elgar Rediscovered' John Knowles says: 'I understand that the disc [of Elgar's *Elegy*] was part of a collection that came from the home of husband and wife, Peter Bates and Beatrice Sherwin', and has, in Carice's hand, 'Bea from Carice' on the label. Somewhere along the line things seem to have been misunderstood or misinterpreted, and assumptions made, and I think it worthwhile to set out what I have picked over the years in the course of my own researches.

As can be seen from the illustration on the back cover of the CD booklet, the note on the record label in fact it says 'Bee from Carice', though Bee was indeed Beatrice Sherwin. 'Bee' is a name that crops up constantly in Carice's diaries of the 1930s, and Chris Bennett asked Margaret Elgar if she knew who the mysterious (to me) Bee was. 'That was Beatrice Sherwin, she taught us all piano' came the immediate reply. This 'Bee', however, was not the wife of Peter Bates, but Frances Beatrice Sherwin (1873-1955). Daughter of a Worcester commercial traveller, Rupert Sherwin, 'Bee' worked as music teacher all her adult life and lived in the London Road area of Worcester. But she never married.

This is where life starts to get complicated, for Beatrice had a sister, Gertrude Maitland Sherwin, and Gertrude did indeed marry into the Bates family – but it was Peter's father that she married.

Now the Bates were one of those families in which the eldest son traditionally bears his father's name – and in this case that name was not Peter, but Tom. Grandfather Tom Bates (1844-1916) was born in Cambridgeshire, and trained as a doctor in Edinburgh. He had a practice in Foregate Street, Worcester, and was on hand to give gas when Elgar had teeth out! In 1872 he married a Malvern girl, Alice Mary Davis.

Their two sons, Tom and Mark, both became doctors in practice in Worcester. Their son Tom is the Tom who married Gertrude and was the father of Peter. But since Peter's one and only Christian name was Tom, he was only known as Peter to avoid confusion (well, that didn't work too well!). In 1938 Peter/Tom married Rowena Vawdrey Naish, the daughter of an Upton-on-Severn doctor, William Vawdrey Naish. Just to add to the genealogist's nightmare, having been given the Christian names of 'Rowena' and 'Vawdrey' she chose to be known as 'Betty' – not a million miles from 'Bee'. Luckily for us, Carice knew Betty/Rowena before her marriage to Peter/Tom, and, even more luckily, recorded in her diary on 29 March 1937: 'To Baths at 2.30 – Marionette Show – Pinafore – Betty Naish – Bee – Mr. & Mrs. Philip Baldwin there. Took Bee home', which at least confirms that we are talking about two different people. The marriage did not last, and in 1948 Betty married a Victor Johnson, dying in Malvern in 1973.

I hope that, even if readers have been somewhat confused, they have also been somewhat amused by this little tale.

ELGAR VIEWED FROM AFAR

After the Great War almost a full page was dedicated to Elgar in the second volume of Otto Keller's *Geschichte der Musik (History of Music)* published in Munich and Leipzig in 1923. Sir Edward makes his appearance on page 151-152 and he would have been surprised what he could read about himself. He is aged by three years and described as 'the first of the English [composers] who studied in his home country'. Elgar 'already at a young age caused justified surprise with his improvisations, but he had to study law because his father, although as an organist in Worcester a musician himself, was having none of his son's musical career'. However, Keller's romantic story has a good ending with the rising composer abandoning law, marrying the daughter of Sir Henry G. Roberts, moving to Malvern and dedicating his life to his art. Elgar's works for orchestras reveal that he is a 'brilliant orchestral technician who had studied modern literature up to the latest Richard Strauß' [*sic*, the correct way of writing is 'Strauss']. Several 'oratorios' and 'cantatas' are mentioned and that 'during the world war he wrote a *Polish Symphony* and a *Hymn to the Glory of Belgium*'. His leitmotives in *The Apostles* are 'not always concise but intricate in a modern harmonic way'. The *History of Music* resumes: 'The sound effects of his orchestra are not always beautiful but of a most peculiar appeal. [...] Even if you would not put your signature under the assertion that England's future depends on Elgar's creative work, we can nevertheless state that hitherto he is the most English of the British composers'.

Während bis jetzt die meisten Komponisten der britannischen Insel entweder aus Deutschland oder Italien eingewandert waren, oder die in England geborenen Musiker ihre Studien in Deutschland machten, so ist nun Edward Elgar (geboren 1854) der erste Engländer, der auch sein Studium in der Heimat gemacht hat. Er erregte schon im jugendlichen Alter durch seine Improvisationen berechtigtes Staunen, mußte aber doch Rechtswissenschaft studieren, da sein Vater, obwohl selbst als Organist in Worcester ausübender Musiker, von der musikalischen Laufbahn seines Sohnes nichts wissen wollte. Schon war Edward Elgar ein Jahr bei einem Rechtsanwalt tätig, als er nun doch sein Ziel erreichte und sich der Kunst widmen durfte. Zuerst vom Vater als Organist ausgebildet, wurde er 1885 Nachfolger seines Vaters, gab aber diese Stellung auf, als er sich mit einer Tochter des Sir Henry G. Roberts verheiratete, nach Malvern übersiedelte und nunmehr ganz der Komposition leben konnte. Zuerst schuf er einige Orchesterwerke, eine Serenade für Streichorchester, Orchestervariationen, die Ouvertüren „Cockaigne“ und „Im Süden“, die ihn als einen glänzenden Orchestertechniker erkennen ließen, der die moderne Literatur bis zum jüngsten Richard Strauß herauf gründlich studiert hat, dann wendete er sich der Vokalmusik zu und schuf die Oratorien „Lux Christi“ (U.-A. beim Musikfest zu Worcester 1896), „Der Traum des Gerontius“ (U.-A. in Birmingham 1900), „Die Apostel“ (U.-A. beim Musikfest in Birmingham 1903), und die Kantaten „Der schwarze Ritter“ (1893). Szenen aus der Sage vom „König Olaf“ (1896) und „Caractacus“ (1898). Während des Weltkrieges schrieb er eine „polnische Sinfonie“ und eine „Hymne zu Ehren Belgiens“. Auch in seinen Oratorien und Kantaten ist er durchaus Anhänger der neuen Richtung. Eine Einführung in das Oratorium „Die Apostel“ zählt Leitmotive, die nicht immer prägnant, aber modern harmonisch verzwickelt sind. Die Klangwirkungen seines Orchesters sind nicht immer schön, aber von eigenartigster Wirkung. Charakteristisch sind auch seine Orchestervariationen, in denen er die Charakterbilder mehrerer seiner persönlichen Freunde geben wollte — also Programm-Musik im reinsten Sinne des Wortes. Wenn man auch nicht gerade die Behauptung unterschreiben will, daß auf Elgars Schaffen zunächst die Zukunft Englands beruht, so mag man doch konstatieren, daß er der bisher englischste der britannischen Komponisten ist.

RECORDING NOTES . . .

The story of the first complete (more or less) recording of the *'Enigma' Variations* begins in 1920 as part of a projected set (on HMV's Black Label) on 12" 78s (with a short cut). Four of the records would be doubled up and (according to the practice of the day) a coupling would be needed. Thus we have 'Variations on an original Theme 'Enigma' (Op.36)' on four acoustically recorded shellac discs and a blank side. This was to be occupied by a little of *The Sanguine Fan* from 1920; it took a while to record 'Enigma' and I imagine this was the composer's one chance to get a little of 'Sanguine' on to record.

The Sanguine Fan was a short ballet, attractive enough in its way but intended for the kind of event which would raise funds for charity. The guests would probably be more interested in the other guests than in the music, at any rate! 'Sanguine' received two performances and was then put aside until Sir Adrian Boult took it up and made a stereo LP for EMI (ASD2970). The set of 'Enigma' on 78s was (of course) a gramophone première, and was issued in this country on double-sided D578, D582, D602 and D596 with a portion of 'Sanguine' as a coupling to D596 (eight 12" sides in all). As usual, Elgar secures spirited (and musical) playing throughout.

'Enigma' was an immediate success on record and in the concert hall with the musical public; it offer attractive and clever melodies whose appeal (up to an including 'Nimrod') seems unlikely ever to fade. Most Society members will know the delightfully intimate illustrated book, *My Friends Pictures Within*, which Novello produced and published, while the dash of mystery about the whole enterprise has done nothing to discourage interest in Elgar, his friend and his family circle and in Elgarians and Elgarnatics¹ generally. I myself was convinced long ago beyond doubt by a 'solution' proposed some years ago; a phrase from Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony seems to hover over 'Enigma' and Elgar even owned a recording on 78s (C1686-C-1688, VPO/Kleiber) of this little-played work, which he would have had to order specially from HMV.

Elgar, of course, wilfully (but characteristically) declined to provide answers, but the music is the thing, whither in two recordings on 78s from the composer and contemporary contributions from conductors like Wood, Harty, Boult, Sargent, Barbirolli, etc, etc. Let us hope that the day never dawns when Elgar's 'Enigma' is no longer played or discussed. I look forward to discussing Elgar's electrical recording of 'Enigma' – Variations on an Original Theme – when its centenary arrive in due course in 2026.

Michael Plant

100 YEARS AGO ...

May 1917 found Elgar staying with his sister Pollie in Worcestershire. While he was there Alice and Carice went 'to Fittleworth to see a cottage – lovely place, sat in lovely wood & heard a nightingale, turtoo doves, & many other dicksies & saw lizards & heard Tuckoo for 1st time – dear place – finally took it for June'. This, of course, was Brinkwells. Elgar returned home on the 4th, 'looking muss better & burnt by out of door airs sun'.

On the 9th Elgar went to see Oswald Stoll 'who liked the idea of the Kipling Songs at Coliseum'. Stoll agreed to give *The Fringes of the Fleet* a fortnight's run, starting in mid-June. *The Sanguine Fan* was repeated on the 22nd in aid of the War Emergency Fund of the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society. Alice thought 'the music entrancing & all beautifully played', but otherwise found 'most things dull – a very heavy dull audience – why shd. Philanthropy make ladies so oppressively stupid?'. Late that day Charles Mott 'came & sang the Fleet Songs, perfectly & splendidly. They sounded gorgeous'.

They left for Brinkwells on the 24th: 'E. badsley headache but thought it "too lovely for words" & satisfied with house much to A.'s relief. A. very busy making it look a little nice'. Two days later she told Windflower: 'E. has already made me 2 rustic footstools – Today Carice is to arrive & I am going in to meet her'. They left on 4th June, 'hoping to return'.

Elgar was involved immediately in rehearsals for 'Fringes', taking time off on the 7th 'going to Harwich for Kit from Ships'. The first two performances were on the 11th: 'Very good & most exciting & much enthusiasm. Maud Warrender & many Admirals there'. The run was a success and was extended, and HMV arranged to make an 'original cast' recording on 4th July. After the Coliseum performance on the 6th Admiral Lord Beresford wrote to 'convey to you the immense pleasure that you gave me by allowing me to hear your glorious music, sung by those splendid men'. Elgar told Pollie that 'The songs go on till the 28th certain & I know not what will happen after that'. Performances continued until 4th August, with George Parker replacing Mott, who had been called up. A provincial tour was then arranged, starting on 13th August.

Before it started he went to stay with his sister Pollie, where he found 'everything just as usual: the country silent no birds sing: but it has been lovely'. He went straight on to Manchester where on the 13th he 'had a rehearsal & 3 performances'. While he was away Alice went to Hereford, and from there to Hasfield Court, visiting old friends. She had asked one of the singers, Frederick Henry, to keep an eye on Elgar. His first report assured her that 'Sir Edward appears none the worse for his tiresome railway journey on Sunday and the strenuous exertions involved in putting a very inadequate orchestra through its rehearsal and conducting three performances yesterday'. Alice returned home on the 25th, Elgar a day later, but with the news that a 'mean spirited R. Kipling wants to stop 'The Fringes' continuing'.

On the 29th Edward and Alice left for Brinkwells: 'walked up & found nice fire & all ready – Garden too dreadfully wild – 5 kittens frolicking about not wanted by A – E. enjoying it at once'. They stayed until 8th September.

Martin Bird

1 This is a word I have just invented.

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