

The Society

Elgar



pp  
JOURNAL

*The*  
**ORGAN GRINDER'S  
SONGS**

*From the*  
"STARLIGHT EXPRESS."  
(Op. 78)

*Words by*  
**ALGERNON  
BLACKWOOD.**

*Music by*  
**EDWARD  
ELGAR.**

A black and white illustration of a man in a suit and bow tie, standing in a doorway. He is holding a hat in his right hand and a large organ on a stand in his left. The organ has a fan-shaped soundboard. The man is looking towards the viewer with a slight smile.

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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*Front Cover: Cover of the sheet music of the Organ Grinder's songs from The Starlight Express,  
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Books: Author, *Title* (Place of publication: Publisher, year of publication), page[s]. Thus: Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 199.

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

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

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## Editorial

It never ceases to amaze me how much contemporary material relating to Elgar continues to emerge. Two essays in this issue concern recent 'finds'. The violinist Reginald Bailey was known to me only by a single letter preserved at the Birthplace from him to his former teacher. Recently Richard Westwood-Brookes acquired a fascinating and hitherto unknown collection of letters from Elgar to Bailey and his mother which sheds new light on Elgar's considerable qualities as a teacher, particularly when dealing with his more talented pupils, and I am most grateful to him for sharing this collection with us. And John Ling (who I discovered was the chairman of a local choir for which I had played and sung as a 'extra' for many years) succumbed to the lure of a second-hand music shop one day and bought himself a copy of *The Music Makers* for the princely sum of £7.50, only to discover that it had been inscribed by Elgar to Professor Charles Sanford Terry, who had written a short piece about its composition therein.

By the time you read this, members of Southern Branch will have been regaled with the story of Elgar and the singer Joan Elwes. A noticeable feature of the Birthplace Archive is the almost complete absence of correspondence from any ladies to whom Elgar was known to have been attracted. The singer Joan Elwes was one, and such letters from her as survive at the Birthplace are of a purely formal nature. Through a mutual friend I was put in touch last year with one of her daughters who 'had a couple of Elgar letters'. I was given a free rein to hunt through bundles of old letters in the loft, and found not a couple but a couple of dozen letters from Elgar which show beyond doubt that he was decidedly smitten! They will all appear in due course in the 'Collected Correspondence' series, along with a little-known series of letters from Elgar to the soprano Doris Leech, to which her daughter kindly gave me access not long before her recent death.

December is the centenary of the production of *The Starlight Express*, and it is marked by an in-depth article by Kevin Mitchell. Finally, it is ninety-nine years since Marie Hall recorded the Violin Concerto, and Peter Adamson has contributed some thoughts on this. As Marie Hall, like Reginald Bailey, was one of Elgar's pupils, I have added a few words of my own to flesh out a little more of their contact over the years.

Martin Bird

## ‘My tunes are ne’er forgotten’: Elgar, Blackwood and *The Starlight Express*

Kevin Mitchell

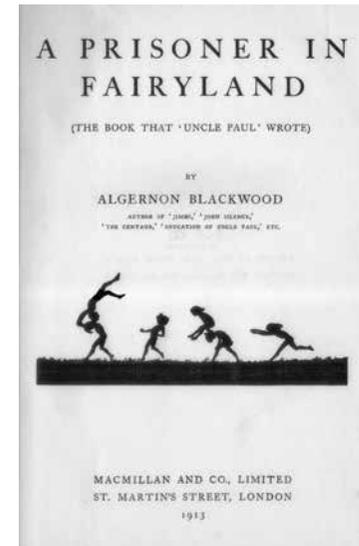
Elgar’s most substantial theatrical score was the music he composed for *The Starlight Express* play, which opened on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1915, conducted by fellow Worcestershire composer, Julius Harrison. It was an adaptation of Algernon Blackwood’s fourth novel, *A Prisoner in Fairyland*, published in 1913. The production was put together at speed, was shown for only a month and has never been revived in its original format – but it contains some of Elgar’s most enchanting music, hastily composed in war-time London.

### *A Prisoner in Fairyland*

The starting point for the venture was Blackwood’s novel. Henry Rogers, a 40 year old successful City of London businessman, retires to undertake philanthropic schemes. He is drawn back to his childhood home in Crayfield, Kent where imaginary characters – the Dustman, the Lamplighter, the Sweep and others (the Sprites) – re-emerge after years of waiting and haunt his mind. He recalls their involvement in catching and distributing stardust, their travels on The Starlight Express, the Caves of Lost Starlight and the Net of Stars. He is enveloped in the fairyland of childhood dreams.

He travels to Switzerland to visit his cousin, John Campden, his wife and three children who live in genteel poverty in the Jura. Campden is a writer but his inspiration is lacking (he has become ‘wumbled’ – worried and jumbled), but who has vague memories of visiting the Star Caves as a child. His wife is burdened with household chores and the villagers are all troubled in some way. ‘Cousin Henry’ arrives and joins the children in their fantasy world of dreams when their spirits travel to the Star Caverns – while their bodies remain asleep – to collect stardust to sprinkle over people to ‘unwumble’ and transform them. On being touched with stardust Campden finds he can write again; his wife’s burdens are lessened and the villagers’ problems resolved. Rogers distributes largesse where he can, briefly returns to London only to travel back to the village where he meets an Austrian Countess with whom he falls in love. It is revealed, in the final pages, that it is the Countess who has created the entire story and implanted it in the minds of the characters – *a deus ex machina* – which makes all Henry Rogers’s actions morally neutral.<sup>1</sup>

1 For a discussion of the novel see J.P.E. Harper-Scott, ‘Henry and the *Grafin* /Grinder: Elgar and *The Starlight Express*’, *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.13, No.4 (March 2004), 15-23 and Andrew Neill, ‘Starlight and Fan: Escape and Reality in Wartime’, *Oh, My Horses! Elgar and the Great War* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001), 287-299.



The title page of Blackwood’s novel.

In the novel Henry Rogers re-visits his childhood home, which is clearly based on the Crayford House.

He saw the Manor House where he was born, the bars across the night-nursery windows, the cedars on the lawn, the haystacks just beyond the stables, and the fields where the rabbits sometimes fell asleep ... He saw the old gravel-pit that led, the gardener told him, to the centre of the Earth.<sup>2</sup>

The Crayford garden held another cherished memory for Blackwood. His father purchased an old railway carriage and set it up in the garden for the children to play in. Blackwood found it when he returned home from a summer holiday and it fired his imagination. Here was the source of *The Starlight Express*. When returning to his childhood home Henry Rogers comes across the train.

Then, suddenly, looming against the field that held the Gravel-Pit ... he saw the outline of the Third-Class Railway Carriage his father bought as a Christmas present, still standing on the stone supports that were borrowed from a haystack. The railway Carriage had filled whole years with joy and wonder. They had called

2 Algernon Blackwood, *A Prisoner in Fairyland* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 21.

### *Algernon Blackwood*

Much of the novel has its source in aspects of Blackwood’s earlier life. He was born on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1869 at Wood Lodge, Shooter’s Hill, Kent, near the borders of London. His father, Stevenson Arthur Blackwood was a Clerk to the Treasury, later becoming Secretary to the Post Office and a knight. For his mother, Harriet, her marriage to Arthur was her second, as she had been widowed, at the age of only twenty and had two children by George Montagu, the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Manchester. Algernon was the third of Arthur and Harriet’s five children.

The family were wealthy. Wood Lodge was a substantial home set in over thirty acres of land and they were able to enjoy considerable domestic help. In 1871 the family moved to the Manor House, Crayford, six miles from Shooter’s Hill, which remained Algernon’s home until 1880 when he was eleven. This childhood house and garden held many memories for Blackwood which resurfaced in *A Prisoner in Fairyland* and other stories.

Algernon Blackwood aged five or six.



it the Starlight Express. It had four doors, real lamps in the roof, windows that opened and shut, and big round buffers. It started without warning. It went at full speed in a moment. It was never really still.<sup>3</sup>

The children were forced to leave the railway carriage when in 1880 they moved to an even larger house with extensive grounds that looked over fields and a series of ponds – Shortlands House near Bromley. Here the young Blackwood developed his love of nature and nocturnal exploration. In *Episodes Before Thirty* he recalled these experiences.

I loved to climb out of the windows at night ... creep among the shadows of the kitchen-garden ... and so on to the pond where I could launch the boat ... Trees grew closely round the banks, and even on clear nights the stars could hardly pierce through, and all sorts of beings watched me silently from the shore, crowding among the tree stems, and whispering to themselves about what I was doing.<sup>4</sup>

The lure of these escapes and the sense of being apart excited the young boy and another theme of *A Prisoner in Fairyland* was born.

I thought of all the people asleep in their silent rooms, and wondered how they could be so dull and unenterprising, when out here they could see these sweeping branches and hear the wind sighing so beautifully among the needles. These people ... belonged to a different race. I had nothing in common with them. Night and stars and tress and wind and rain were the things I ... wanted. They were alive and personal, stirring my depths within full of messages and meanings ...<sup>5</sup>

The natural world was to become all important for Blackwood and offered him comfort.

Forests, mountains ... the simple fields, the lanes, and little hills, offered an actual sense of companionship no human intercourse could possibly provide. ... it was to nature I ever turned instinctively.<sup>6</sup>

Blackwood was a dreamy boy, who did not excel at a number of ‘horrible private schools’. After a year at Wellington College, he was sent in May 1885 to the school of the Moravian Brotherhood in Konigsfield in the Black Forest. Surprisingly Blackwood flourished in the monastic though benevolently administered regime and his year there gave him strength of character and again there were opportunities for communing with nature.

In order to perfect his French, Blackwood went back to Europe in the autumn of 1886, to Bole, in French-speaking Switzerland. He lodged with the pastor who, together with his religious duties, ran a small guest-house and took in students who wished to learn French. Here Blackwood explored the surrounding pine forests at night, climbing mountains at midnight and watching the sun rise over the Alps. Bole is the model for Bourcelles in *Prisoner*; a name contrived from those of neighbouring villages, Boudry and Corcelles. In these mountain explorations he discovered ‘dark openings in the rock [with] ... entrances to long and winding passages between the twisting strata which pierce far into the mountain’<sup>7</sup> which would later evolve into the Star Cavern of the novel and play.

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3 *Prisoner*, 40.

4 Algernon Blackwood, *Episodes Before Thirty* (London: Cassell & Company, 1923), 33-34.

5 *Episodes*, 34.

6 *Episodes*, 35.

7 Algernon Blackwood, ‘In the Jura – Neuchatel’, Canadian *Methodist Magazine* (June 1891), 554.

On returning from the Jura an undecided Blackwood considered that farming was his *forte* and after a year at Edinburgh University, there followed an extensive spell in Canada and North America, where he undertook a variety of jobs, tried various business ventures, knew poverty and relative wealth and became a teacher and a journalist. These adventures are recounted in his *Episodes Before Thirty*. At the end of his time in America he became personal secretary to the financier and philanthropist James Speyer, brother of Sir Edgar Speyer, who may well have been a model for Henry Rogers.

In 1899 Blackwood returned to England. Memories of his American years provided some magazine articles and as stories took shape in his mind it became a ‘habit and delight to spend my evenings composing yarns on my typewriter, finding more pleasure in this than in any dinner engagement, theatre or concert’<sup>8</sup>. He continued to write short fictional ‘supernatural’ stories and a few were published, but in 1906, through his friend Angus Hamilton, who submitted some of Blackwood’s manuscripts to a publisher, his first volume *The Empty House and Other Ghost Stories* saw the light. Blackwood subsequently become a full-time writer and by 1914 a further six volumes of stories had been published, including *John Silence – Physician Extraordinary* in 1908. This book’s financial success allowed him to travel to the Jura Mountains for in January 1909 he returned to Bole, where he lived on 4.50 francs a day and wrote more books.

He lodged at a small *pension* run by the village postmaster and his wife, who became the model for Madame Jequier in *A Prisoner in Fairyland*. His top room looked out over the village and the surrounding hills where he could observe the life of the community. Blackwood went back there every year until 1912. In 1909 he worked on the semi-autobiographical novel that became *The Education of Uncle Paul*. The chief protagonist, Paul Rivers shares make-believe adventures with children and enters into the magic of childhood imagination leading Blackwood to comment:

And to all who – since childhood – have lived in Fairyland and tasted of its sweet innocence and loveliness, comes sooner or later the desire to transfer something of these qualities to the outer world.<sup>9</sup>

Paul Rivers has a ‘wish to beautify the lives of others’ so Rivers writes a book called *Adventures of a Prisoner in Fairyland* recording the events of *The Education of Uncle Paul*. Blackwood’s novel was published with success in November 1909 and he continued with other novels whilst shuttling between England and Switzerland. In October 1911 he returned to the Jura for a winter of work and his mind turned ‘instinctively’ to *A Prisoner in Fairyland* which occupied him until 1913. It was a happy time for him as he had become acquainted with Maya Stuart-King, a young violinist and the wife of Johann Knoop. Although her friendship with Blackwood was platonic he was captivated by her and she became his muse, patroness and spiritual companion and the dedicatee of *A Prisoner in Fairyland* and the model for the Countess.

The novel was published on 27 May 1913. Critical reaction was mixed. The *Daily Express* called it ‘A supremely beautiful book,’ whilst *Country Life* stated ‘it is the finest he has yet given us’. The *Times Literary Supplement* found ‘... the idea itself is more fantastical than imaginative, which is the book’s weakness’.

In truth, it is a long novel – overlong with its 506 pages, and it could easily have been cut by some 200 pages. It is prolix and self-indulgent with many repetitive passages and digressions, for example chapter 19 concerns the Campden family opening a box of clothes sent by a family

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8 *Episodes*, 223.

9 *The Education of Uncle Paul* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 242.

in Edinburgh which does nothing to advance the story. Mike Ashley, Blackwood's biographer comments:

The trouble from the reader's point of view is that this begins to pall after a while. It becomes too saccharine. *A Prisoner in Fairyland* is a charming book, which benefits from a second reading if you can survive the first. Its charm comes from knowing the people and places described and understanding their relationships.<sup>10</sup>

It is over sentimental and suffers from having no contrasting 'evil' or dangerous characters, such as Captain Hook and the pirates of *Peter Pan*. The mystical and metaphysical aspects of the story obscure its essential message and a serious flaw is that 'the distinction between reality and fairyland is blurred'.<sup>11</sup> Yet Blackwood obviously loved the novel and did not want to let it go and became too absorbed and obsessed and could not view it objectively for as he told a correspondent when writing the novel: 'Here I have forests & children. What more can a man want?'<sup>12</sup>

### ***Violet Alice Pearn and Muriel Pratt***

An aspiring playwright, Violet Pearn contacted Blackwood shortly after the novel's publication, with a request to adapt it for the stage. She worked quickly and the synopsis of 'By Starlight Express to Fairyland' was ready in August 1913. At first Blackwood was not involved – he admitted he was no playwright – but took more interest in her work as it evolved. Originally in four acts, then reduced to three, Pearn concentrated on the action in the Jura so cut out the prologue in England and the conclusion with the Countess. The first act concerned the Campden family and the arrival of Cousin Henry; the second with the pine forest at night, the Star Cave, the Starlight Express and the spirits of the children collecting stardust to 'unwumble' their father and others; the third showed the result of their efforts and the realisation of Daddy's literary ambitions. The adaptation was finished in early October.

Originally incidental music did not enter into Pearn's thinking although she did envisage songs with the introduction of a new character, the Organ-Grinder, who was to introduce each act. However by October Blackwood clearly had music in mind, writing that with 'the right music and the right cast this little Play ... may prove to have a vitality which will mark a genuine departure in its "fairy" genre.'<sup>13</sup>

Muriel Pratt, the niece of Pearn's companion, the sculptor Gertrude Pratt, was instrumental in attempting to stage the play.<sup>14</sup> She had worked with Basil Dean,<sup>15</sup> who in 1913 was assistant stage-director at His Majesty's Theatre, London and it is probable that she brought *The Starlight Express* script to his attention. Blackwood informed Dean on 9<sup>th</sup> November that the script was being typed and that a first reading was planned for him and Frederick Harrison, the manager of the Haymarket Theatre for the following week.

By November Blackwood informed Macmillan's that the play would be performed at a

10 Mike Ashley, *Starlight Man, The Extraordinary Life of Algernon Blackwood* (London: Constable, 2001), 177.

11 Andrew Neill, 'Starlight and Fan', 295.

12 Blackwood to Stephen Graham, 15 November 1911, Ashley, 177.

13 Blackwood to Basil Dean, 20 October 1913, Ashley, 194.

14 Pratt's own company at the theatre Royal, Bristol, would stage Pearn's first play, *Wild Birds*, in May 1914.

15 Basil Dean (1888-1978), English actor, writer, film producer/director, theatrical producer/director.

London theatre in the autumn of 1914 and with this in mind, Dean requested his friend Clive Carey, composer, singer and actor, to compose the music.<sup>16</sup> Carey had appeared in *Fifinella*<sup>17</sup> and it was hoped his success in that production, would transform this play not only with his music but also as a singer in the role of the Organ-Grinder. Believing all was in hand, Blackwood left for a prolonged stay in Switzerland in November 1913 and Carey started to compose in March 1914. However with the outbreak of war in August, with financial backing uncertain and Dean enlisting in September, Dean sent the script back to Blackwood in October, who tried to interest Annie Horniman<sup>18</sup> in Manchester to produce the play at Christmas. He informed her that apparently the music was mostly written but she expressed no interest and with Dean's option on the play expiring in February 1915, production plans came to a halt.

Muriel Pratt attempted to re-establish her company in Bristol in April 1915. If successful she would probably have tried to produce the *Starlight* play, but unfortunately the company was finally disbanded in May. On returning to London she was given a part in John Hasting Turner's play *Iris Intervenes* at the Kingsway Theatre, run by actress-manager Lena Ashwell, who played the leading role.

### ***Lena Ashwell***

Born in 1872, Lena Pocock<sup>19</sup> originally wished to be an opera-singer and studied at the Royal College of Music, but changed to acting in 1891 following advice from Ellen Terry. She quickly became established as a fine, emotional actress often appearing in melodramatic roles, gaining the admiration of Shaw who considered she was one of those actresses 'who had awakensingly truthful minds as well as engaging personalities'<sup>20</sup> and concurred that she was an inspiring woman, totally committed to the theatre. Her zeal resulted in her taking a 99 year lease of the Great Queen Street Theatre in 1907.<sup>21</sup> Being near the new thoroughfare, Kingsway, Ashwell changed the name to the Kingsway, carried out considerable refurbishment and opened with her first hit, *Irene Wycherley* in October 1907. Success did not last and the financial burdens of the lease forced her to take on engagements elsewhere and to let out the theatre to other managements,

**Lena Ashwell in 1915**  
(*Bassano Ltd.*)



16 Clive Carey (1883-1968), associated with Rutland Boughton's Glastonbury productions and a friend of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Sang at the Leith Hill Festival and worked with Vaughan Williams on the first professional performance of *Sir John in Love*.

17 Produced by Barry Jackson in Birmingham and Manchester in 1912/13 – a 'fairy play' contrived by Jackson and Basil Dean.

18 Annie Horniman (1860-1937), theatre producer and manager who founded the first regional repertory theatre in Britain at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester.

19 Lena Ashwell (1869-1957), actress, manageress, impresario, and wife of the royal obstetrician, Sir Henry Simson.

20 George Bernard Shaw, 'An Aside', in Lillah McCarthy, *Myself and My Friends* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1933).

21 Opened in 1882 as The Novelty Theatre, it had several changes of name. The London première of *A Doll's House* was given at the theatre in 1889.

including Harley Granville-Barker from early 1912 to April 1915. Involved with the establishment of her 'Concerts at the Front' organisation, Ashwell kept the Kingsway Theatre closed in the late summer of 1915 and, in order to meet its continuing costs, she had to resume her actress/manager role. *Iris Intervenes* opened on 16<sup>th</sup> October, directed by William Bridges-Adams, husband of Muriel Pratt who had the small role of Muriel Hudson. It is likely that it was during the run, which finished its London season on 20<sup>th</sup> November, that Ashwell decided to produce *The Starlight Express* after Christmas, being the theatre's next production 'as a piece of Red Cross work for the mind during the first agony of the War'.<sup>22</sup>

Ashwell set herself a considerable challenge to put on a musical play in such a short period of time. Whilst music had always been an integral part of the Kingsway's productions, she had never embarked on a musical play before. Her uncharacteristic action has been described as 'reckless and ill-thought-through' but she was no doubt drawn to the story, for like Blackwood, religion and eastern philosophy meant much to her and she explored mysticism and spiritualism throughout her life.<sup>23</sup>

She started to assemble her company – the backer was Ralph Philipson<sup>24</sup> who supported the project as a tribute to his late wife: Henry Wilson, architect and designer of jewellery and newly appointed President of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was brought in as designer, even though he had no previous experience of such work.<sup>25</sup> He had the assistance of Stanley North who created the comet design used in the programme and Arthur Penley, former proprietor of the Kingsway, was the business manager.

### The production

It is not clear why Ashwell did not contact Carey to use his music, but she broached the subject with Blackwood who in turn contacted Robin H. Legge of *The Daily Telegraph* who immediately thought of Elgar. On 9<sup>th</sup> November 1915 he wrote to Elgar who was away in Leeds.

I rang you this morning about an important matter with Lena Ashwell, who came down here to ask me to suggest a composer of incidental music with some chorus work for a play she wants to produce at Xmas. I of course 'went for' you tooth & nail. The play ... is one that I am sure will attract you. Most sincerely I hope you can see your way to undertaking the music. PLEASE do take it up if you like the play. We want something more from you now, & this is so beautiful a thing. Nobody else can do it as you can.<sup>26</sup>

Ashwell wrote to Elgar on the same day:

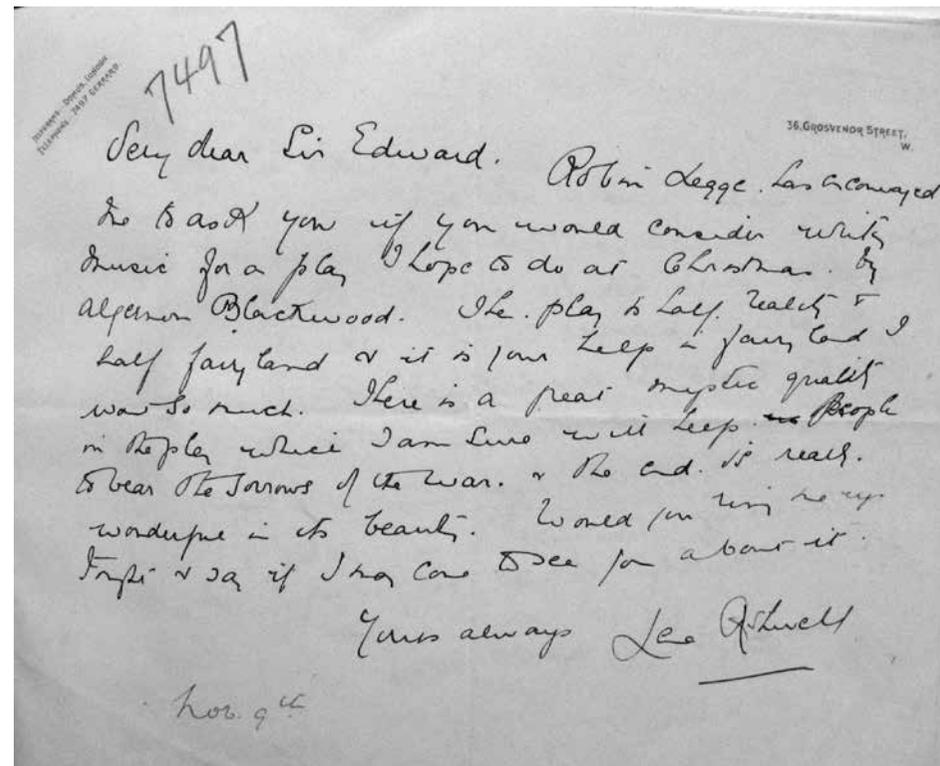
22 Lena Ashwell, *The Stage* (London, 1912), 189.

23 Margaret Leask, *Lena Ashwell: actress, patriot, pioneer* (Hertfordshire: The Society for Theatre Research, 2012).

24 The lawyer, mine owner and patron of the arts Ralph Hilton Philipson (1861-1928), was to marry Blackwood's friend Maya Stuart-King (Baroness Knoop) in 1922.

25 Henry Wilson (1864-1934) was President of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society from 1915 to 1922.

26 K. E. L. Simmons, 'Elgar and the wonderful stranger: music for *The Starlight Express*', *Elgar Studies* (Aldershot: Scholar Press 1990), 161-162.



Ashwell's letter of 9th November 1915

... The play is half reality & half fairy land & it is your help in fairy land I want so much. There is a great mystic quality in the play which I am sure will help people to bear the sorrows of the war, & the end is really wonderful in its beauty...<sup>27</sup>

Alice Elgar's diary recorded developments over the succeeding days:

10<sup>th</sup> November ... Lena Ashwell came up & showed E. the play she longs for his music to go with it ...

11<sup>th</sup> November E. into town for lunch. Met A. at Kingsway Theatre & Lena Ashwell gave a box. Alice S.W. with us. Enjoyed 'Iris Intervenes' extremely – Lena wonderfully clever in it ... Tea with Lena A. afterwards – very nice and interesting.

12<sup>th</sup> November ... E. busy thinking out the music for L. Ashwell's Play ... Alice S.W. to tea & to see the Play proposed.

13<sup>th</sup> November Lena Ashwell came & E. settled to do or adapt his music for her Play. She was moved to tears by E.'s music from the Fountain [from *The Wand of Youth* music] ...<sup>28</sup>

27 Simmons, 162.

28 Martin Bird transcript.

Ashwell was familiar with Elgar's music having used *Sursum Corda* and the *Serenade for Strings* in her production of *Diana of Dobson's* at the Kingsway in 1908 and *Chanson de Matin* in *Iris Intervenes*. Elgar had been on the advisory board of the Three Arts Club which Ashwell founded in 1911 – hence she may well have known of *The Wand of Youth* music and their origin in the Elgar children's play, which was set in a 'Woodland Glade' 'intersected by a brook' with fairyland on the other side, where 'characters on crossing the stream entered fairyland and were transfigured ...'<sup>29</sup> That this theme resembled Blackwood's story appealed to Elgar and as there was less than seven weeks to the planned premiere, he agreed to adapt and borrow music from *The Wand of Youth* suites.

On 15<sup>th</sup> November he met Blackwood and reported to Alice Stuart-Wortley:

I had a 'meeting' author producer & composer this am & decided to do the music – consider the amount of help I shall want & the responsibility!<sup>30</sup>

... and on 17<sup>th</sup> November he wrote to Schuster from Leeds:

... I have decided to 'do' the little music required for the play ... as it includes children, sprites & grown ups, will sure to excite comparison with other such wares.<sup>31</sup>

Years later Blackwood recalled:

Music only emerged as quite an afterthought. Elgar's name cropped up – I had never met him and knew next to nothing of his music. However, various people, myself amongst them, were bold enough to approach the great man. He at once fell in with the proposal.<sup>32</sup>

Alice Elgar's diary continues:

15<sup>th</sup> November ... E. still not very well. Lena Ashwell, Algernon Blackwood & Mr Phillips [Ralph Philipson] came up – E. played to them, they wept. Had a delightful talk &c – A. Blackwood seemed charming. Told E. about rearing a horse to run in the Derby on dried milk –<sup>33</sup> ... E. drove into town with them to Novello's. Returned at 3.30 & settled about adapting Wand of Youth.

19<sup>th</sup> November E. muss better. Looking over sketches ...

20<sup>th</sup> November Lena Ashwell to talk about play in the morning –

23<sup>rd</sup> November ... E. busy with his Play music –

24<sup>th</sup> November E. very hard at work ... E. went to Kingsway Theatre ... E. pleased with the Theatre Rehearsal.

29 Elgar, 'A note by the composer', March 1929 – draft notes to accompany HMV set 80, *The Wand of Youth*, EBM letter 1304.

30 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: The Windflower Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 156.

31 Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 6914.

32 A. E. Keeton, 'The Starlight Express', *Music & Letters*, January 1945.

33 Blackwood became a director of a dried milk company in 1903. A horse, Azote, was reared on dried milk and hay from 1906. It gained 825 pounds since it was weaned, a record at that time. It ran in the Derby on 26th May 1908 and finished next to last. It has more success racing in France.

25<sup>th</sup> November Mr. A. Blackwood here very early to go through Play with E. Then Mr. Green came to sing – fairly good, not ideal ... Then Frank [Schuster] and Alice S. W. came on after theatre ... E. played his new tunes. Then A. Blackwood came and & stayed to dine. Very pleasant out of the world talk late around the fire.

26<sup>th</sup> November E. very hard at work. Much telephoning L. Ashwell Elkin Enoch Novello &c &c &c –<sup>34</sup>

Elgar became more engrossed in the project. He read *A Prisoner in Fairyland* and recognised its evocation of sleep and dreams. He and Blackwood found much in common – both were violinists; both had a pantheistic love of trees and the natural world and had nostalgic memories of childhood which they idealised. Julius Harrison recognised this as he found Elgar '... a man apart; his soul in constant touch with other-worldly things, living in dreams; metaphysical; detached; his complex nature desiring much he could never attain ...'<sup>35</sup> Composer and author had a joint love of games and japes and delighted in each other's company. This was spotted by Robin Legge who wrote to Elgar on 29<sup>th</sup> November:

Why on earth it never dawned on me to bring you & Alg. Blackwood together [before] I cannot think. He is wonderful to me, & you must be wonderful to him (as you are to me). When can I hear the music?<sup>36</sup>

By now Elgar had revised his original thoughts and the score was to include much new music over and beyond the adaptation of *The Wand of Youth* suites. He used 'Moths and Butterflies' in a shortened form and the 'Sun Dance', Motifs from 'Little Bells' and 'Fairy Pipers' became important 'passages of the utmost tenderness drawn from simple but eloquent harmonies, as though for sheer affection he could not let them go.'<sup>37</sup> but overall *The Wand of Youth* music provided a small proportion of the 300 page score which was eventually written.

Another consequence of the expanding role of music was an enlargement of the pit orchestra. Ashwell agreed to a virtual doubling of musicians from her usual string ensemble to include wind, brass, harp and percussion and later the finances were stretched to provide cow bells, a wind machine and an organ.

As rehearsals continued the play and the music were refashioned. The Organ-Grinder was allocated three songs, each sung to introduce each act. The lyrics for 'To the Children' and 'The Blue-Eyed Fairy'<sup>38</sup> were taken from the novel, but the song for the third act, 'My Old Tunes' was specially written for the play. The singing role of The Organ-Grinder increased in importance as the music developed. One of The Sprites' chants – 'The Curfew Song' – was given to him and during the run he took over 'The Song to the Little Winds'. 'They're all soft shiny now' in the last scene and 'Hearts must be soft-shiny dressed' were also transferred to the Organ-Grinder from The Sprites. Elgar wanted to set as many of Blackwood's verses as he could and when the operatic baritone Charles Mott secured the role this provided another reason to expand his part. Elgar had

34 Martin Bird transcript.

35 Julius Harrison, 'A personal Reminiscence', *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.18, No.5 (August 2014), 24.

36 Elgar Birthplace 2511.

37 Diana McVeagh, 'Elgar's musical language: the shorter instrumental works', in Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton, *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 59.

38 The waltz tune came from a sketch dated August 1882.

*Act III Finale*

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for the final page of Elgar's score. The score is written on multiple staves, each labeled with an instrument or section: Piccolo, Flauti I. II., Oboi I. II., Corno Inglese, Clarinetto in C I. II., Clarinetto Basso in C, Fagotti I. II., Contra Fagotto, Corni I. II. III. IV., Trombe I. II., Tromboni I. II., Percussion (Tamburi, Tamburi piccoli, Gran Cassa e piatti, Arpa), Violini I., Violini II., Violenze, Violoncelli, and C. Basso. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are several handwritten annotations and signatures, most notably a large signature that appears to be 'Elgar' and another that says 'Brethg 15. 15'. The page is numbered '14' in the bottom left corner.

The final page of Elgar's score.

heard Charles Mott in *Die Meistersinger* in February 1914 and was so impressed he urged Ivor Atkins to engage him for *Gerontius* at that year's Three Choirs Festival in September.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, when operatic soprano Clytie Hine was engaged for the part of The Laugher – probably the choice of Lena Ashwell as Hine belonged to 'The Concerts at the Front' organisation – music was re-allocated to her. Like Mott, Hine had also sung Wagner at Covent Garden and with Beecham in *Die Zauberflöte*.

Of the actors who were engaged, three names stand out. O. B. Clarence<sup>40</sup> played Daddy. He was a well-known character-actor on the London stage and appeared in several of Barrie's plays. He had a number of film roles and one of his last was as the Aged Parent in David Lean's 1946 film *Great Expectations*. Una O'Connor,<sup>41</sup> who played Grannie, and who in later life often played maids or housekeepers, moved eventually to Hollywood and appeared in many films including *The Barratt's of Wimpole Street* and in the 1938 classic *The Adventures of Robin Hood* alongside Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland. The young Lynne Fontaine, who was later to make her name in the theatre, was one of the seven Pleiades.

Alice Elgar's diary continues:

*6<sup>th</sup> December* ... E. very rushed – Mr Mott at 9.30. Very good & nice. Lunched with Landon [Ronald at the] Guildhall [School of Music] who explained the business he had, like an Angel, settled for E. Just as he started Goodwin & Tabb's emissary came, & Ballet Mistress [Flo Martell]. E. worried about the work till these were settled. The soprano [Clytie Hine] came late – very delightful singing.

*7<sup>th</sup> December* Mr. Bradley [copyist] here working for E. E. not out all day – Absorbed in his 'Starlight'. Mr. Blackwood to dine – very pleasant & interesting. E. told him many stories. ... Blackwood entranced with E's music. Glorious Orion & Pleiades at night.

*8<sup>th</sup> December* Ballet Mistress came. E. much absorbed in his work –

*9<sup>th</sup> December* E. very very busy – Music most fascinating & lovely. Very wet – E. to try & find an organ – went to all sorts of wonderful places in London – no success. Miss Ashwell to dinner & to go over points of the play –

*10<sup>th</sup> December* E. very busy – To the Theatre & lunched there –

*11<sup>th</sup> December* Mr. Mott early & sang some of the music delightfully & so delighted with it. Mr. Bradley here – ... Mr. Elkin here later – to discuss publishing Starlight. Novello gave it all up – Kind Landon arranging things –

*12<sup>th</sup> December* Very cold. Not out. Sharp snowstorm. J. Harrison here to go through the music with E. & stayed to lunch.

*13<sup>th</sup> December* Breathless time with Starlight Express.<sup>42</sup>

On 10<sup>th</sup> December Elgar wrote to Clare Stuart-Wortley that he had 'been so sumptuously busy over the play – slow copyists – inferior & rejected singers etc etc that all the nicest things in the world, & you

39 The festival was cancelled following the outbreak of war in August 1914.

40 O. B. Clarence (1870-1955).

41 Una O'Connor (1880-1959), Northern Irish character actress.

42 Martin Bird transcript.

best of all, have had to be neglected, but not forgotten'.<sup>43</sup> Alice Elgar's diary was also to be neglected as preparations continued apace. On 15<sup>th</sup> December Elgar completed the score writing his age as 15, surely an echo of Henry Roger's thoughts as he left Bourcelles by train to return to England?

... he came back to duty – duty in London – great, noisy, overwhelming London, with its disturbing bustle, its feverish activities, its complex, artificial, unsatisfying amusements, and its hosts of frantic people. He grew older in a moment; he was forty again now; an instant ago, just on the further side of those blue woods, he had been fifteen.<sup>44</sup>

Elgar would have identified with these sentiments!

On 20<sup>th</sup> December he confided to Sidney Colvin:

... It has been a real joy to have something so pure & simple to do Blackwood is an unusual man – & sympathetic to me. I have been in sore straits to find copyists (of all things) & have had to do much of it myself! Not out of the house for days together – the stress is over now.<sup>45</sup>

The manuscript of the play (without music) albeit not in its final form, was submitted by Penley to the Lord Chamberlain's office on 6<sup>th</sup> December and licensed on 11<sup>th</sup> December. Ernest Bendell, in the Lord Chamberlain's office, described the work as:

A daintily didactic little fairy-play of the school of *the Blue Bird* but less dramatic in its motive and plot ... The nursery romance, which has its scene laid in the Swiss Mountains, is charmingly imagined and prettily written, seems rather lacking in lucidity in its earlier stages, perhaps through its super abundance of subordinate characters. But it is always perfect in taste and sound in tone, and its last Act, which moralises the whole fantasy, has many passages of tender beauty.<sup>46</sup>

### **Dissension**

As the date of the opening grew ever nearer, financial and other pressures came to the fore. Muriel Pratt, who had alerted Ashwell to the play, felt alienated as she was, surprisingly, not given a part and Violet Pearn was unhappy with Ashwell's treatment of her friend. Pearn found that Elgar's music bored her to tears and she would have preferred Clive Carey's. Carey had found out about the production but as his connection with the play and the Basil Dean enterprise had lapsed – especially since his enlistment – he had no standing now, and after being placated by Pearn, bore no grudge against Elgar. It is likely that Elgar was shielded from knowing of Carey's prior involvement.

Difficulties were compounded when Ashwell was summoned to Bow Street Police Court in mid-December for non-payment of rates on the theatre, which came to £83 6s. 6d. In mitigation the Court was told that the Kingsway had been closed between May and October and Zeppelin raids had forced a brief re-closure after it opened in the autumn. Ashwell hoped that the success of the new production would enable her to pay the debt. She was allowed a further month's grace.

O.B. Clarence recalled in his autobiography that:

43 EBM letter 7910.

44 *Prisoner*, 400.

45 EBM letter 3459.

46 Ernest A. Bendall, 6 December 1915, Lord Chamberlain's Office quoted in Margaret Leask, 'Lena Ashwell and *The Starlight Express*', *Theatre Notebook*, Vol.63, No.1 (2009), 45.

The play was all rather vague and mystical and required a master hand. Granville Barker might have treated it successfully. During the rehearsals there were constant bickerings and difficulties which were regrettable and unpleasant... There were even dissensions among the orchestra, which was conducted by Julius Harrison. There was so much allure in the conception of this fantasy that one felt that it only wanted harmony among its interpreters to secure success.<sup>47</sup>



**Blackwood reads to the children at rehearsal. The lady is Lena Ashwell.**

More worryingly Ashwell banned Blackwood from the theatre for a week, ostensibly for his playing hide-and-seek with the children, and she found his presence disruptive. To top it all there were serious worries about the designs of Henry Wilson, whose conception of the work radically differed from Blackwood's. Around 18<sup>th</sup> December Blackwood shared his concerns with Elgar:

I shall be in town again early Monday morning [20<sup>th</sup> December], but not at the theatre. I am staying away from the rehearsals for a week at Miss Ashwell's request. It's a good idea. I shall come back fresh and be able to judge the progress. ... I suppose you realise that your music is the most divine, unearthly thing ever written. I don't believe you do. ... It makes me happy all day long, and I want to cry and sing. It will go all over the world. I know I shall simply burst when I hear Mott sing it.

I hear that Mr. Wilson, the artist, has designed the Sprites in the spirit of Greek fantasy – Lamplighter a quasi-Mercury, Gardener as Priapus, or someone else, and Sweep possibly as Pluto. It

47 O. B. Clarence, *No Complaints* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), 145.

is a false and ghastly idea. There is nothing pagan in our little Childhood play. It is an alien symbolism altogether. It robs our dear Sprites of all their significance as homely childhood figures. Don't you think so too? If our play means anything at all, it means God – not the gods.<sup>48</sup>

Although the costumes were changed the dress rehearsal on 24<sup>th</sup> December revealed further problems and in a long letter to Elgar written on Christmas Day from the Savile Club, Blackwood revealed his anger at Wilson's ideas:

I know what you're feeling. Probably you guess what I'm feeling. Can we do anything? ... I have, of course, the right of veto. That means getting a new artist, postponement of opening, heavy loss of money to Miss Ashwell, and so forth. You know better than I do what a sweeping veto would involve. That our really big chance should be ruined by her strange belief in a mediocre artist is cruel. This murder of my simple little play (qua words) I can stand, for the fate of my books has accustomed me to it; but this suburban, Arts & Crafts pretentious rubbish stitched on to your music is really too painful for me to bear. ... after a horrid night of thinking it all over, I can see no course but to veto it all and face postponement, change of artist etc etc etc – or to insist upon what compromise is possible at this late hour. We can talk on Monday [27<sup>th</sup> December] if you like. I am ready to do anything. ... I stopped the Sprites being Greek Gods, but the rest.....!

... I have also tried to show ... how Mott's songs lose half their effect by being against an ugly gauze, and entirely out of the picture. In the play I wrote "a street scene"... Mott was most depressed about it himself.

I further objected to his Piedmontese Brigand appearance with those ghastly tight breeches. No English child will recognise the familiar organ-grinder of the country lanes in that untrue and silly costume. ... In fact, a new artist seems our only hope. And someone to be called in (Harry Gratton say) who understands something, at least, about proper lighting...<sup>49</sup>

O. B. Clarence recalled:

There were disagreements about the symbolism of the décor, which was all rather highbrow and obscured the beauty of the story. ... I don't know what Elgar thought of it all; it was altogether sad. He made no remonstrance to my knowledge. He was geniality itself and entertained the cast one day to lunch at the Connaught Rooms...<sup>50</sup>

Ashwell, well aware of the problems, wrote to Elgar before the opening:

I have been dreaming about the difficulties & I see them clearly. ... I can't do the play without you & it is really life or extinction for me to get the play right & it can't be right without you.<sup>51</sup>

A postponement was not possible as invitations for the 2.00 p.m. matinee performance on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> December had been sent out by Arthur Penley on 17<sup>th</sup> December and Ashwell would never have sanctioned a delay as publically all was well. The *Observer* for 26<sup>th</sup> December struck a positive note and quoted Blackwood as saying:

48 British Library MS69834 folios 7-8.

49 Simmons, 177-178.

50 Clarence, 145.

51 Simmons, 179.

The extraordinary intuitive comprehension of my ideas which Miss Ashwell has shown has been a very keen delight to me. Her enthusiasm and her zeal are beyond anything I could have expected.<sup>52</sup>

For her part Lena Ashwell following an interview at the dress rehearsal and published in *The Referee* on 26<sup>th</sup> December, disguised the true situation:

Although producing a play in War time has its minor difficulties in the way of procuring materials... the serious difficulties have solved themselves.... Mr Wilson ... knew exactly what Mr Blackwood's Sprites looked like and did. In fact, he seemed to know just as much about it as the authors, Mr Blackwood and Miss Pearn. So that difficulty did not arise.<sup>53</sup>

Alice Elgar resumed her diary on 27<sup>th</sup> December:

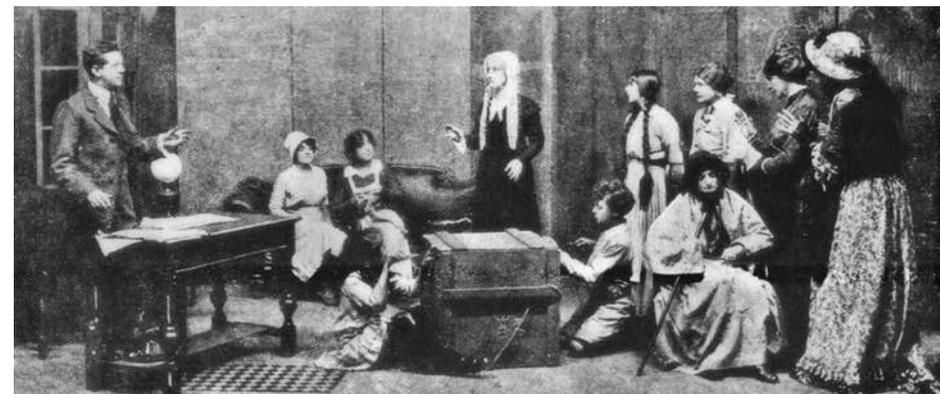
E. very busy with his Starlight music. Mr Blackwood with him in afternoon & Mr [Anthony] Bernard who helped –<sup>54</sup>

Elgar did remonstrate about the design as his letter of 28<sup>th</sup> December to Troyte Griffith shows:

Your friend has entirely ruined any chance the play had of success – he's an ignorant silly crank with no knowledge of the stage at all & has overloaded the place with a lot of unsuitable rubbish & has apparently never read the play! He ought to be put in a Home!<sup>55</sup>

A note appended to this letter by Troyte states: 'This refers to Harry Gratton's beautiful but most unsuitable scenery for The Starlight Express.' As Gratton was first mentioned in Blackwood's

**The 'wumbled' family: O. B. Clarence is on the left.**



52 Leask, *Theatre Notebook*, 49.

53 Simmons, 179.

54 On that day she was involved in a taxicab accident and was confined to bed with slight concussion.

55 EBM letter 7284.

letter of 25<sup>th</sup> December it is unlikely that any new designs of his would have been in place by 28<sup>th</sup> December, so Elgar's comment must relate to Wilson. As Troyte's own architectural designs were in the Arts and Crafts style it is likely that he did know the President of the Arts and Crafts Society.<sup>56</sup>

The opening matinée took place on 29<sup>th</sup> December conducted by Julius Harrison and not, as planned, by Elgar. Officially he was unable to attend due to Alice's accident but her diary gives another reason:

E. wd not conduct as the mise en scène was so repulsive – & was not even present – Music wonderful



The final scene.

His dudgeon did not last for by 1<sup>st</sup> January 1916 Alice Elgar noted:

... Starlight Express every day. E. there very often –<sup>57</sup>

Robin Legge, who instigated Elgar's involvement wrote after the first performance:

I regret a thousand times to hear of the course which prevented you from conducting the production of that beautiful thing today: & most sincerely hope that Lady Elgar is better & progressing well. I know no details.

The play was a real success & could be made greater by pruning – 3½ hours is much too long – But may I say that your music is lovely beyond words – & absolutely fits the play? On all sides I heard its praises sung – & I & my daughter revelled in it.<sup>58</sup>

It appears that audiences enjoyed the play. The actors received favourable reviews and the music was singled out for praise, as were the singers.

... Elgar ... shows himself, like a truly great mind, able to please the other great minds – those of children With it all the composer is true to himself and the music bears the unmistakable impress of his hand, though more delicate in its touch than it has ever been before. ... the audience was not slow to recognise how much it is an integral part of the whole. The calls for the composer were many.

This was from the *Morning Post*. However it was the play itself that drew criticism:

56 See Jeremy M. Hardie, *Troyte Griffith: Malvern Architect and Elgar's Friend* (Malvern: Aspect Design, 2012). Troyte successfully designed the stage sets for Granville Barker's 1907 production of Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* at the Savoy theatre, and if he had been involved with *The Starlight Express* these problems might have been avoided.

57 Martin Bird transcript.

58 EBM letter 9217.

... in the theatre the fantasy never once gets fairly going, and despite the profusion of literary embellishment, the fable strikes one as thin and wanting in distinction ... But though the piece enjoyed a friendly reception, Mr. Blackwood appearing in response to a hearty call, one feels that it lacks the magic touch which children are quick to recognise and their elders are not slow to enjoy.

The *Daily News* for 30<sup>th</sup> December 1915 wrote:

The composer, as much as the author ... must be praised, because his music is the compliment, and often the realisation, of the author's thought. Without it there would be arid patches ... It is prolix and too obviously profound ... Mr. Blackwood is so intent on being definite that sometimes he becomes almost obscure. He has not the persistent magic of Maeterlinck, nor the elfin humour of Barrie, but he has nevertheless the right stuff in him ... all that hampers the flight of "The Starlight Express" can be thrown away and it should be done immediately.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* found that the music ...

... was in some respects the best thing of the afternoon – light, yet rich, full of ingenuity and fancy, expressive melody and tripping rhythm.

*The Standard* commented:

Were it not for the explanations thoughtfully given in the programme, it would be next to impossible to decide what 'The Starlight Express', produced yesterday afternoon at the Kingsway Theatre is all about. Everybody loves a fantasy, but it should not be so subtle as to elude the understanding.

*The Era* succinctly commented:

Unfortunately the authors require an audience for their play gifted with an imagination at least as equal to their own ... [it] does not stimulate the imagination; if it did the lengthy explanation given on the programme would be unnecessary.

*The Daily Telegraph* found the music entrancing:

Elgar's music charms and pleases alternately ... The whole is an accompaniment of perfect appropriateness. He enters completely into the particular mood of the piece. It has stimulated his imaginative vein to the full.

*The Bystander* produced a series of cartoon sketches showing the actors becoming increasingly confused until the third act when 'father discovers the plot and explains'. O.B. Clarence, who played the father, recalled many years later:

... it was one of the strangest and most moving parts I've ever had. The music was haunting in its beauty – I was proud to be associated with it – at the same time I felt there was something wholly wrong with the script.<sup>59</sup>

59 Quoted in A. E. Keeton, 'The Starlight Express', *Music & Letters* (Vol. XXVI, No. 1, January 1945), reprinted in Christopher Redwood (editor), *An Elgar Companion* (Ashbourne: Sequoia Publishing, 1982), 234.

Elgar subsequently realised this writing to William Starmer in 1921: ‘...the drama (not by my friend A.B. ) did not seem to hold together.’<sup>60</sup>

Blackwood took a stoical attitude writing to Elgar on 1<sup>st</sup> January:

That you have written that music to my words (which the papers tell me are rotten) is one thing big in my life: but that you have opened your deep, strange, simple heart to me as you have, is another thing. I feel joy and wonder at that. The play (to me) is a detail.<sup>61</sup>

For a child’s perspective there is an account by Wulstan Atkins, who saw the play aged 11. He was disappointed not to find Elgar conducting but:

My disappointment soon disappeared, however, when Elgar’s fascinating overture began and when the Organ-Grinder, Charles Mott, appeared on the apron of the stage to sing the first song ... Soon I was completely absorbed in the play, eagerly following the dream-like Sprites, the Lamplighter, the Sweep, the Dustman, the Woman-in-the-Haystack, the *Starlight Express* itself, and the Stardust Cavern in the Mountains.<sup>62</sup>

*Country Life* agreed that ‘All children of whatever age would love it. And as for old folk, it makes tears stream down their cheeks.’

During the run alterations were made. *The Times* of 19<sup>th</sup> January 1916 reported that the play had ...

...been shortened and pulled together, and in some scenes remounted ... if the new scenes and devices in the last act do not quite secure a satisfactory expression of Mr. Algernon Blackwood’s starry fancies, they are at all events a great improvement on those of the first performance. In spite of obvious drawbacks, which include a lack of dramatic action, *The Starlight Express* is a play not to miss. The great charm of it lies in Sir Edward Elgar’s music, and especially in that part of it that is sung by Mr. Charles Mott. The acting ... is even better than it was, and the finale is certainly one of the most moving and beautiful effects on stage at the moment. The production is a notable attempt rather than an achievement, but it has beauties that make it well worth a visit.

It had been due to run for six weeks but the poor reviews, Zeppelin raids, black-outs and falling audiences, forced Ashwell to close it after forty performances. She wrote to Elgar on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1916:

The financial side of the enterprise has not been very satisfactory and I cannot honestly try to persuade Mr Phillipson to continue the run this year in the circumstances, though I think there is no doubt from what he said that he will be prepared to revive it next year, when I am sure we shall have a much greater success. I am very sorry because I am afraid it has been a disappointment to you, but I am quite sure that the lovely music you have written will not be wasted, and that the greatest happiness has been given to a great number of people by it.<sup>63</sup>

60 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar and other writings* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 268.

61 Robert Anderson, *Elgar in Manuscript* (London: The British Library, 1990), 138.

62 Wulstan E. Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1984), 271. His most vivid memory was of the Star Cave, which took up a substantial amount of the production budget – information from Arthur Reynolds.

63 British Library MS69834 folio 11.

The final performance took place on 29<sup>th</sup> January; Alice recorded:

...on to Kingsway Theatre large audience & much enthusiasm. Lovely play & music enchanting killed by bad setting...

30<sup>th</sup> January 1916 E. felt the ceasing of the Starlight very much so did Mr. Blackwood indeed all the nice people concerned.<sup>64</sup>

Landon Ronald undertook the business arrangements for the play, thereby relieving Elgar of that additional burden. However the contract which Elgar signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> December gave him 25 guineas,<sup>65</sup> plus royalties and a large percentage for mechanical rights and concert performances. Elkin only published the three Organ-Grinder’s songs in Julius Harrison’s arrangement for voice and piano and a suite for piano arranged by A. W. Ketelbey. The Gramophone Company, as early as 7<sup>th</sup> December, expressed an interest in recording Mott’s songs, but even though Elgar had by that time, undertaken three recording sessions, with seven of his works on disc, he did not display much enthusiasm for gramophone recording and in order to retain his name and increase his interest, the company proposed a more generous contract to run from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1916. Charles Mott was to record four songs from the play. With the ending of the production and with little of the score being published, Elgar realised that recording would be the best way to preserve the music which he valued and he could dictate terms. He negotiated that some of the soprano songs also be recorded and that Agnes Nicholls be the chosen artist at a fee of £30 and delayed signing the contract until all was agreed.

Alice Elgar wrote:

11<sup>th</sup> February 1916 .... Agnes Nicholls to sing Laughter music – sang perfectly beautifully. Mr. Elkin to lunch – to talk over Star music for Gramophone ...<sup>66</sup>

The music needed revising and the opening song shortened to fit onto one side of the disc. Elgar and Blackwood attended the Hayes recording studio on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> February when eight sides were recorded. Years later Nicholls recalled the occasion:

...he had a great fancy to have me do this ... We rehearsed it at the Studio and then went into the recording room ... there were all sorts of small difficulties. However, we rehearsed and in the end got a fairly good recording ... He was very excited about these records, and if I may say so, very pleased with the way I did it.<sup>67</sup>

This was a huge undertaking for the time and more than 150 pages of music were recorded, being over half of the MS score. That the composer conducted these discs added a further cachet, as he had not conducted the score in the theatre since this was divided between Harrison and Anthony Bernard.

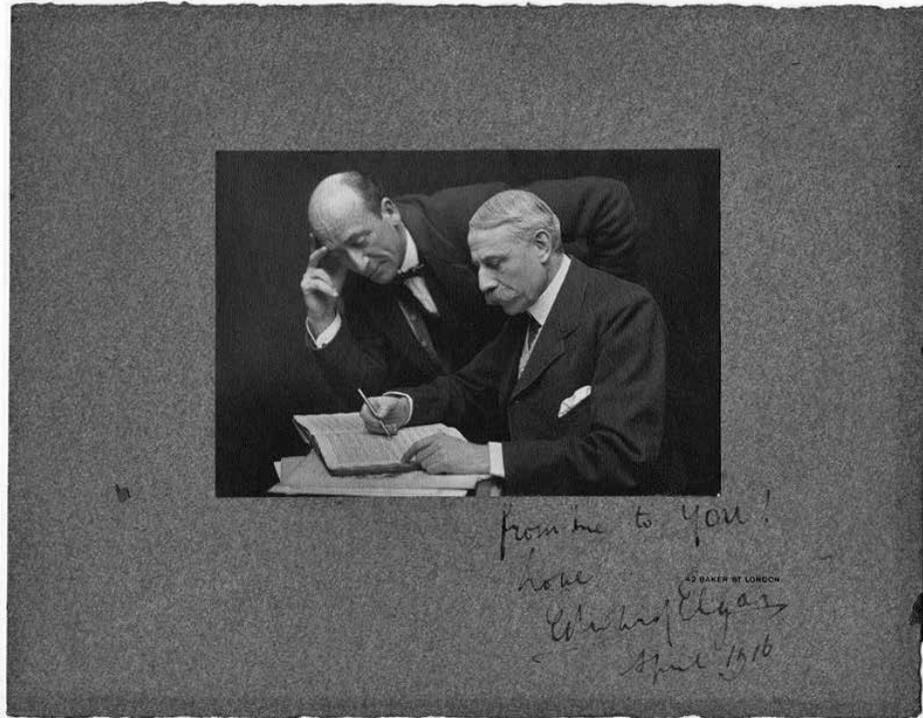
Jerrold Northrop Moore in commenting on the recording wrote:

64 Martin Bird transcript.

65 Worth approximately £1,850 today.

66 Martin Bird transcript.

67 Agnes Nicholls to Jerrold Northrop Moore, 26 August 1958, Jerrold Northrop Moore, ‘An Elgar Discography’, *The Journal of the Institute of Recorded Sound*, Vol. 2, No.9 ( January 1963), 20.



**Blackwood and Elgar at the recording sessions on 18th February 1916. The inscription reads ‘from me to you! Love Edward Elgar April 1916’. This photograph, by Ernest Histed, was given to the National Portrait Gallery in 1983 by Dorothy de Navarro, the daughter-in-law of Elgar’s close friends Tony and Mary de Navarro.**

As a whole, the reproduction of these records is really excellent, and Agnes Nicolls’ voice, which did not generally fare well with acoustic recording, is here captured more perfectly perhaps than anywhere else. Mott, although his voice production was not perfect, demonstrates a keen insight into the nature of the songs, and his are almost the only real Elgar ‘creator’ records which exist. The published set ... is charming beyond words, and quite enjoyable by modern standards.<sup>68</sup>

The performance thus preserved is – within the limitations of the acoustical process – a worthy record of one of Elgar’s loveliest works. The harmonic, contrapuntal, and orchestrational simplicity dictated by theatrical realities render the score far more amenable to acoustical recording than most of Elgar’s important music. Charles Mott’s performance is a unique moment of his affectionate impersonation of the Organ-Grinder ... Agnes Nicholls would perhaps have made a formidable Laugher ... but her ability to cope effortlessly with the many difficult tessitura passages bring to the music an intensity

68 Discography, 20.

which admirably seconds Mott’s more relaxed presentation.<sup>69</sup>

HMV found these to be ‘wonderful records’ and advanced pressings were rushed to Severn House where Blackwood was to commence a fortnight’s stay.

*13<sup>th</sup> March* Mr. Blackwood came to stay. Starlight Express records came – very exciting hearing them – very good.<sup>70</sup>

The records were launched formally at a luncheon at the Savoy Hotel on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1916 with the composer and author, and where Elgar told the press he was ‘delighted with them’ and indeed they are amongst one of the most moving things that he recorded. They cemented Elgar’s interest in the possibilities of recording and he was to continue to do so for the next eighteen years, a veritable star in HMVs roster of artists. By 1933 he had recorded much of his oeuvre, being one of the first major composers to commit his works to disc.

Shortly after the end of the run Ashwell gave up running the Kingsway Theatre and the promised revival did not take place.

Was the production a success? Even though subsequently some considered it a failure is this really the case? Audiences greeted it with the ‘warmest applause’ and even on the last night there was a good attendance – the public clearly liked it. The critics had doubts about the play and it was always going to be difficult to translate Blackwood’s ephemeral and diffuse message to the stage but the music was universally praised. The short time available to prepare the production and the conflicts which thus arose, were negative factors. One commentator has noted wisely:

It is hard to imagine today a director or manager commissioning a score for a West End musical play six weeks prior to opening night. However, it should be remembered that Ashwell initially asked for some incidental music and chorus work for the play – it was Blackwood’s contact with the ideas of childhood that triggered enthusiasm and memories for Elgar and led him to compose more music than was originally intended. Perhaps there were too many ‘dreamers of dreams’ involved. Undoubtedly all were committed to doing their best in difficult circumstances but clearly Ashwell was distracted by her other activities and stretched to the limits of her resources, both financial and personal. Also, she had reached the point where there was no alternative but to proceed even if the work was not ready or fully integrated.<sup>71</sup>

The play lacked the clarity and immediacy of *Peter Pan*, which was revived every year since 1904, and audiences may have had difficulty in identifying ‘with the problems of the Campden family and the people of Bourcelles. These were hardly substantial and much less than for its audience, a people in a country at war.’

Even so, to put on such a production in war-time, with its problems, should be marked as an achievement. Positive friendships were made and Elgar’s music has continued to delight, for his involvement, spurred by nostalgia for a lost childhood, which in 1915 was increasingly necessary but elusive, has ensured that *The Starlight Express* and all who travelled on it have not been forgotten.

69 Notes to Volume II, *The Elgar Edition*, Pearl Records, 1969. These acoustic recordings are currently available in a four CD box set from Music and Arts (CD-1257 (4)), which contains all Elgar’s acoustic recordings from 1914 to 1925, wonderfully restored by Society Member Lani Spahr.

70 Martin Bird transcript.

71 Leask, Theatre Notebook, 52.

A subsequent article will take the story on from 1916 to 1922

*Acknowledgements: I am most grateful to Martin Bird for allowing me access to the diary entries, letters and documents he has assembled on his database. I salute his altruistic attitude. I thank Chris Bennett and Sue Fairchild for their assistance at the Elgar Birthplace Museum. I wish to thank Andrew Neill and Arthur Reynolds for their assistance with books and information and Philip Petchey for obtaining volumes from the London Library. I also thank Stephen Harrow, Peter Nixon and Andrew Neill for their excellent comments and suggestions after looking through the first draft – their improvements have been gratefully adopted.*

*Kevin Mitchell is the Clerk to a Charitable Educational Trust in London - The All Saints Educational Trust - and Vice-Chairman of the London branch of the Elgar Society.*

## Elgar the violin teacher – was it really such a bad life?

### **Richard Westwood-Brookes**

It is generally accepted that Elgar, in his early years, was forced into the drudgery of teaching violin to detested pupils before he could establish himself as a great composer. But was this really the case? Hindsight can often be an ardent fabricator of myth, and in Elgar's case many of these persist, including, perhaps, a misleading impression of what life was really like for him in his teaching days.

Personal testimony of those days is, understandably, sketchy. Perhaps the best insight is that portrayed by Rosa Burley, the Headmistress of the school for young ladies where Elgar taught week by week in the early 1890s after the failure of his attempt to establish himself in London. She speaks of mutual detest between teacher and pupil, of the girls trying to ensure that they didn't go last in the string of interminable lessons, and of their teacher's nickname of 'The Genius', which was an ironic sobriquet rather than an application of virtue.

But Burley also describes how the young teacher was hogtied by overbearing governesses who insisted on being present as chaperones during the sessions and who would often frustrate him by intervening while he attempted to teach. And it is obvious that the girls, daughters of aspiring upper middle class families, were only learning to play an instrument as part of their wider education into genteel Victorian society, rather than having any particular musical talent.

Such testimony does, however, provide a tempting basis for romantic extemporisation, and in Elgar's case, this was adequately fulfilled by Ken Russell in his famous BBC film, which painted a tantalising 'rags to riches' scenario, and which was also at pains to point out that on the day that Richard Strauss took over as conductor of the most famous orchestra in the world, Elgar began his stint as conductor of the Powyck Asylum Band.

In order to achieve his aim of making Elgar's emergence all the more remarkable, Russell, as is the wont of storytellers, had to make the downside even more 'down', than perhaps it actually was – and even of course mucked about with the chronology of Elgar's life to suit the purpose of the story.

But was it really the case that this period of Elgar's life was so dull and unedifying? It seems not.

A series of hitherto unknown letters has recently come to light which suggest Elgar the violin teacher was not such a lost soul in a sea of talentless diligence – and perhaps he even relished the task. They also reveal his own regrets, motivations and the inner zeal from which his genius derived and provide not only a new perspective on his early years, but how, as time went by, the more distant great and famous composer emerged from the more self-effacing Worcestershire musician.

In January 1892, George Arnold, Organist at Winchester Cathedral wrote to Elgar.

Dear Sir

Although I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, I venture to address you as a fellow professional –

A boy named Reginald Bailey is to be a pupil of The Revd. Ford of Exhall and he much wishes to have instruction from you on the violin, unfortunately the Father has been unfortunate and is not able to pay your terms, could you possibly by any means take him at less than your usual fee as it would be a pity for him to have inferior instruction – I believe Mr. Ford has taken him for much less than ordinary pupils –

He will in all probability eventually go to the Royal School of Music (Sir G Grove has a very high opinion of his capabilities) and be brought up as a violinist –

I am sure he would do you credit as a pupil, and if they apply to you, I trust you will kindly give the matter your best consideration and oblige –

Yrs very truly  
George B. Arnold

Bailey, a Winchester farmer's son, was 12 at the time, and despite the request for Elgar to cut his rate, he must have been intrigued by the boy's potential, and agreed to take him on. He was not to be disappointed, as this letter written to Bailey's mother demonstrates.

Apr. 19. 1892

Dear Madam

As to your son : I think he has great talent & is just at that 'receptive' age when his musical education requires great care & his taste may now be developed for good or evil. He wants now a good thorough master – not a mere fiddler – one who could give him a broad notion of music generally: he should devote himself most to the violin but the pianoforte & harmony shd also be studied not only as a valuable adjunct to his municipal study but also because from any point of view the Violin only is a most precarious instrument: a slight accident, a finger permanently sprained for instance may remove at once a violinist's only means of gaining a livelihood. Therefore the plan is to make a 'Musician' of your son hoping he may be an exceptional Violinist.

For this end I would recommend in the future a year in London if possible and (more for the sake of the music he would hear – an education in itself) a year at Leipzig & if the masters are still good at Brussels, a year there.

I should not tie him down to one conservatorium for three years if you find the Violin progresses as well as it promises to do.

Of course, what I have sketched out may be quite impracticable but it is necessary for a Violinist to know something of all schools of playing: & you may take it for granted that anyone solely educated in London is always turned out a hopeless 'prig'.

I am afraid all this will not help you but you will see as times goes on how your son progresses.

My opinion is (you ask it) that your son has great and exceptional talent & if he applies himself steadfastly to work will make a fine player: some of the music he brought to me is or was too difficult & not well studied: you must guard against his getting inflated notions from the praise he will receive in private circles (he is not quite unspoilt) & try all you can to impress upon him the necessity of broad noble style in place of trickery & that a high ideal is necessary for a great musician.

At any time I shall be most delighted to advise you on any point connected with your son's music: I

have taken a great liking to him( I doubt who could help that) & that must be my excuse for troubling you with such a long epistle.

I am afraid all I have said is most vague but it will give you some idea of what I think right & any definite question that arises I would at any time answer definitely.

With thanks for your kind remarks on the little I was able to do for your son.

Believe me  
Very faithfully yours  
Edward Elgar

My very kind regards to my pupil.

The following January, Elgar's enthusiasm for his pupil was undimmed. Not only was young Bailey a talented violinist, but he appears to have made an immediate impact on Elgar in the way he approached the whole world of music.

Forli  
Malvern  
Jan: 23 1893

My dear Reginald

I was extremely glad to receive your letter tell me how you are getting on. I should have replied at once but Mrs Elgar has been really very ill & it has taken all my attention: she is better now.

Well, I think you must be getting on very well from the list of pieces you sent me. I hope you try and find out all the inner meaning of the music & are still not satisfied with mere show: that is always unsatisfactory & leads nowhere. You need to like & remember to talk about the /feeling/ of the music: pray do this always. The mere mechanical dexterity comes to most people but it is of no account without the soul is it ?

Well, I hope you have had a good holiday: this time has been very sad for me as I told you my wife has been so ill so I will tell you of our summer holiday: we went to Bayreuth. I dare say you have heard of all the Wagner Operas: there they are done in his own theatre & most superlatively well done: we went up the Rhine as it made a day's cool journey, a thing much to be desired in August, stayed at Mainz & then on to Bayreuth where we stayed a week after that we went to Nurnberg, Munich & then in to the Algau Alps: right on the Austrian frontier.

I am sending you some Violin studies [his own 'Études Caractéristiques']: I fear they are dry & perhaps too difficult for you just yet but you will see I have written a lot of things since I saw you & do more writing than playing now: I will send you some one day.

Now my very dear boy, you must go on working very hard it is really your best time fore getting over the drudgery & when you devote yourself entirely to Music you will be so glad to have done with some of the trying part of learning: I trust you keep your other studies well in front: the days when musicians need not be educated men are over now. Schubert was about the last of that school: the art is now in a higher position than ever & it is the duty of every musician to raise it as high as he can: you see the men that are in the front rank now & who really lead the world of music are highly cultivated people: I need not tell you this I think but I will only remind you that all the studies you so will really help your music & make all you do in the way playing or composition more worthy & place it on a higher level.

It is so good for you to have learned to swim: I do not appreciate the severe frost quite as much as you do as I do not skate: do you know the anecdote of Joachim when a student? He was well known then

as a splendid violinist & went out with many others to learn to skate: of course he fell several times when one of the onlookers called out 'Ah! it's not so easy as playing the fiddle is it?'

I don't know what you consider most difficult to do but you can tell me sometime.

I am dreadfully ashamed of my writing now, but I have been scoring a Cantata [The Black Knight]. 176 pages of small writing & it cramps the hand dreadfully & the pen will try to make semi quavers and minims all over the page instead of nice shapely letters.

Write to me sometime & tell me everything & with much love

Believe me  
Affectionately yours  
Edward Elgar

The same day Elgar wrote to Bailey's mother:

Forli  
Malvern  
Jan: 23 : 1893

Dear Mrs Bailey

I was so delighted to receive your dear boy's letter & to hear from you how well he is going on: I could not write before as we have had a most trying time during Mrs Elgar's most serious illness: she is better now & I can begin to think of things again & one of the first to be done is to answer your very kind letter.

I think Reginald should do very well with Mr Carrington. He is considered an excellent master & he is a good Violinist, I know.

I shall always be so interested to hear anything of your dear boy & if ever there is anything I can do help him I shall be so really glad if you will let me.

With kind regards

Believe me  
Sincerely Yours  
Edward Elgar

If sometime I could have a photograph I should be charmed: I have not said so to your son but wd. you tell me if he has one to spare sometime.

Elgar wrote again to Bailey the following July:

Forli  
Malvern  
July 21: 1893

My dear Reginald

I was so very glad to receive your letter & to hear how well you are getting on with your Violin: it is an excellent list of Music which you sent me & I should much like to hear you play some of them: by this post I send you a new piece of mine [La Capricieuse] : will you give my compliments to Mr Carrington & ask him if you may learn it; I should be so delighted if you would play it: Mr Carrington does not know me although I used to see him a great deal (at a distance) when he was at the Crystal Palace years ago when I was studying Violin with Mr Pollitzer.

The Harmony you are doing is most useful & I do hope you like it: you will find it more interesting as you go on.

I have no news to tell you as the term has been very quiet but we are now preparing to start for our holiday & are going (D.V.) to Munich for the Wagner Operas and hope to get some mountains as well.

We hope your father & mother are well: they must be looking forward to seeing you very much : will you give me kind regards to them.

Mrs Elgar is now quite well again: thank you for your very kind enquiries.

And now you must forgive a very dull & hurried note as I am so very busy finishing off lessons for the end of Term [at Rosa Burley's school].

I am always so glad to hear of you so you will send me a note now & then.

& now with much love

Believe me  
Very sincerely yours  
Edward Elgar

The next letter was sent to Bailey some two years later.

Forli  
Malvern  
April 25 1895

My dear Reginald:

I was do delighted to receive your letter & to hear all about you: we were away from home visiting when it reached me & we were going about a great deal so I did not answer at once: then I lost it & did not know your address but to day I found your letter under an accumulation of papers. I hasten to send you a line I was much interested in the list of music your have learned & think it very good work indeed & should like to hear you play some of the things very much: perhaps I should have a chance some day.

It is nice to hear that you like Cricket & Football: they are rather too much for me so I console myself with Golf & play a very great deal – not well you may be sure : the links here are very good for inland links & the situation is lovely: much wide views across Worcestershire.

I see you wish in your letter for some frost: now I am sure you had enough in January & February: there was ice good enough and continuous enough to satisfy the most rabid skater surely: have you seen Curling played? The poor frozen out or rather snowed out golfers adjourned to the large pool by the links and curled all day. I went down several days & it is great fun.

I hope the boat is a great success & sails well: when we lived at Kensington we saw so many boats on the Round Pond by Kensington Palace: people meet there to race their little boats & get very excited over them both old & young & some days there are dozens.

I am glad to hear you had a nice time at the Sea last August: we as usual , went to the Bavarian Highlands & walked about amongst the mountains a great deal, staying at out of the way villages for the night & then walking on next day. We went to Innsbruck this way & back along the Inn Valley to our head quarters at Garmisch.

We were at Oberammergau for the opening of the new organ & I was the first Englishman who played on it: we love the people in that country & look forward to our next visit. I have just completed a set

of Six Volkslieder with orchestra in imitation of their music: Mrs Elgar has written the words after Bavarian models.

Now I must ask you to give my kind regards to your father & mother & with much love to yourself

Believe me  
Affectionately yours  
Edward Elgar

By the following year, there was the question of whether Bailey was good enough to take his musical education to the level of the Royal College of Music. Elgar wrote to his mother – by this time the family were moving to Wandsworth in London:

Forli  
Malvern  
Dec: 8: 1896

Dear Mrs Bailey

I was very glad to receive your letter giving such a good account of your son & to hear how well he is getting on in everything: it is so good to hear of a musical boy having a sound education in addition to good musical training: it is so absolutely necessary in these days & was formerly so very different. I am glad that the Harmony & Counterpoint progresses.

I shall look forward to hearing that R. has carried off the scholarship but of course there being only one narrows the chances so very much though the thing is perfectly open to outsiders.

I know Dr Parry a little & Dr Stanford more & shall be very pleased to do anything possible when you are in London: I think Wandsworth is considered healthy & the common is naturally very nice to have so close: please let me hear what happens & be assured that my good wishes are always with your son whom I remember so well.

Believe me  
Sincerely yours  
Edward Elgar

Despite Elgar's intervention, Bailey's scholarship attempt was not successful. The official report in March 1897 from the Royal College of Music listed both the successful candidates and those, including Bailey, who had come next (*proxime accesserunt*). As might be expected, the list included a number of people who were to make their mark in the profession: the composers Thomas Dunhill and Haydn Wood (though the latter carried off the violin scholarship, rather than the composition); the pianist Harold Samuel; and the singers Muriel Foster and her twin sister Hilda.

#### THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC.

The final examination for twelve free open scholarships took place on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup> February. The total number of candidates throughout the United Kingdom applying to attend the preliminary examination was 445. Of these, 43 were disqualified on various grounds, were absent from illness and other causes, and the remainder were examined by the Honorary Local Examiners at 90 centres on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, and reduced to 113. 4 of these subsequently withdrew, and the remaining 109 were brought up for dual examination at the College in London on the above dates. The candidates for this final examination divided themselves follows:- Composition 4, singing 48, pianoforte 29, organ 4, violin 14, violoncello 7, hautboy 1, bassoon 2, total 109.

The following are the names of the successful candidates, and those who *proxime accesserunt*.

Composition – Thomas Dunhill, Canterbury; J. Nicholson Ireland, Manchester. *Proxime*: Alexander Young, Manchester.

Organ – Percival Kahn, Hoxton. *Proxime*: Archie Barnes, Clifton; William Gibbs, Ramsgate.

Pianoforte – Edith Ridgeon, Windsor; Ada Thomas, Chelsea. *Proxime*: Janet Meld, Clifton; Harold Samuel, Kilburn; Clara Smith, New Cross; Felix Swinstead, Stoke Newington; Colin Taylor, Oxford.

Singing – Arthur Davy, Sheffield; Muriel Foster, Sunderland. *Proxime*: Elizabeth Broom, Norwich; Sarah Davies, Treacastle; Alice Forshew, Brighton; Hilda Foster, Sunderland; Alice Hodder, Sharpness; William Richards, Ton-y-pandy; Ethel Wood, Holmfirth.

Violin – Haydn Wood, Douglas; Patrick Jordan, Bradford. *Proxime*: Reginald Bailey, Winchester; Margaret Wishart, Kensington.

Violoncello – Cyril Cleosy, Clapham. *Proxime*: William Southworth, Preston.

Hautboy – Herbert Goldie, Chelsea

Bassoon – Ernest Hischliff, Kennington. *Proxime*: Edward Brearley, Huddersfield.

Elgar had hoped to speak with the 'powers that be'.

Malvern  
Oct 19 1897

Dear Mrs Bailey

I have been waiting to write until I had something to tell you & as we have been abroad I have had no opportunity of speaking to either Dr Parry or Dr Stanford until the Hereford Festival: there I saw Dr Parry & he said the nicest things possible & the most encouraging about the dear boy.

Dr Stanford I missed the opportunity of asking because two days before we left here & [he] left two days before we came back!

I hope you are all well & that your life in London is pleasant. I shall follow with keen interest your son's career & shall be glad to hear of his doings from time to time.

Give him my love & excuse such a short note from a very overworked man.

Believe me  
Sincerely Yours  
Edward Elgar

Elgar wrote again in June 1899.

Craeg Lea  
Wells Road  
Malvern

[no date]

Dear Mrs Bailey

I was most grieved about the scholarship, chiefly because I knew how much your dear son wd be affected by the disappointment: I hope now he is getting quite strong again.

Richter is playing an orcl piece of mine on the 19<sup>th</sup> [The 'Enigma' Variations], first performance & I shall hope to be in town again round about that date & if possible I will hope to call but you know

how one's time is frittered away on the occasion of a flying visit to town – I have dropped kite flying lately & do much golf which last I recommended to your son as being safe – i.e. no fear of accidents as at cricket etc.

My kind regards to your all

Believe me  
Sincerely Yours  
Edward Elgar

Nevertheless he was accepted by the College, though without its financial support, where he took part in Mendelssohn's Octet, under Haydn Wood's leadership, in October 1901, when Ernest Tomlinson was one of the viola players. Undaunted, Bailey tried again in 1902, but this time, remarkably, Elgar seemed more reluctant to offer his support:

Craeg Lea  
Wells Road  
Malvern

June 8 1902

My dear Mrs Bailey

Many thanks for your letter; I am sorry Reginald is laid up & hope he will soon be better.

I should be delighted to give any recommendation to your son anytime but I do not like my name to be in print – I never allow it when I can prevent it.

I am sure he will not mind & I am certain if it did appear it would not be of any use!

Kind Regards  
Yours sincerely  
Edward Elgar.

One is bound to speculate as to the reasons for Elgar's reluctance, and in particular his self-effacing belief that his intervention might do more harm than good. Did he feel personally that his intervention may have had a bearing on Bailey's previous failure? Perhaps he felt that his self-belief of the level of his own prestige and influence in those more carefree, pre-'Enigma' days was misplaced, and despite the fact that by 1902 he had achieved worldwide fame far beyond any of his dreams, he was more cautious to exercise it.

Certainly his tortuous experience at the Leeds Festival premier of 'Caractacus' in 1898 had proved a turning point in his outlook. As Rosa Burley pointedly remarked about the event: 'When it was all over he rushed back to Malvern with the air of one who has fought – and is inclined to think he has lost – a heavy engagement'.

Whether Elgar's lack of intervention was any factor or not, Bailey was eventually successful. *The Times* of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1903 reported:

Royal College of Music

At the conclusion of the Easter term of this college yesterday, April 1, the following awards were made by the director and Board of Professors ... The Charlotte Holmes exhibition of £15 was divided in equal proportions between Reginald H. Bailey (violin), and Oonah R. Sumner (violin).

Bailey's scholarship was thus just £7.50 but worth about £850 in today's money.

Bailey's letters *to* Elgar seem strangely missing, but he did write this one following the success of the Elgar Festival in 1904:

11 Granard Road,  
Wandsworth Common,  
S.W.  
March 15<sup>th</sup>

1904.

Dear Dr. Elgar,

I am venturing to write to offer you my sincere & hearty congratulations upon the success of your festival; firstly, because in your last kind letter to my Mother you said you should always be pleased to hear from me; secondly, because I so well remember those few lessons you gave me at Worcester when I boy-like said to myself that you were "an awfully jolly man"; & thirdly because I want to know if I may come & play to you some day when you are in town & renew the short & happy acquaintance begun about 12 years ago when I was a very raw & painfully new school-boy? I finish up my studies at the Royal College at the end of this term, & we are staying on here for another year to see if I can get sufficient engagements to play at "At Homes" etc: & also private pupils to make it worth while for us to stay in London.

I & my Father & Mother are great country lovers, & since I was ill with pneumonia & overgrowing (ft. 6 4/4 ins: in my socks) of which I think you have heard, it would seem to be very jolly if I could get enough to do in some big country town, as everything is so full & overcrowded in this horrid "modern Babylon" & it is hard to get along unless one is a Kubelik or Marie Hall!! Anyway, my I come & play to you & have a good long talk & may I also bring my Mother who has always so much wanted to make your acquaintance, ever since you wrote her those very kind letters about me?

I expect I have developed into a very different sort of person from what you may have imagined I should; being interested in many things besides music, yachts & motors taking a large share; golf I am afraid I am not very keen on, partly perhaps through lack of opportunity & also because I am not a good hand at long walks.

I hope you will not think this a very cheeky letter.

With kind regards to you and Mrs. Elgar to whom you once introduced me;

Believe me  
Yours very sincerely  
Reginald Hugh Bailey.

The reply came, not from Elgar but from his wife – a typically polite, but somewhat formally distant letter to Bailey's mother:

Craeg Lea  
Wells Road  
Malvern

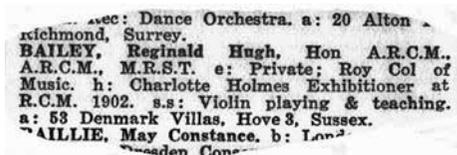
Dear Mrs Bailey

My husband asks me to write for him & thank you for your letter & kind congratulations. Since our return home Dr Elgar has been overwhelmed with correspondence & is now having a little respite before many new works & undertakings. Dr Elgar is glad to hear of your son & will write a little later on & as always wishes him every success.

The Festival is a very delightful memory to us, to look back upon.

With kind regards  
Very truly yours  
C.A. Elgar

There were to be no more letters. After the Festival, Elgar was celebrated as the most important composer of his age. The Knighthood was to follow shortly afterwards. So in their own way these letters show the transition which took hold of his life – from the local lad full of enthusiasm for his music and his life in his native Worcestershire, to the great composer, rubbing shoulders with rich and famous of Edwardian Society. The Malvern days of violin teaching and indeed the very man Elgar had *been* in those days, as evidenced by the enthusiasm and warmth he had shown to a young and promising pupil had truly come to an end.



Entry in Landon Ronald's 1935 *Who's Who in Music*

For his part, Bailey became what Elgar had once been. After leaving the RCM he worked as a private music teacher in Hove, Sussex, where he died in 1964. He often recalled his days with Elgar, who he referred to as 'jolly' and solemnly bequeathed these letters on his death to ensure that they remained for posterity.

*Richard Westwood-Brookes has been researching and collecting Elgar material all his life. As a boy of five he met Elgar's daughter, Carice, and since that time has built up one of the most significant collections of Elgar's letters and manuscripts in private hands. He is accredited as crucially assisting Anthony Payne with the reconstruction of Elgar's Third Symphony, and single-handedly organised the placing of a commemorative plaque at Wolverhampton Wanderers' Molyneux Stadium to record Elgar's love of the football club. His collection includes a considerable number of Elgar's letters, original manuscripts, Elgar's own copies of the Beethoven Violin Sonatas which he had as a boy and such items as Elgar's father's membership ticket for the Worcester Glee Club. Richard has lectured frequently – and often controversially – to Branches of the Elgar Society and is always happy to offer one of his lectures in the future.*

## Cost-cutting and cloth-cutting: Elgar's 1916 Violin Concerto recording with Marie Hall

Peter Adamson

Tully Potter has rightly commented<sup>1</sup> that it now seems 'comical' to have pared down Elgar's Violin Concerto in order to squeeze Marie Hall's 1916 recording onto only four 78rpm sides instead of the required twelve (such as in Menuhin's later recording). The reasoning behind this and the implied order of playing the sides are here explored.

Not so comical is the simple fact – always to be borne in mind when considering the early making and marketing of recordings – that records were then mostly *luxury* items. The Marie Hall recording with Elgar conducting originally appeared on four HMV single-sided 12-inch discs (2-07942/45). These are listed in the October 1917 HMV main catalogue at five shillings and sixpence each, or no less than twenty-two shillings for the set. That was already a sizeable chunk of the income of many ordinary people, and a set costing three times that would have had such restricted sales, especially during war-time, as to subvert Elgar's own interest in promoting his music. Luckily HMV soon started transferring their 'black label' issues into the double-sided format, and so the price of the Hall version became more reasonable on only two (albeit slightly more expensive) discs (D79/80); in due course it disappeared from the 1925 catalogue.

The next problem relates to the order in which these sides should be played. Dugald Robertson's second of two articles on Marie Hall<sup>2</sup> describes a presentation of the third movement 'most unusually ... back to front', with the Cadenza preceding the remains. A review by Jonathan Woolf of the recent Music & Arts reissue (CD-1257) states firmly that 'Elgar's solution to the cadenza was to place it on the third side and then start the finale on the final side, which will also startle but was an eminently practical piece of work'.<sup>3</sup> Another reviewer, John Quinn, says that 'it almost turns the concerto into a short, four-movement work'.<sup>4</sup>

But what is the justification for this assumed order of presentation? Was it really Elgar's startling 'solution', even perhaps as a 'short, four-movement work'? The order of playing is not necessarily defined by the separately recorded discs, which might just as easily be played (or reissued) in a different order. The 'presentation' in this case is a *modern* interpretation, for better or worse.

Any historic recording known to have been made in separate sections is prey to modern interpretation – and that may indeed constitute a matter of judgment that is not apparent in the final result. A parallel example might be the reissue of Bartók playing his Suite Op. 14 (HMV AN468), where it is musically interesting to consider the intended spacing between the movements because

1 *Classical Recordings Quarterly* (78, Autumn 2014), 9.

2 *Classical Recordings Quarterly* (77, Summer 2014), 18.

3 [http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Mar12/Elgar\\_CD1257.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Mar12/Elgar_CD1257.htm), accessed September 2015.

4 [http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2013/Apr13/Elgar\\_conducts\\_CD1257.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2013/Apr13/Elgar_conducts_CD1257.htm), accessed September 2015.

**THIS MASTER'S VOICE**

**Pianoforte—continued**  
**Miss Irene Scharret—continued**  
**12-inch records 5s. 6d.**

05573 Allegro scherzando, from Pianoforte Concerto in G minor, Op. 22 (Saint-Saëns) (79)

05542 (a) Etude in A flat, No. 1, Op. 25 (Chopin) (81)  
(b) Etude in F minor, No. 2, Op. 25 (Chopin) (81)

05541 (a) Etude in G flat, No. 9, Op. 25 (Chopin) (80)  
(b) Valse in D flat, No. 1, Op. 64 (Chopin) (80)

05571 (a) Etude in G sharp minor, Op. 25, No. 5 (Chopin) (79)  
(b) Dance Nègre (Scott) (78)

05610 Etude in E flat major (Chopin) (79)

05583 Fantaisie Impromptu (Chopin) (78)

05591 Intermezzo in E flat (Schumann) (79)

05526 Rhapsody (Liszt) (81)

05539 Rondo Capriccioso (Mendelssohn) (81)

05576 "Tipperary"—Five Variations (Goodhart) (79)

ABBREVED LIST.—For Complete List see Celebrity Catalogue

**VIOLIN**

**Miss Marie Hall**

ENGLAND'S greatest violinist, Miss Marie Hall, was born in Newcastle, and early showed splendid promise. Going to Prague she was fortunate enough—and promising enough—to be accepted as a pupil by the celebrated Professor Sevcik; made her debut at Vienna in 1902. She is now ranked with the world's greatest violinists, her technique, tone and execution being flawless. An artist of exceptional gifts, her interpretations are marked by rare insight and feeling and she has enriched many of her best concert pieces in "His Master's Voice" records.



MARIE HALL

**10-inch records 3s. 6d.**

3—7974 Canonetta, Op. 6 (d'Ambrasio) (78)

3—7971 Gavotte (Bach) (78)

3—7973 La Précieuse (Kreisler) (78)

3—7972 Le Cygne (The Swan) (Saint-Saëns) (79)

3—7945 Minuet (Beethoven) (81)

**12-inch records 5s. 6d.**

07974 (a) Bourrée (Handel) (80)  
(b) L'Abellie (Schubert) (81)

07972 Cavatina (Raff) (80)

2—07916 Moto Perpetuo (Paganini) (78)

2—07934 Symphonie Espagnole (Lalo) (79)

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**INSTRUMENTAL RECORDS**

**Violin—continued**  
**Miss Marie Hall—continued**  
**12-inch records 5s. 6d.—continued**

2—07938 Romance, Op. 9 (d'Ambrasio) (78)

2—07942 Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61—Allegro (Elgar) accompanied by the Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir EDWARD ELGAR, O.M. (79)

2—07943 Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61—Andante (Elgar) accompanied by the Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir EDWARD ELGAR, O.M. (79)

2—07945 Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61—Allegro Molto (Elgar), accompanied by the Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir EDWARD ELGAR, O.M. (79)

2—07944 Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61—Cadenza (Lento) (Elgar) accompanied by the Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir EDWARD ELGAR, O.M. (79)

**Prof. Joseph Joachim (the late)**  
**12-inch record 5s. 6d.**

047905 Hungarian Dance, D minor, No. 2 (Brahms) (75)

**Mr. Francis Macmillan**  
**10-inch records 3s. 6d.**

2—7944 Minuet (Mozart) (81)

2—7935 Sérénade à la Colombine (Pierrot) (81)

ABBREVED LIST.—For Complete List see Celebrity Catalogue

**Miss Isolda Menges**  
**10-inch record 3s. 6d.**

3—7999 Hungarian Dance, No. 7 (Brahms) (80)

**12-inch records 5s. 6d.**

2—07990 Arietta (Handel) (78)

2—07939 Benedictus, No. 3 (A. C. Mackenzie) (79)

2—07935 Hungarian Dance in A, No. 2 (Brahms) (79)

2—07933 Nocturne in E minor (Chopin) (78)

2—07923 Polonaise in D, Op. 4 (Wieniawski) (79)

2—07925 Staccato Valse, Op. 128, No. 6 (Godard) (79)

The figures in brackets at end of selections indicate the speed at which the records should be played



ISOLDA MENGES

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**THE GRAMOPHONE**

**OF PERFECT TONE**

Fig.1: The HMV main catalogue of October 1917, showing the original four single-sided discs.

the composer specifies extra bars rest after movements I and II. The usual 78rpm disc problem is here made worse by the fact that, to accommodate the work onto one record, Bartók actually recorded the movements *in the wrong order* – I and III on side 1, II and IV on side 2. His recording therefore yields no new information as to what he intended about spacing, any reissuer just has to decide unilaterally when assembling the pieces, and the interested listener is unknowingly left none the wiser (either way).

So what can we determine about the intended order of playing Elgar's 1916 recording? As Jerrold Northrop Moore's *Elgar on Record* indicates,<sup>5</sup> the order of issued single-face catalogue numbers (2-07942 etc) is different from that of the *matrix* numbers (Ho2408af etc):

I.	Allegro	Ho2408af	2-07942
II.	Andante	Ho2409af	2-07943
III.	Allegro molto	Ho2410af	2-07945
		Ho2411af	[destroyed]
	Cadenza	Ho2412af	2-07944

5 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar on Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 20.

This, although perhaps suggestive either way, still does not tell us conclusively whether the matrix number order or the catalogue number order is the one to follow when actually playing the sides. So further clues are required, and we may turn next to the contemporary HMV catalogues.

A search through main catalogues across the years 1917 to 1924 shows that HMV were not entirely consistent in the billing of the Concerto movements. An alphabetical listing of 'Instrumental' titles (under 'Violin Concerto ...' or 'Concerto for Violin ...') at first gives the record sides in the order of single-face numbers, therefore with the Cadenza placed third rather than last. This is true even in 1920 and 1921, after the sides were 'doubled' as D79 and D80 – although admittedly a thoroughly alphabetic approach might anyway list 'Cadenza' after 'Allegro molto'. But, in any case, such an alphabetical section acted only as a brief 'contents' list, referring the reader onward to the appropriate page in the fuller classified sections. There, the classified 'Instrumental' section features all the recordings by Marie Hall under 'Violin', and the listing for the Concerto consistently places the Cadenza last. From 1922 onwards, the alphabetical title and classified listings were merged in the HMV main catalogues, and now the 'Concerto' entry also appears with the Cadenza last (although initially with D80 preceding D79). Again, the entries under 'Hall' always place the Cadenza side last. Thus the majority of HMV catalogue entries, and certainly all those highlighting Marie Hall, list the Cadenza side last.

I have not so far touched upon essential musical evidence for the 'order of play'. Jerrold Northrop Moore refers to the 'fourth side' as 'reserved for the Concerto's accompanied Cadenza',<sup>6</sup> thus taking a lead from the order of matrix numbers. In the liner notes for the old Pearl LP (GEM 112), he again refers to this as the 'fourth side' and comments further that 'there is no way of playing the record so as to fit the music into its proper place'. In spite of this, Pearl (as with Music & Arts) presented the Cadenza as the third side. I have taken the liberty of asking Dr. Moore about the appropriate order of playing the sides, and he is quite clear that the answer lies within the music itself. Without pre-empting what he is to publish in a forthcoming new book on Elgar's style and methods, it is fair to state that he regards the unusual structure of the third movement of the Concerto as making it necessary to play Hall's Cadenza recording last – notwithstanding the resulting lack of a grand conclusion.

Thus, we have strong support from a musically-informed opinion, plausible suggestive evidence from the yearly series of HMV catalogue entries (certainly all those highlighting Marie Hall), together with the admittedly weaker evidence of the matrix number order, for presenting the 1916 Concerto recording with the Cadenza side played *last*.

Finally, I venture to propose an additional practical intention behind the Concerto being listed in this way in the HMV catalogues, once more arising from the sheer cost of the discs. A 'complete' summary of the work (considered as an orchestral piece with violin solo) might be obtained by purchasing the three main 'movement' discs (at 'only' sixteen shillings and sixpence), as shown grouped together. The Cadenza recording would then have been featured and perhaps bought as effectively a separate 'solo' item, in its own right and highlighting Marie Hall for her indubitable fans – at five shillings and sixpence.

Perhaps the way to play the four sides in both practical and musical a fashion is indeed to go through the three main 'orchestral' movements, and then pause before admiring Sir Edward's (and Marie's) Cadenza – separately.

6 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar on Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 19.



# INSTRUMENTAL RECORDS

## RONALD, Landon

(Played on a Chappell Concert Grand Piano)

### 10-inch double-sided black label

- E. 21 { "L'Enfant Prodigie"—Pierrot's Love Declaration to Phrynette (*Wormser*) (78)  
Sir GEORGE HENSCHEL (Bass)  
Das Wandern (*Schubert*) (78)

### 12-inch double-sided black label

- D. 72 { "L'Enfant Prodigie" Selection (*Wormser*) (78)  
MARK HAMBURG  
The Harmonious Blacksmith (*Händel*) (78)

## SCHARRER, Irene

(Played on a Chappell Concert Grand Piano)

### 12-inch double-sided black label

- D. 82 { (a) Etude in A Flat (Op. 25, No. 1) (*Chopin*) (81)  
(b) Etude in F Minor (Op. 25, No. 2) (*Chopin*) (81)  
Etude in E Flat Major (*Chopin*) (79)
- D. 83 { (a) Etude in G Flat (Op. 25, No. 9) (*Chopin*) (80)  
(b) Valse in D Flat (Op. 64, No. 1) (*Chopin*) (80)  
Funeral March (*Chopin*) (79)
- D. 84 { (a) Etude in G Sharp Minor (Op. 25, No. 6) (*Chopin*) (79)  
(b) Danse Nègre (*Scott*) (79)  
Nocturne in C Minor (*Chopin*) (79)
- D. 85 { (a) Etude in G Flat (*Chopin*)  
(b) Bees' Wedding (*Mendelssohn*) (79)  
"Tipperary"—Five Variations (*Goodhart*) (79)
- D. 86 { Fantaisie Impromptu (*Chopin*) (78)  
Rhapsody (*Liszt*) (81)
- D. 87 { Intermezzo in E Flat (*Schumann*) (79)  
Rondo Capriccioso (*Mendelssohn*) (81)  
Allegro scherzando, from Piano-forte Concerto in G Minor (Op. 22) (*Saint-Saëns*) (79)
- D. 81 { FREDERIC LAMOND  
Erl King (*Schubert-Liszt*) (79)  
Dance of the Gnomes (*Liszt*) (78)
- D. 543 { Two short sonatas in C major and G major (*Scarlatti*) (78)

## VIOLIN

## FAIRLESS, Margaret

### 12-inch double-sided black label

- D. 34 { Scherzo-Tarantella (*Wieniawski*) (78)  
Aria (*Bach*) (78)

## HALL, Marie

### 10-inch double-sided black label

- E. 2 { A borée (*Moffat*) (78)  
Berceuse from "Miniature Suite" (Op. 20, No. 3) (*César Cui*) (78)
- E. 15 { Canzonetta (Op. 6) (*d'Ambrosio*) (78)  
Sérénade (*d'Ambrosio*) (79)
- E. 46 { Gavotte (*Bach*) (78)  
Humoreske (*Dvořák*) (78)
- E. 17 { Humoreske (*Tor Aulin*) (78)  
Le Cygne (*Saint-Saëns*) (79)
- E. 18 { La Précieuse (*Kreisler*) (78)  
Minuet (*Beethoven*) (81)

### 12-inch double-sided black label

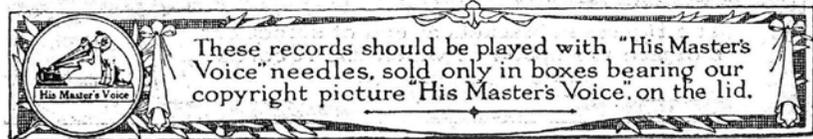
- D. 76 { (a) Bourrée (*Händel*) (80)  
(b) L'abeille (*Schubert*) (80)  
Jota Aragonesa (Op. 27) (*Sarasate*) (79)
- D. 77 { Cavatina (*Raff*) (80)  
Moto Perpetuo (*Paganini*) (78)
- D. 78 { Sarabande et Tambourin (*Leclair*) (79)  
Romance (Op. 9) (*d'Ambrosio*) (78)  
Concerto in B Minor (Op. 61) Allegro (*Elgar*) (Accompanied by the Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir EDWARD ELGAR, O.M.) (79)
- D. 79 { Concerto in B Minor (Op. 61) Andante (79)  
Concerto in B Minor (Op. 61) Allegro Molto (79)
- D. 80 { Concerto in B Minor (Op. 61) Cadenza (*Lento*) (79)

## JOACHIM, Prof. Joseph

(the late)

### 12-inch double-sided black label

- D. 88 { Hungarian Dance, D Minor, No. 2 (*Brahms*) (76)  
PHILHARMONIC STRING QUARTET  
Death and the Maiden (Variations in D Minor) (*Schubert*) (79)



Peter Adamson is recently retired from computer service work in the University of St. Andrews and has collected 78 rpm discs for most of his life. He has fairly wide musical and recorded interests, but has concentrated on the very earliest discs, on twentieth-century 'art' music on 78s, and on early instrumental and orchestral recordings, including such unusual corners as the harpsichord. He writes occasionally on such topics for record collector magazines.

Fig. 2: The HMV main catalogue of 1922, illustrating the 'order of play' for the double-sided issues.

## Marie Hall: The Elgarian connection

### Martin Bird

Marie Hall was born in Newcastle in April 1884, the daughter of an itinerant harpist, Edmund Hall, who taught her the violin from the age of eight. Although he had played with the Carl Rosa Company, her father earned money mostly as a street musician. In 1894 the family moved to a small cottage in Guarford, to the west of Malvern. In a 1906 interview preserved by the Elgars in a press cuttings album, Marie spoke of her childhood days.

It was not until I was eight that my father was induced to give me lessons on the violin, and he would not have done so then if I had not set to work secretly on my own and mastered Raff's "Cavatina" with such speed that he realised at last in what direction my forte lay.

It is difficult for me, in the full tide of prosperity which I am now enjoying, to realise fully the circumstances of my early struggles, when I was glad to receive the scanty reward of even a few pence in order to support my little brothers and sisters. So poor were we in those Newcastle days that even at the age of ten I played for very small fees at hotels, garden parties, and anywhere where I could earn something, in order to keep the family going.

I at that time practised five hours every day, and the year after I had the advantage of tuition from no less a person than Sir Edward Elgar, whose skill as a violinist has not been almost forgotten in his greater fame as a composer.<sup>1</sup>

For the summer term of 1895 she received lessons from Elgar. Alice's oft-quoted diary entry reads: 'E. into Malvern – Gave the little girl Hall a lesson & some chocolates. Then to the Mount & unexpectedly to Links. Home raser early. Vesey hot.'<sup>2</sup> By the following January she was playing at a public concert in Worcester.

Of no small merit was the concert arranged by Mr W. E. Bell-Porter, and given in the St. Paul's parish room on Tuesday night. A fairly large audience listened to a capital programme excellently executed. High honours fell to Miss Marie Pauline Hall, whose violin solos were really marvellous for a little maid of only eleven years. With delicacy and finish and sympathetic expression, the youthful artist played Wieniawski's "Legends". In response to an enthusiastic recall she played a gavotte by Mr Edward Elgar, which had been presented to her by the composer. Miss Marie Hall displayed yet more executive ability in Alard's fantasia on airs from "Faust", introducing the favourite



Aged 10, photographed by Ruddock, Ltd., Newcastle-on-Tyne

1 *Daily Graphic*, 17th November 1906.  
2 Alice Elgar diary, 6th June 1895.

Soldiers Chorus. The delighted audience insisted on an encore, and Miss Hall played Wieniawski's "Sieluka".<sup>3</sup>

On a lighter note, a 'concession to popular tastes was made by the coster songs given by Mr Frazer, who sang 'Mrs 'Enery Awkins' with much humour, and for an encore gave his Farmyard imitations, with which he elicited hearty laughter'.<sup>4</sup>

However, on a rather more serious note, the following month:

Edward Hall, harpist, Malvern, was charged with having neglected to send his children Marie Pauline and Evaline to school. Mr. Doughty explained that the former was employed by the defendant to play the violin at public places in the town, and was under twelve years of age. She had not yet attended any school, and had only received musical instruction. The latter (Evaline) had not been to school for the last ten weeks; she was seven years of age. Defendant's brother appeared as defendant was engaged at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, and said that some Malvern ladies had promised to place Marie Pauline at a high class school, as she was very talented in music. The other one had been kept at home for trifling circumstances. The Bench considered it a bad case, and fined defendant, including costs, 10s.<sup>5</sup>



... in more affluent circumstances.

Alice numbered herself among those 'Malvern ladies', and her diary of 30<sup>th</sup> March records her going 'to Committee M. P. Hall Fund'. On 17<sup>th</sup> April she went again 'to Committee Meeting M.P.H. Fund –', but, sadly, her entry for 11<sup>th</sup> May records: 'A. to Committee Meeting M.P.H. Fund, collapse of'.

While the committee was meeting Marie was in Birmingham, where, on 8th April...

... The Rev. Harry Drew was on a visit. An extract from letter he wrote at the time is interesting. Mr. Drew said: - "G. and I heard the little wonder, Marie Pauline Hall. She is 12 to-day. Too wonderful for words – looks younger than her age, frail little figure, but heaps of character and strength, quite natural. Difficulty seems an unknown word to her. Almost entirely self-taught; prodigious memory, bent on getting to the very top. Practises hours by herself; has only had about ten odd lessons from different masters. Instrument only cost 25s, but she got worlds out of it. She played a chaconne of Bach's, Beethoven's "Romance in G", and last and greatest Mendelssohn's 'Violin Concerto'. She is great – and should be great-issimus."<sup>6</sup>

An interview in the *Strand Magazine* of June 1903 records that she received free lessons from Max Mossel, sometime leader of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, who now taught at the Midland Institute School of Music in Birmingham, 'living with some rich friends, who paid my parents a pound a week for letting me stay during the three years I worked under Mossel'. By 1903 she had become an established soloist, earning £500 for her first London appearance at St. James's Hall. Still under the age of majority, she had been made a Ward in Chancery in 1902 'on account of family difficulties'.<sup>7</sup>

3 *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 18th January 1896.  
4 *Ibid.*  
5 *Worcestershire Advertiser*, 29th February 1896.  
6 *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 6th May 1903.  
7 *Strand Magazine*, Vol.25, No.6, June 1903.

In 1907 she had been engaged to appear at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival to play the Beethoven concerto at the secular concert ...

... but the lady could not fulfil her engagement, as she was unable to get back in time from her New Zealand tour owing to the dislocation of steamboat traffic. In these circumstances the Stewards were fortunate in securing the services of so celebrated an artist as Mischa Elman. described by the late Dr. Joachim as the greatest of living violinists; and no real disappointment was occasioned by the enforced change in the arrangements, which carried with it no alteration in the pieces to be played.<sup>8</sup>

It was natural that she should take up the Elgar Concerto, and in February 1911 Henry Clayton corresponded with the composer 'over negotiations with a member of the Baring family who wish to take Elgar's Violin Concerto on tour'.<sup>9</sup> Marie had married her manager, Edward Baring, the previous month. In April the *Sunday Times* reported that 'Sir Edward Elgar has cabled from America his congratulations to Miss Marie Hall on the great success of her first performance ... of his Violin Concerto'.<sup>10</sup>

She was engaged by the London Symphony Orchestra, at a fee of 50 guineas, to play the concerto in December 1912 in an all-Elgar programme conducted by the composer, and wrote to him at the beginning of the month.

Inveresk, Cheltenham  
Dec 1<sup>st</sup> 12

Dear Sir Edward Elgar,

It is exceedingly kind of you to help me with your Concerto and I shall be so pleased to come on Friday morning at 11-30. Thank you and Lady Elgar very much for asking me to stay to luncheon which I shall be delighted to do.

With kind regards,  
Yours sincerely  
Marie Baring<sup>11</sup>

On 6<sup>th</sup> December she 'played through Concerto with E. & stayed to lunch Played very well & was most nice -'.<sup>12</sup> The concert was on the 9<sup>th</sup>, and Sir Alan Lascelles was in the audience.

London symphony concert in the evening – all Elgar, composer conducting. Marie Hall played the violin concerto; take it from me, that is a great work – a whole torso above anything else he has ever done. The symphony I found only sporadically interesting, and terribly commonplace as a whole; and didn't stay for the Enigma Variations. He's always feeling for something, like a man running after his hat; but he catches it right enough in the concerto, especially the beginning and end of the slow movement.<sup>13</sup>

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8 *Gloucester Citizen*, 12th September 1907.

9 Bloomsbury Auctions sale 614, lot 552.

10 Leonard Rees, *Sunday Times*, 9th April 1911.

11 EBM letter 3632.

12 Alice Elgar diary, 6th December 1911.

13 Sir Alan Lascelles diary, in Duff Hart-Davis (editor), *End of an Era*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 139.

In April 1916 Columbia had produced an abridged recording with Albert Sammons and Henry Wood. In September Landon Ronald reported to HMV 'that Sir Edward agreed to having Marie Hall play his Concerto under his direction. It was DECIDED that the Recording Dept. arrange for this to be done.'<sup>14</sup> In December:

The Recording Dept. reported that Sir Edward and Miss Marie Hall were coming on the following Saturday to record Elgar's Violin Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. Mr. Ronald stated that Sir Edward was not feeling very well, and he did not know whether he might not postpone the Session. The Recording Dept. reported that so far as they knew, Sir Edward was keeping the appointment.<sup>15</sup>

15<sup>th</sup> December dawned 'Very cold & foggy – Marie Hall & discreet companion in aftn. to rehearse Concerto for Gramophone. She played well -'.<sup>16</sup> The recording was made next day.

Frightful fog – & cold – Gramophone Co. sent car. E. & A. started soon after 9 a.m. Very horrid, E. did not like it. A cart ran into us, & road up continually. Nice Gramophone men so kind & cheerful. Marie Hall very late, delayed in train. Lovely to hear Concerto – beautiful Then E. changed & we started home. Very late, nearly smashed by Red Cross car coming on wrong side – No lunch till just 2.45 – E. vey tired & headache – L. Binyon tried to come & arrived at Hampstd. Tube but cd. not venture to find way in fog.<sup>17</sup>

HMV's publicity was suitably upbeat: a copy of their marketing leaflet was preserved by the Elgars.

Although only a few years have passed since its first production, Elgar's Violin Concerto has already become a modern classic, ranking, in the opinion of many musicians, with the great Concertos of the older Masters. Certainly it is one of its composer's finest inspirations, and one that has firmly won public favour. World-famous players like Ysaÿe and Kreisler have ailed the Concerto as a great masterpiece. Marie Hall has become enthusiastic over it, and played the work continually. Of unusual interest and significance, therefore, is the issue of four records of the music, giving the finest parts of each movements, and practically giving the effect of a concert performance of the Concerto. The fact that these have been made under Sir Edward Elgar's personal direction, and with himself conducting the orchestra, will make them not only prized to day, but of historical value, since future generations will be able to learn the composer's own interpretation of his music.

The soloist, Miss Marie Hall, has achieved many triumphs by her playing of the Concerto, her lyric beauty of tone and perfectly finished style suiting ideally from an interpretative point of view.<sup>18</sup>

After Elgar's death Marie wrote to Carice.

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14 Minutes of the Gramophone Company meeting of 26th September, 1916, in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar on Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 19.

15 Minutes of the Gramophone Company meeting of 12th December, *ibid.*

16 Alice Elgar diary, 15th December 1912.

17 *Ibid.*, 16th December 1912.

18 EBM, press cuttings album.

Inveresk, Cheltenham.  
Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> 34

Dear Mrs. Blake,  
I am very grieved to read in this morning's paper of the passing of my old friend and teacher, and send you my deepest sympathy – I always remember Sir Edward Elgar with gratitude and kindness, and interest in me when a child – The world of music has indeed lost its greatest composer.

Yours very sincerely,

Marie Hall<sup>19</sup>

Marie Hall died in 1956 at the age of 72.

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19 EBM letter 680.

## Discovered: a letter from Alice Elgar – and more ...

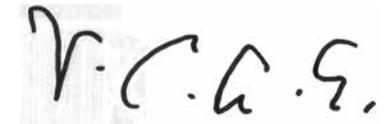
### John Ling and Martin Bird

*John Ling writes:*

The biennial conference on 'Music in nineteenth-century Britain' was held in Glasgow in July of this year. Finding nothing of compelling interest in the programme one afternoon, I visited a second-hand music shop that I had been to a couple of times in the past. Looking through the vocal scores I came across *The Music Makers*, priced at £7.50. Having sung in this a few times and thinking that I might well do so again in the future, I decided to buy it. Flicking over to the title page I was amazed to see Elgar's signature, with a date – Sep 16 1912 – and the comment 'before 'twas heard'.

From the 'ex libris' label inside the front cover it was clear that the score had originally belonged to Professor Charles Sanford Terry, a friend of Elgar. But the composer's autograph was not the only treasure lurking in the copy: pasted on to one page was a letter to 'Dear Professor', handwritten on notepaper from the Abbey Hotel, Malvern. At first it was not clear who had written it: there were four initials. But eventually it became clear that they were 'Y.C.A.E.', the first standing for 'Yours'.

It was a letter from Alice Elgar, remarking briefly about Elgar's health or possibly his state of mind in the run-up to the first performance of *The Music Makers* at the 1912 Birmingham Festival and thanking Terry in advance for looking after her husband. In addition, some blank pages of the score were taken up with a description of and commentary on the work, in handwriting that Martin Bird was able to confirm later is Terry's.



When I showed my find to the Elgar specialists back at the conference, they were as amazed as I had been. Julian Rushton suggested I contact Martin, who was cataloguing Alice Elgar's letters, so I took the copy round to him. He will now take up the story.

*Martin Bird continues:*

On 14<sup>th</sup> September 1912, at the conclusion of the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford, 'E. motored with Muriel to Malvern, he & A. stayed as her guests at Abbey Hotel. A. by train there ... Amusing to see Malvern again, Troyte came to dine, nice room that he had altered & nice chairs'.<sup>1</sup> Muriel Goetz, née Foster, had sung Elgar's newly-orchestrated settings of *The Torch* and *The River* at the

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1 Alice Elgar diary.

festival. During the year she was a frequent visitor to Severn House – and a frequent *chauffeuse* to Elgar.

Sunday the 15<sup>th</sup> was a ...

Lovely day – [to church at] Connellan – E. raser headache, very bad early, Dokkered him & he was better. Muriel motored E. & A. to Broadway. Lovely drive & so tussin to see our own Country, lovely in warm sunshine. Gave A. a great choke. Very nice time, many had to leave early but Lindsay M[acArthur]. there & Norah Noel they drove with us to Campden lovely place on way back – E. so badly had to go to bed at once. Better by morning. Except his headache a most dear day.<sup>2</sup>

The following evening Elgar was due in Birmingham for his first rehearsal with the Festival Chorus of *The Music Makers*, which was to receive its première on 1<sup>st</sup> October at the Triennial Festival.

Muriel motored E. to Birmh. So thankful for him to be spared train. A. paid calls in every direction! & came home by 5 train ... E. found the Chorus very fine & was really pleased. Prof. Terry with him wh. made A. happy about him.<sup>3</sup>

The Elgars had taken Castle Pool House for the Hereford Festival. Professor Terry had been at the festival, 'but not with us, alas –'.<sup>4</sup> The ever-anxious Alice made sure that he was well aware of his duties before they set out for Birmingham.

The Abbey Hotel, Malvern.  
Monday [Sept 16<sup>th</sup> 1912]

Dear Professor

I trust E. will keep all well, he has been so bad;- I know he will be safe & happy with you & you will not [let] him wait a moment before changing –

So thankful for you to be with him –

Do send me a line & tell me the Sound of the music – So glad to have had you at H<sup>d</sup>.

Yr. C.A.E.

In Birmingham Elgar gave Terry a vocal score, which he inscribed:

Edward Elgar  
Birmingham  
Sep 16 1912 (before 'twas heard)



Terry pasted Alice's letter into the score, and at some later date wrote the following essay on a couple of its blank pages.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1912.

Though Elgar had for long had O'Shaughnessy's ode in his mind for music, it was not until the close of 1911 that he began to work upon it. In January 1912, soon after his removal to Severn House, I found him there in possession of a Library copy of O'Shaughnessy's volume which, to his surprise, I was able to replace with a new copy; for he supposed the work to be out of print. On the very day I was there he was communicated with regarding the scheme which [one word unclear] into the production of *The Masque of India* at the Coliseum. The production of the Masque taxed Elgar's physical strength very much, and a somewhat prolonged rest-cure was prescribed for him after the *Masque* was successfully launched. It was therefore towards the summer of 1912 that Elgar turned seriously to complete the Ode. He wrote it, he told me, in six weeks, and the scoring took him only three weeks longer. The latter was completed about the middle of August.

For the above reasons the parts were late in the hands of the Chorus, which had devoted only 2½ practices to it before Elgar held a rehearsal on Monday Sept 16<sup>th</sup> and heard the work for the first time. The Chorus, considering their scant rehearsal, sang it with extraordinary accuracy but little atmosphere at first. After a little speech in which he appealed to every individual in the Chorus to put himself under the words or refrain from singing at all, Elgar very soon succeeded in forming the atmosphere he wanted. The Chorus was exceedingly responsive and clearly enjoyed the fine work. It caught at once at Elgar's oblique reference to the production of *Gerontius* 12 years ago as a sort of personal footnote to the first verse of the Ode.

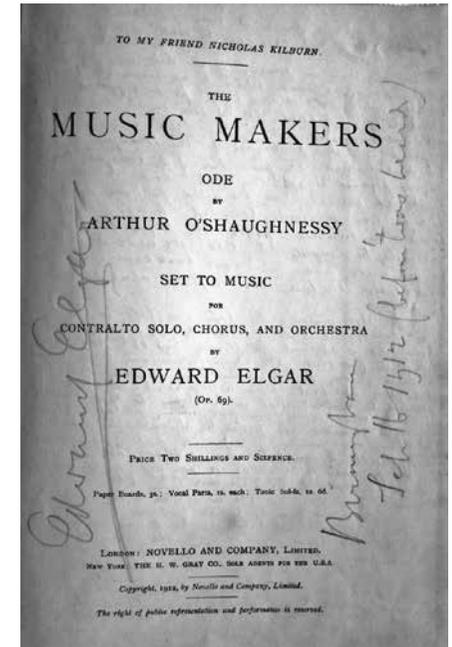
How closely Elgar read the ode in relation to his own work is sufficiently patent from the lavish quotation of themes from his own works. I do not know whether it was ever in his mind that the lesson conveyed by the ode was very appropriate to Birmingham which 12 years ago failed to recognise in *Gerontius* the work of a "mover and shaker" of the world's music. But the depth and sincerity of the musician scorns any such petty utterance. The mood in which Elgar approached the words was the mood in which he wrote the Prologue of the "Apostles" with its proud and confident claim to inspiration and a message. It may be noted indeed that there is a close similarity between the opening bars of the chorus in the two works. The key-colour is the same, & the themes, tho' not identical, are closely related. While the responsibility of the artist is suggested 2 bars before Fig: 11 by quoting the "judgment" theme from "Gerontius".

The date of Terry's visit, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1912, can be ascertained from a passage in 'Dorabella's *Memories of a Variation*.

The Elgars left Hereford early in the New Year and went to live at Hampstead. I had a card from Professor Sanford Terry dated January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1912, which ended:

'The E's are settling into 42, Netherhall Gardens. I lit the first fire in the Dining Room 10 days ago! He is very happy and working at the Masque. C.S.T.'<sup>5</sup>

5 Mrs. Richard Powell, Edward Elgar: *Memories of a Variation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 90.



That day Alfred Littleton had come to Severn House to discuss the publication of *The Crown of India*, and made a file note ‘... that the Firm was prepared to deal with the matter on the basis of a sum down on account of Royalties’.<sup>6</sup> Elgar suggested that Bertie Shelton, Oswald Stoll’s Manager at the Coliseum, should discuss the matter further with Novello, and, ultimately, arranged for it to be published by Enoch and Son.

<sup>6</sup> Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers*, Vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 760.

## MUSIC REVIEWS

**Elgar: *Short Orchestral Works: Air de ballet, Sevillaña, Salut d’amour, Sursum corda, Three Bavarian Dances, Minuet, Chanson de nuit, Chanson de matin, Sérénade lyrique, Three Characteristic Pieces, May-Song, Canto popolare, Pleading, Romance for bassoon, Falstaff – two interludes, Carissima, Rosemary, Mina***

Elgar Complete Edition Vol. 23, edited by David Lloyd-Jones  
(Rickmansworth: Elgar Society Edition Ltd., 2015)

Here is what to me is one of the more eagerly anticipated volumes of the Complete Edition, the shorter orchestral pieces, few of which have been easily obtainable in full score up until now. It is truly a bumper volume, weighing in at a little under three kilos, and containing no fewer than 26 completed works and eight further sketches. Even at full price that works out at a bargain price of around £3.25 each – you couldn’t buy paperback miniature scores for that, even if they were available.

But why should any member of the Society reach for the Birthplace flyer and order a copy for Christmas? Surely we’ve known most, if not all, of these scores for years; surely they’re just light music – little fillers knocked off for a fiver, or between rounds of golf? I happen to think they are far more than that, and that feeling has been enhanced by the ability to see most of them in full score for the first time.

Elgar has been praised frequently for his skill as an orchestrator (and occasionally damned for producing overblown, over-ripe, scores). Yes, he was undoubtedly a highly skilled orchestrator who, like many others in the field of light music from Coates to Farnon, could apply a series of deft touches to a piece to make it charm, delight and sparkle. But Elgar, almost uniquely, was more than that: he didn’t just orchestrate, he *thought* in sound. What struck me, listening to the wonderful Neville Marriner disc of many of the pieces in this volume, was the amazing range of sound-pictures created. Listen to a disc of Eric Coates (and even though he’s one of my favourite composers of light music I’m slightly embarrassed to find I’ve got 22 of them), and, for all his supreme skill, there’s a certain formulaic approach to his scoring. Listen to *Mina*, though, and the sound-picture immediately conjures up a spirit of sadness, despair, nostalgia for times past. Now that’s certainly not there if you hack out the first 16 bars on the piano – it might have got him an A\* in GCSE music, but it’s hardly earth-shattering. But to be able to imagine this simple chord sequence as a sound-picture capable of arousing all those emotions that I have mentioned – that’s A\* genius.

I am sure there will be many members whose enjoyment and appreciation of these seemingly simple pieces will be greatly increased by being able to follow on paper what they hear.



ISBN 978-1-904856-23-8

487 pp. + xxxi.

And what of the edition itself? It's no secret that recent volumes have been plagued by a series of unexpected and surprisingly blatant errors. You will not need me to tell you that computer software works in ways often unexpected even by its designers, and the Sibelius software used to originate the scores in the Edition is no exception. Procedures at the proof stage have been significantly improved for this volume, and, thankfully, nothing (yet!) leaps off the page as an origination error.

In David Lloyd-Jones we have an Editor with impeccable credentials – the practical approach of a first-rate conductor of many years experience allied to his experience as General Editor of OUP's William Walton Edition. He applies a light yet thorough touch to the many and varied (and often demonstrably faulty) sources at his disposal. There are none of the little editorial additions that Elgar may or may not have meant that I have cavilled at with previous volumes. Instead, what we have is as near an urtext edition as we could hope to have. Listen to recordings, and you will find many a conductor tweaking things for variety on occasion, but this edition gives you what was actually in the original score, even if I remain convinced that I can hear some horn touches in the *Minuet*, Op.21, in some recordings, including Elgar's, that do not appear on the printed page.

To sum up: this is one of the very best and most valuable volumes to have yet come out of the Complete Edition, and I urge members with strong enough shelves to treat themselves.

Martin Bird

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Pauline Collett: *Elgar Lived Here*. Second Edition: revised and enlarged.**

Oakham, Pauline Collett, 2015

In 1981 Pauline Collett put us in her debt by producing her delightfully illustrated book, *Elgar Lived Here*. Over recent years she has been working on a second edition – updated, revised, and enlarged from 120 pages to 165 – which deserves a place on the bookshelves of any Elgarian.

To my shame, the first edition is one of the few Elgar books that never made it on to mine, so I was quick to place an order this time round. For me, the appeal of the book lies principally in Pauline's own drawings of their homes, full of charm and somehow more redolent of Elgar's time than any photograph. That said, the book is not short of photographic illustration, both contemporary and modern, well reproduced on good quality paper, along with various floor plans and site maps.

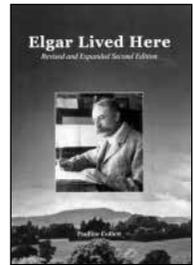
But the book is far more than an illustrated guide. Pauline gives comprehensive details not only of each residence, but also of Elgar's time in residence: a mine of valuable information. One notable addition this time around is the inclusion of full post codes, which enable the modern explorer to locate each residence with a minimum of fuss, or sadly in a few cases, to find where the house would have been.

The level of accuracy is extremely high – the date of demolition of Severn House, given as January 1936 rather than the autumn of 1937 is the only mistake I noticed. Carice discussed with Clare Stuart Wortley whether anything of the house could be saved: her diary entry of 20 November, 'To town in am – fetched parcel of glass – initials from Severn House – from Station', seems to indicate the sole achievement.

The book arrived as I was working through Elgar's notebook from their time in Alassio in 1903-1904, and I realised with regret that only the Elgars' English homes are included. The BBC web site has a fascinating piece on the English in Alassio in Elgar's time (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-27870687>): its English Language Library of more than 18,000 books still exists thanks to the efforts of the locals. Were that Villa San Giovanni and Via Gregoriana 38 (where they took second floor flat in Rome in 1907-1908) included! I called at Via Gregoriana a few years ago, but the Elgars were away ...

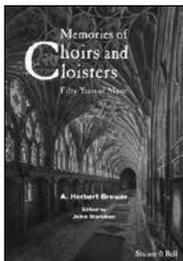
But we must be thankful to Pauline, not for small mercies, but for the huge store of information that is presented here, and presented in such a way that we get a real impression of the buildings not just as buildings, but as homes.

Martin Bird



165 pp

No ISBN



191 pp + viii

ISBN  
978-0-85249-946-7

**A Herbert Brewer (ed. John Morehen): *Memories of Choirs and Cloisters: Fifty Years of Music***  
London: Stainer & Bell, 2015

In 1990 Anthony Boden, the Secretary of the Gloucester Festival, discovered in the City Library a brown paper parcel marked 'Brewer Scores'. It contained a manuscript of *Emmaus*, including Elgar's orchestration of the work, long considered lost: it was performed again at the 1992 Gloucester Festival (my review appeared in the *Elgar Society Journal* for January 1993). Herbert Brewer had been appointed as the organist of Gloucester Cathedral in 1898. For the 1901 Festival he decided to write an oratorio, and acquired a libretto entitled *Emmaus* from the writer and critic Joseph Bennett. It is based on a post-Resurrection event from Luke's Gospel, chapter 24; but Bennett had forgotten that he had already provided a text on the same subject for another composer, and would therefore have to rewrite it. Brewer, as the Gloucester organist, was heavily involved in organising the festival and feared that he would now not be able to complete his work in time. Elgar came to his aid, and scored *Emmaus* for him, to Brewer's grateful relief.

This incident, together with Elgar's letters, was dealt with in Brewer's book, *Memories of Choirs and Cloisters*, published by the Bodley Head in 1931, three years after the organist's death. Long out of print, it is now available again, and is a fascinating read – a wonderful mixture of anecdote, humour and history. Brewer was a man of vision: at the meeting to plan his first festival in 1898, many on the committee wanted to do away with new works, for financial reasons. Brewer writes: 'I pointed out that if musical interest was to be maintained and if the programmes contained no novelties, the Festivals would soon cease to attract and would pass away like other worn-out institutions'. Brewer wanted a work from Elgar that year, but the composer was busy writing *Caractacus* for the Leeds Festival; so Elgar and Jaeger suggested Coleridge Taylor, who soon became a Three Choirs favourite. In a letter to Brewer Jaeger wrote of him: 'He has a quite Schubertian facility of invention and his stuff is always original and fresh. He is the coming man, I'm quite sure'. Another of Brewer's contribution to the Three Choirs was his suggestion of an opening service with full chorus and orchestra on the Sunday. The choice of works is impressive: the first British performance of Verdi's *Three Sacred Pieces* (the composer later added a fourth). Brewer initiated early dates for commissions for new works, to avoid the danger of having an under-rehearsed chorus. The 1901 Festival contained no less than eleven new commissions by British composers. That same year Brewer founded the Gloucestershire Orchestral Society: the first leader of that orchestra – suggested by Mackenzie – was W. H. Reed. Three years later, Elgar's *Apostles* was first performed at the Gloucester Three Choirs. It drew the largest attendance of the week: 400 more than *Elijah* and over 300 more than *Messiah*. Brewer was a great admirer of Parry, but not afraid to speak the truth as he saw it. 'He had not a great orchestral sense, and his oratorios

suffer in consequence.'

The 1910 Festival saw the premiere of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, but apparently it did not impress Brewer; in April of that year he spoke to the 18-year-old Herbert Howells of '... the strange composer ... who would be bringing a strange work, something to do with Tallis': whether Brewer changed his mind about the work in due course we are not told. But new commissions of works by esteemed composers continued: the 1913 Festival saw the premiere of Saint-Saëns' *The Promised Land*, but it was generally regarded as a disappointment: Sibelius' *Luonnotar*: and the closing scene of Strauss's *Salome*, sung by Madame Ackté, and of which a report read, 'It was electrifying and the audience were worked up to a wild state of enthusiasm'.

In the first edition of Brewer's book there were no chapter headings, The editor of this new edition, John Morehen – himself a distinguished organist and a past President of the Incorporated Society of Musicians – has not only created headings, but also very helpful footnotes, which add to our knowledge and to our enjoyment of the book. Lovers of Elgar and of English music generally are very much in Professor Morehen's debt. I urge you to buy it: you will not be disappointed.

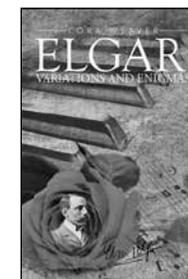
Geoff Hodgkins

**Cora Weaver: *Elgar, Variations and Enigmas***  
Xlibris, 2015

Cora Weaver will be well known to Elgarians, especially of West Midlands Branch, as a writer and lecturer on Worcestershire history in general, and Elgar in particular. Her 1988 book, *The Thirteenth Enigma* (Thames Publishing), told us much of Elgar's relationship with Helen Weaver. Now, with *Variations and Enigmas*, Cora give us the fruits of her continued research and tells us far more about Helen's life, both in England and in New Zealand, as well as exploring the sorry tale of Alice Elgar's brother, Stanley Napier Roberts.

Stanley Napier Roberts (1844-1922) served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Liverpool Regiment in Afghanistan and Burma, retiring in 1892 with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. In 1875 he married Emily Catherine Darell (1846-1930). He left her and subsequently became involved with the actress (and con artist) 'Lady Gipsy Rogers'. As a result of these doubtful dealings he was declared bankrupt in 1898. Unsurprisingly, although living near Cheltenham, a place Alice visited frequently, he is, as far as I can tell, never mentioned by Alice. She and Elgar did, however, visit Emily's mother, Lucy, in Southsea while on honeymoon in the Isle of Wight in May 1889.

Stanley, like Sir Joseph Porter, could well have sung about 'His sisters and his cousins, whom he reckons up by dozens, and his aunts!' (especially, Elgar might have added, those d----d aunts): and they are the bane of any biographer. In compiling *An Elgarian Who's Who*, and trying to understand the relationships between the Dightons, Probyns, Raikes, Roberts and Thompsons that make



96 pp + xiv

ISBN  
978-1-49319-344-9

up Alice's side of the family (I sought assistance from Margaret Elgar, who told me that she had never understood them either) I found more than 450 of them, including a dozen assorted Napiers. Cora quotes extensively from Alice's diaries, but I suspect that the Napier mentioned is not Stanley Napier, but his son-in-law Cyril Probyn Napier Raikes. (Keep up at the back there!)

No matter: what is important is that, thanks to Cora, we have a detailed insight into one of the darker corners of Alice's life and doubtless one, given her skilful management of news, that she would have hoped would have remained little-known. (I could go on about the various friends of the Elgars who were shot dead by jealous spouses or lovers, but that, as they say, is another story.)

The main story of the current book is, of course, that of Helen Weaver, and in telling that in such great and previously unknown detail we owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Cora. She has scoured the archives and uncovered a goldmine of new information, particularly about Helen's time in Yorkshire with her friend Edith Groveham and her subsequent family life in New Zealand.

The Weaver family was headed by William, who had a successful boot and shoe business in Worcester's High Street. His son Frank, who was to take over the business, was, like Elgar, a violinist, and Frank's two sons each had violin lessons from Elgar. Helen, an accomplished pianist, was William's daughter. At some point Elgar and Helen became engaged; Elgar visited her and her friend Edith Groveham in Leipzig in January 1883; and the engagement was broken off the following year. Thus far is common if sketchy knowledge. Cora has been able to flesh this out with detailed chapters on the background to the Weaver family, the circumstances of Helen's friendship with Elgar, and her time in Leipzig. Moreover, she has delved into the shadowy figure of Edith Groveham, and tells us not only a considerable amount about her family background, but much about her friendship with Helen, and why Helen might have gone to join the family in Bradford after leaving Worcester. Edith stayed in touch with Elgar – and not just after Alice's death: she recalled discussing the First Symphony with Alice at the Midland Hotel where both she and the Elgars were staying for the première in December 1908.

Perhaps the most valuable part of the book is that dealing with Helen's life in New Zealand – work, marriage, children, and music – her son Kenneth's service in the Great War, his time in England not a million miles from Severn House recovering from wounds, and his subsequent return to France and death in action. It was Brian Trowell who argued so convincingly that Elgar might well have known of Kenneth's presence in England, and perhaps even met: here Cora builds on Brian's work.

I have found this a riveting and invaluable book, for it fills in so many gaps in the Helen Weaver story. It is illustrated profusely both with contemporary and modern photographs, and with press cuttings. I congratulate Cora on her work, which should find a place of the shelves of anyone who claims an interest in the life of Elgar.

Martin Bird

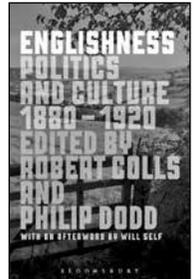
**Jeremy Crump: 'The identity of English music: The reception of Elgar 1898 – 1935'; in *Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, edited by Robert Colls and Philip Dodd**

Bloomsbury Academic, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2014

This book was first published in 1986, and now reappears in much the same format, with the addition of an 'afterword' by Will Self. The 'politics' of the title is very definitely left wing; thus Conservative voters – and also Elgarians suffering from high blood pressure! – are best advised to avoid the book! As well as the chapter under review, there are ten others: 'Englishness and national culture'; 'Englishness and the political culture'; 'The discovery of rural England'; 'The invention of English'; 'A literature for England'; 'The Englishwoman'; 'The Marginal Britons: the Irish'; 'Englishness and the Liberal inheritance after 1886'; 'The Conservative party and patriotism'; and 'Socialism, the state, and some oppositional Englishness'.

In the Preface we read: 'The received wisdom is that the English are patriotic rather than nationalistic. Popular nationalism is the vulgar face of other people, some because they are oppressed and need it, and some because they just like that sort of thing. The English do not need nationalism and do not like it; they are so sure of themselves that they need hardly to discuss the matter. This [book] is ... an attempt to make it clear that such innocence is culpable' (p.xi). It would have been helpful to have Colls and Dodd's detailed definition of the two concepts. Chambers defines 'patriotic' as 'devoted to one's country'; whereas 'nationalistic' is '... favouring or striving after the unity, independence, interests or domination of a nation'. Elgar was certainly devoted to his country, but was definitely not jingoistic: for instance, he loved Germany, and had many German friends. Soon after the First World War began in August 1914 he wrote to Arthur Benson to see if the poet would write new words to 'Land of Hope and Glory' more appropriate to the hour. When he received Benson's new version, Elgar approved of 'Stand for faith and honour, smite for truth and peace', but said that 'Wider still and wider' should 'come out – it is liable to [be] misunderstood now'. And his diary entry for Armistice Day in 1918 is very matter-of-fact, with no sense of triumph or gloating: 'Armistice – ran up Flag. Car to Victoria. A. & E. to Fittleworth 1.36. Flags. Signed YMCA letter [-] Lalla at Victoria. Threshing barley at Brinkwells'.

Crump writes well and makes some good points, but it is clear that his aim is to demean Elgar and his achievements. In many parts of his piece I was reminded of a couplet from Pope: 'Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer/And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer.' Some of his statements are highly questionable. Consider the following: 'The main thrust [of the English Musical Renaissance] was not so much the desire to spread certain forms of music to the working class ... but the establishment of music as a legitimate occupation for the English Middle Class'. But there *was* also a desire by many to encourage music among the *working* class; for instance, the large



320 pp

ISBN  
978-14725-2267-2

number of brass bands which were formed, particularly in industrial areas; the enormous growth in the teaching of tonic sol-fa in schools; and from the 1870s the competition festivals for choirs, drawn mainly from the middle and working classes, and most of which took place in the industrial areas of the Midlands and North. (I have dealt with Elgar's support of and involvement in the competition festival movement in my book *Somewhere Further North*).

Crump's knowledge of Elgar is limited and selective, and much of what he writes can be called into question. Take this, for example: 'In *Spirit of England* and the *Dream of Gerontius* [sic], Elgar was considered to have explored and consoled the English soul at a time of national grief. His insight was thought to transcend religious barriers, and his Catholicism was overlooked'. Leaving aside the fact that the definite article is part of the title of the two works he quotes, the three verbs – 'was considered ... was thought ... was overlooked' – beg the question, 'By whom?' Statements such as these need amplifying, otherwise they are merely personal opinion.

The death of Queen Victoria – coming less than a month into the new century, and after a reign of over sixty years, increased – or possibly created – uncertainty over the future in the minds of many. Far from being a golden age – characterised by Rupert Brooke punting on the Cam; Christopher Robin and Pooh throwing sticks in a stream; Hirst and Rhodes batting at the Oval – living conditions for many millions in the Edwardian years continued to be appalling. Agriculture was in decline. Trade unions were growing in numbers and power, and the number of strikes increased. The political scene was changing: 29 Labour MPs were elected in the 1906 General Election. The Second Boer War, especially Britain's appalling treatment of women and children, shocked many people. Ireland wanted self-rule. Women wanted the vote; the Suffragettes became increasingly active politically during this period. Jaeger picked up on this uncertainty at the end of his analytical notes on *The Apostles* in 1903: 'As in *Gerontius*, the end is Peace. It is the old, yet ever-new and ever-welcome message brought to a stressful and materialistic world ... the good tidings of Peace, of God's goodness and the love of Christ. Never stood music in greater need of strong men able to deliver such a message ...'

Geoffrey Hodgkins

## CD REVIEWS

### *Organ Sonata, Vesper Voluntaries, Imperial March, Cantique, 'Enigma' Variations ('Nimrod'), Pomp and Circumstance March No.1*

Daniel Justin (organ)



Brilliant Classics

94959BR

I was attracted to purchase this disc neither by the organist, whom I had not previously encountered, nor by his instrument, the 'Grand Organ of Leeds Cathedral' (about which Brilliant Classics tell us nothing), but by its bargain price and the fact that the organ arrangements it contains are by friends and contemporaries of Elgar.

The disc is entitled 'Complete original organ music', to which one is tempted to add, 'yes, both pieces', for the Sonata in G and the *Vesper Voluntaries* are Elgar's sole contributions to that medium. In the days of the LP, they would have made a convenient pairing: nowadays purchasers would not be happy with just 45 minutes of music on a CD, and so the net has to be cast wider.

The arrangement of the *Imperial March*, composed in Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year, was commissioned by Novello from George Martin, Organist of St. Paul's Cathedral, and published that same year. The *Cantique* is an arrangement of one of the wind quintet movements of 1879. Elgar orchestrated it in 1912, dedicating it to Hugh Blair, and the following year Novello published it as No.18 in their *New Series of Original Compositions for the Organ*. There is no indication on the organ edition to confirm whether or not the arrangement is by Elgar, but the presence of the English organ virtuoso Edwin Henry Lemare as collector and editor of the series may indicate his hand rather than that of Elgar. He was certainly responsible for the arrangement of the *Pomp and Circumstance March*, published in 1902, and a splendid and virtuosic arrangement it is, too. 'Nimrod' is given is William Harris's arrangement (searching online for scores I see there is also an arrangement by Percy Grainger that would be worth hearing).

I confess I do not see great musical value in modern organ transcriptions: tremendous fun for organists and organ buffs, no doubt, but in general they leave me cold. With these particular arrangements it is quite another matter. They were written at a time when hearing a work in its original form was not a simple matter of turning on the radio or putting on a recording: organ recitals of the latest orchestral works were very popular – most towns had a 'Civic Organist' – and the arrangements could give much more of the full flavour of a work than could the amateur pianist in his parlour. Daniel Justin plays them all exceptionally well, and I am delighted to have this opportunity of hearing the music as it would have been heard by many at the time it was written.

Justin does full justice, too, to the Sonata, which is played as well as I've ever heard it. To pick out just one point among many: his smoothness of

touch at the start of the last movement is remarkable, with none of the choppy playing that I associate with that passage. The recording is first rate, and manages to bring more clarity to the Sonata than is normally achieved in a cathedral setting.

A cathedral grand organ is perhaps a little overpowering for the *Vesper Voluntaries*. I read in *Provincial Musician* that an organ arrived at 'Oaklands' in October 1889 just as the Elgars were finishing dinner and that it was erected next day. This, presumably was the instrument in Elgar's mind when he started work on the *Voluntaries* the following month: a harmonium, perhaps? Although performed on a suitably domestic scale by Justin, the closer recording of the *Voluntaries* make them sound larger than life in comparison with that of the Sonata.

The most excellent liner notes are by the organist Simon Lindley, whose family's Elgarian credentials go back to Emile Cammaerts, Tita Brand, and Marie Brema. Altogether an outstanding issue, and an impulse buy about which I have no regrets.

Richard Wiley



Hyperion  
CDA68089

**Parry: *I was glad, Blest pair of sirens, Dear Lord and Father of mankind, Hear my words, ye people, Evening Service in D, Jerusalem, Coronation Te Deum, Fantasia and Fugue in G***

The Choir of Westminster Abbey, Onyx Brass, Daniel Cook (organ), conducted by James O'Donnell

I greeted my last Hyperion disc of English choral music, by the choir of St. Paul's Cathedral under the direction of Andrew Carwood, with less than enthusiasm, lamenting the 'plodding, almost stentorian, singing ... from the men', and wondering if this was due to the fact that the twelve Vicars Choral of St. Paul's had been supplemented by thirteen 'extras'. Well, I can now exonerate those 'extras', as some of them are also singing on the present, and, may I say, magnificent, disc from the Choir of Westminster Abbey under James O'Donnell.

Many of us will remember the choir's performances of Parry's music from sundry royal weddings and, not least, from the Prince of Wales's documentary on the composer. And no doubt many of you will remember my expressions of mild regret whenever we are offered his choral music accompanied by an organ rather than an orchestra. But I am happy to suspend my prejudices on this occasion, not least because the programme opens with *I was glad* in an arrangement for choir, brass, and organ. I was lucky enough, many years ago, to be invited to conduct the music for the wedding of the bandmaster of the Royal Marines in Plymouth – I provided the singers, he a section of the band – and I made a similar arrangement for the occasion, and the memory of wallowing in the resulting sound remains with me. Onyx Brass also participate in *Hear my words* and the *Coronation Te Deum*, and a thrilling, overwhelming, sound they make.

But the stars of the show (apart from Hyperion's recording team, that is), are James O'Donnell and his choir. Elgar was always – and rightly – banging on about singers with brains. Well, here is brainpower in abundance: supreme choral singing, combining beauty and power of tone with a sense of line and direction that comes from an intelligent awareness of what the music is all about. No mere going through the motions here, and the trebles, in particular, display a similar maturity of music thought that belies their young ages.

Quite outstanding in every way.

Martin Bird

**Bridge: *Music, when Soft Voices Die, O weary Hearts, The Bee, In Autumn***

**Elgar: *O happy eyes, Love***

**Moeran: *Songs of Springtime***

**Parry: *Six Modern Lyrics***

**Stanford: *At the Mid-Hour of Night, It is not the Tear, Shall we go dance, O Breathe not His Name***

**Vaughan Williams: *Three Elizabethan Partsongs***

Quink Vocal Ensemble: Marjon Strijk (soprano), Elsbeth Gerritsen (contralto), Harry van Berne (tenor) Kees Jan de Koning (bass)



Brilliant Classics  
95216BR

How wonderful it must be to be a full time reviewer of CDs. On the all too few occasions when I have been called upon to carry out this duty, it has seemed to me that to know that each day new discs will land on the door mat bringing with them delights both familiar and unfamiliar, in performances both deeply considered and, on occasion, perfunctory. When this disc came through the letterbox unannounced and I was asked by the editor to compile this review, the challenge was to write about a corner of the repertoire with which I am less familiar. Having listened with care, I can start to appreciate the appeal of the part song.

Quink is a Dutch vocal ensemble (not as you may have thought a brand of ink!) with four regular members. On this disc, they have assembled a recital of British part songs which date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In terms of composers, all of the usual suspects are present, with Elgar represented by two songs from his Opus 18, *O Happy Eyes* and *Love*. Both are sung with intelligent phrasing, showing off Elgar at his most tuneful, particularly in the first of these. However, if your interest is confined exclusively to Elgar, only six of this sixty seven minute disc will be of interest.

Of the other composers represented, the items by Frank Bridge stand out by virtue of their invention and originality, whereas the four Stanford titles arguably fall short, at least to my ears.

At the heart of the programme is E. J. Moeran's cycle *Songs of Springtime*, one of which, *Love is a Sickness*, can also be found in the setting by Vaughan

Williams. The programme concludes with Parry's *Six Modern Lyrics*.

All in all, this is disc of real charm that is well recorded and where nothing seems forced, even if the top line can jar a little at times. The booklet contains the texts of each of the songs, but the notes could be more informative and contain some phrases which seem to have lost something in translation. However, if you would like to dip a toe into this repertoire, you could do worse than investing something under £7 on this recording.

Stuart Freed

## LETTERS

### *The 'Powick' music*

*From Barry Collett and Andrew Lyle*

We read with interest Ken Crump's article on 'Edward Elgar at Powick Mental Hospital' as a perceptive account of the medical conditions at the Asylum in Elgar's time and in the twentieth century.

At the risk of sounding a note of pedantry, we wish to correct a few minor errors – mostly on musical rather than medical matters – if only to avoid their perpetuation. Many of these have been current in Elgar literature for a number of years: see Barry Collett's article in *ESJ* Vol.9 No.3 (November 1996) and Andrew Lyle's in *ESJ* Vol.15 No.3 (November 2007) for further details.

1. The correct title for the Asylum in Elgar's time is 'County and City of Worcester Pauper Lunatic Asylum'. Note: 'County' first, 'City' second, reflecting the greater proportion of county rates that paid for the Asylum and the larger number of county dignitaries who were on the Committee of Visitors (Management Committee in today's vocabulary).
2. The estate on which the Asylum was built was 'White Chimneys', not 'White Chimney'.
3. There is no detailed evidence surviving in the accounts of Elgar's rates of pay, only his recollections for an article in *The Musical Times* of 1<sup>st</sup> October 1900, repeated in later conversations with (for example) Wulstan Atkins. Although his quarterly payments are recorded in the Asylum Account Books, this is not broken down into payments for hours worked and separate payments for composing the dances. We can say that the Christy Minstrel arrangements were definitely not written for the Powick Band, although the Commissioner in Lunacy report for 1879 mentions 'the Amateur Christy Minstrels in connection with the Volunteer Artillery' performing at the Asylum. In a marginal pencilled note in the proofs of that same *Musical Times* article, Elgar states that 'The songs were for an amateur troupe, not for the Asylum' [Elgar's emphasis].
4. We cannot say for certain that Elgar's relatives (Frank, William and Henry) played in the Band for the Friday Entertainments, since their initials are not written in any of the part-books. But there were other concerts given at the Asylum by the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society which Elgar conducted or played in where the list of players included his relations. It is not unlikely that Elgar drew on his pool of local players to supplement the Asylum staff's participation to the Band.
5. The surviving part-books, which together with sketch scores are the primary source for this music, contain no parts for oboe or percussion. There is a single mention of 'oboe' in a cue in one of the two first violin parts in the Polka *Helcia* (bar 27). The only mention of percussion

that we have encountered is in an *Illustrated London News* article (28<sup>th</sup> June 1856, the year before Elgar was born) which mentions one of the patients playing a drum alongside the brass band at a country picnic. There are parts for flute and piccolo, as well as ‘Brass bassi’ – a trombone in the polka *La Blonde*, bombardon (bass tuba) in some others.

6. Barry Collett lays no claim to ‘discovering’ Elgar’s Powick Music. Both he and Andrew Lyle remember visiting the Elgar Birthplace in the 1970s and noticing a pile of bound part-books lying somewhat casually in the corner of one of the upstairs rooms. The curator at the time dismissed them as ‘early works’, ‘written for the local Asylum’, ‘never been published’: three phrases guaranteed to stimulate the curiosity of Messrs. Collett and Lyle! Barry has now recorded the music twice and Andrew edited the dances for publication in the Elgar Complete Edition.

### ***The problem with ‘Arthur’***

*From Robert Kay*

John Edwards (April 2015 *Journal*) and Andrew Neill (August 2015) comment on the difficulty of appreciating the complete *Arthur* music as recorded on the new SOMM CD.

The problem for anyone attempting to present the *Arthur* music, either in live performance or on disc, is that the music is designed to follow action on stage and makes little sense outside the theatre. The CD review (*Journal* December 2014) is misleading when it refers to *Arthur* as a ‘35-minute work’ as this implies a degree of continuity. In fact *Arthur* only contains about 22 minutes of extended musical material, itself divided into seven separate sections (the scene introductions), only lasting between two and six minutes each. The remaining 13 minutes comprise brief repetitions of music already heard, designed to underly certain key (and widely spaced) points in the drama.

John Edwards is right (and Andrew Neill appears to agree) that on CD the music sounds fragmentary, because these repeated sections are heard out of context. Unless the listener is equipped with the play script (currently obtainable only from secondhand book dealers at prices ranging from the modest to the exorbitant) plus the score (not yet published in the Complete Edition), he will find it virtually impossible to comprehend the relationship between music and play, and to know how the short repetitious fragments relate to the stage action. Consequently the overall musical experience is disjointed.

In this respect the *Arthur* CD is unsatisfactory. However, had SOMM followed John Edwards’ suggestion of including a narrative of the action, omitting the repeated sections, then, as Andrew points out, the CD would have been much longer (the play is excessively long-winded) and SOMM would not have been able to make the claim that the CD constituted a ‘complete’ recording – the music as recorded being absolutely complete and presented in its correct order. Although wide of the mark, John Edwards’ surmise that the music had been ‘chopped up’ accurately describes the problem that this CD presents to the unwary auditor. I have heard similar reservations expressed by other Elgarians.

The sad fact about the complete *Arthur* music – a problem which was discussed by me in the *Journal* for July 2010 – is that it only works as a theatre accompaniment (the 2012 performance,

with its script excerpts and narrative links, closely approximated a stage version). A somewhat different approach is needed if the music is to stand repeated hearings, and this entails the compiling of the music into a concert Suite. Elgar was in fact requested to do this by Ivor Atkins in 1926 – although Elgar refused at the time, later correspondence showed him coming round to the idea.

There is therefore nothing historically inappropriate about a *King Arthur Suite* and the problem for the arranger merely reduces to deciding what music Elgar was likely to have included. The only practicable solution is to include the scene introductions (which, although short, are effective, closely-argued and connected by *leitmotifs*) and to omit the fragmentary repeated sections altogether (a similar solution was adopted by Bizet when salvaging the music for *L’Arlésienne*, music which would otherwise have stood no chance of survival once the play had bombed). This work was first done in 1972 by the conductor Alan Barlow, his Suite being recorded on Polydor (this is the George Hurst recording referred to by Mr. Edwards). Barlow did not alter the theatre-band instrumentation (apart from omitting the piano) and consequently the sonority is somewhat strange in places. In 2010 I improved on Barlow’s work by transcribing the same music into a conventional suite for full orchestra. This transcription has not yet received a professional recording but has been published, and a live performance can be heard on YouTube (put ‘King Arthur Suite (Kay)’ into Google to find it).

There are thus two Suites available online (Hurst is also available on YouTube) in which the *Arthur* music can be enjoyed without difficulty or distraction. These Suites will hopefully ensure the long-term viability of music which constitutes some of the most evocative output from Elgar’s final compositional period.

## RECORDING NOTES ...

The West End theatres were full at the time of the First World War, one hundred years ago. Officers on leave packed the stalls, while Londoners crowded, as they always had, into 'The Gods' at popular prices for shows like *Chu Chin Chow* (a bloodthirsty 'Musical Tale of the East'), *The Maid of the Mountains* (romantic adventure), *The Bing Boys are Here* and *Tonight's the Nigh'* (revue) and so on. There was a well established pantomime tradition, though Dan Leno (who died young) no longer presided at Drury Lane with his clowning and that best of all pantomime songs ('Nobody loves a fairy when she's forty') had not yet been written. At Christmas time it was the job of kindly uncles and aunts to shepherd parties of well scrubbed nephews and nieces (with a good supply of chocolates, ices and programmes) to their seats for the matinee performances of respectable shows, some still with us (such as *Peter Pan*, with flying! and, a little later, *Toad of Toad Hall*). Not seen for many years is that best of all the Christmas shows, *Where the Rainbow Ends*, (a patriotic adventure with gorgeous music by Roger Quilter, St. George doing battle with the Dragon King, a magic carpet (more flying) and even a wicked solicitor (surely not ... !)). But gone with barely a trace is that Blackwood/Elgar collaboration, *The Starlight Express*.

A successful Christmas play for children might run easily into the New Year and the author of these centenary notes for the first recording of *The Starlight Express* still vividly recalls (from the 1950s) attending a January production of *Noddy in Toyland*. This proved (as so often with Enid Blyton's stories), unexpectedly exciting for a very young and easily alarmed audience! At any rate, she was a first-rate story teller, which cannot quite be said of Algernon Blackwood and his lengthy, ethereal fantasy novel, *A Prisoner in Fairyland* (506 pages and use also made by him, it seems, of characters like 'Cousin Paul' from other books. I journeyed all the way to Woking to see *The Starlight Express* many years ago and can only comment, 'Full marks for trying'.

Much ink has been spilled on *The Starlight Express* and its relationship to *The Wand of Youth* (with which it shares some musical material) and could Elgar's *Wand* recall his own younger days as the ambitious young conductor of a family orchestra? At any rate, there is no connection with any modern musical of a similar name! Elgar wrote his songs and incidental music at speed for the opening night (29 December 1915) of the Blackwood/Elgar musical play. He did not care for the production, but apparently liked it the more he saw of it ('E. there very often', wrote Lady Elgar), who also heard the soprano, Clytie Hyne (1887-1983), audition at Severn House ('very delightful singing'). Miss Hine, who was from Australia, had a long career as a singer and teacher. She does not seem to have made records, but something may turn up one day. The show came off on 29 January 1916, to the dismay of author, producer and composer alike, but (as luck would have it) Elgar was by then negotiating with HMV to renew his recording contract and naturally suggested titles from his latest score, *The Starlight Express*. Remarkably enough, the suggestion was accepted and no less than eight single-sided 12" records were successfully made at Hayes on 18 February 1916. It was a considerable achievement and preserves for us the avuncular singing of Charles Mott, who was killed in the War, and (taking the place of Clytie Hine) the powerful voice of Agnes Nicholls, the distinguished operatic and oratorio soprano (at Elgar's request and in her only Elgar recording).

The records were launched at a launch lunch at the Savoy, but that was several weeks after the show itself had closed. At that time, it was common for HMV to issue sets such as this in 'Art Albums'; it was even done for Dame Ethel Smyth's rollicking comedy, *The Boatswain's Mate* (a work which, I believe, still awaits its second recording) but not so here. Unsurprisingly, the

records themselves are very uncommon in single-sided form – the Elgars numbered their copies, to make a sort of suite – but they were later reissued as 4 double-sided 12" 78s (D455-D458) and remained available until the whole of the Historic Catalogue was deleted during the Second World War. They are, of course, acoustic recordings, made by performers singing into a horn, but Elgar secures spirited performances and most of the music is heard, albeit in incomplete form. He did not return to *The Starlight Express* in the recording studio and it was never revived by the producer in the theatre so that the thought of further records made perhaps 'live' in performance under the composer's baton (or 'Wand'?) is just a 'might have been'. However, some songs were recorded (and rather nicely, too) by HMV in December 1935 on plum-label 78s C2791/2 (Stuart Robertson and Alice Moxon with an unknown conductor). Yet for all the limitations of plot and acoustic recording, Elgar's records did find their audience in the end, in the form of an officer on active service. He wrote to the composer to express his appreciation of the 'Starlight' music as a civilising influence in the depths of Hell and his poignant letter is quoted in Moore's *A Creative Life*. It movingly describes how such music made the ordeal of men like him on the Western Front a little more bearable, at least for a while.

Michael Plant

## 100 YEARS AGO ...

While Elgar and Arthur Benson considered a revised text for 'Land of Hope and Glory', Alice busied herself 'firing into shops about recruiting &c'. She noted 'Canon fixed onto buildings in London ready for aeroplanes'. On 6<sup>th</sup> September Elgar 'suddenly wrote the Song for Soldiers [to Edward] Begbie's words': it was later withdrawn. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, while he went 'to his Station 10-12', Alice noted that 'It wd. have been 'Gerontius' tonight at Worcester Fest – but for Hun Kaiser'. Towards the end of the month he went 'to The Elms after visit to his Station. Travelled with wounded Soldiers (Mons) & gave them tea – he said, "wonderful men".' This was the first of many wartime visits to his sister Pollie.

At the beginning of October Alice went to the 'Emergency Corps to ask if cd. teach Soldiers french – Was asked if she wd. take a class that minute almost! at Chelsea Barracks ... Pupils very nice especially 2 of them, & very interested.' On the 15<sup>th</sup> Elgar travelled to Manchester where he conducted the first wartime concert of the Hallé Orchestra. On his return he went to The Hut for the weekend.

At the end of the month a 'patriotic anthology to be called King Albert's Book', was the writer Hall Caine to raise money for the 'Daily Telegraph Belgian Fund'. After much persuasion – 'This is not the moment when Elgar should be silent'; 'I told the King about the book on Friday & today there is a letter ... saying that His Majesty is in warm sympathy with it & recognises the great generosity of the illustrious artists who are contributing' – Elgar wrote *Carillon*, a setting of Emile Cammaerts' poem 'Après Anvers'. It was completed on 18<sup>th</sup> November, after Elgar had returned from another week at The Elms.

After a rehearsal on 6<sup>th</sup> December (Wonderful sounds & orchestration. [Wassily] Safonoff & others delighted Safonoff said it was a "succès boeuf"! E. not tired & pleased –), Elgar conducted its première at Queen's Hall the following day, with Cammaerts' wife, Tita Brand, reciting the poem. Rosa Burley recalled that 'unfortunately Madame Cammaerts was *enceinte* and in order to conceal this fact an enormous bank of roses was built on the platform over which her head and shoulders appeared rather in the manner of a Punch and Judy show.' The work was an instant success, so much so that the very next day HMV agreed to record it, with 'Henry Ainley [and] the Mayfair Orchestra'. It was played for a second time on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 'sounded greater than ever. Most beautifully played & aroused enormous enthusiasm – recalled & recalled & shouts of "bis, bis".'

On the 10<sup>th</sup> the Elgars hosted a concert at Severn House in aid of Belgian charities – £36.10.0 was raised. Elgar was still busy with his Special Constable duties, and on the 21<sup>st</sup> was 'all the morning at his Constab. Station' while Alice and Carice went 'to Scotland Yard vain search for umbrella'. Christmas Day was 'Dry but very cold – thick fog – A. not out at all – Nice letters & little things. E. & C. well thankful to say. Miss Burley here – Alice S. W. came to tea, brought flowers & E.'s lovely lavender water.' The year ended 'in great anxieties but with invaluable consciousness that England has a great, holy Cause – May God keep her –'.

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