


The Society

Elgar



JOURNAL

THE ORGAN GRINDER'S SONGS • FROM
THE STARLIGHT EXPRESS
WORDS BY ALGERNON BLACKWOOD
MUSIC BY EDWARD ELGAR

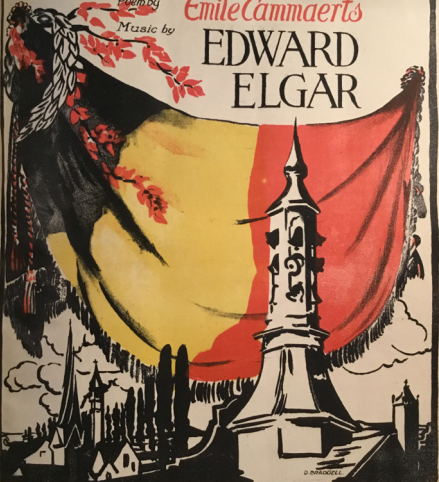


1. TO THE CHILDREN.
B^b (C to E) & C.
2. THE BLUE-EYES FAIRY.
E^b (B^b to B^b) & F.
3. MY OLD TUNES.
D^b (D to E^b) & C.

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CARILLON
"CHANTONS, BELGES, CHANTONS!"
Poem by Emile Cammaerts
Music by EDWARD ELGAR



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ORGAN

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

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Front Cover: Covers of the scores of Carillon (Arthur Reynolds' Archive) and The Starlight Express (Barry Collett).

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Elgar and the Great War

Barry Collett

By 1914 Elgar was at the height of his international reputation. He could have had no idea that, five years later, his world would lie in ruins and Music and the Arts in general would be embarked on a very different path. It is perhaps true that his popularity was somewhat on the wane, or at least taken for granted. The delirium that greeted the First Symphony in 1908 and the Violin Concerto of 1910 was certainly not repeated for his next major works – the Second Symphony of 1911, *The Music Makers* of 1912, and *Falstaff*, 1913, all of which were generally received with puzzled indifference. Some commentators have argued that artists' antennae were more attuned to the growing unease than those of the politicians, and this is reflected in their work. And certainly there was more angst and darker moods in Elgar's work as his fame increased and demands on his time took their toll. But it seems the Elgars were as surprised about the outbreak of war as everyone else was. They were on holiday in the far north of Scotland, and the story of their attempts to get back home to London makes fascinating reading.¹

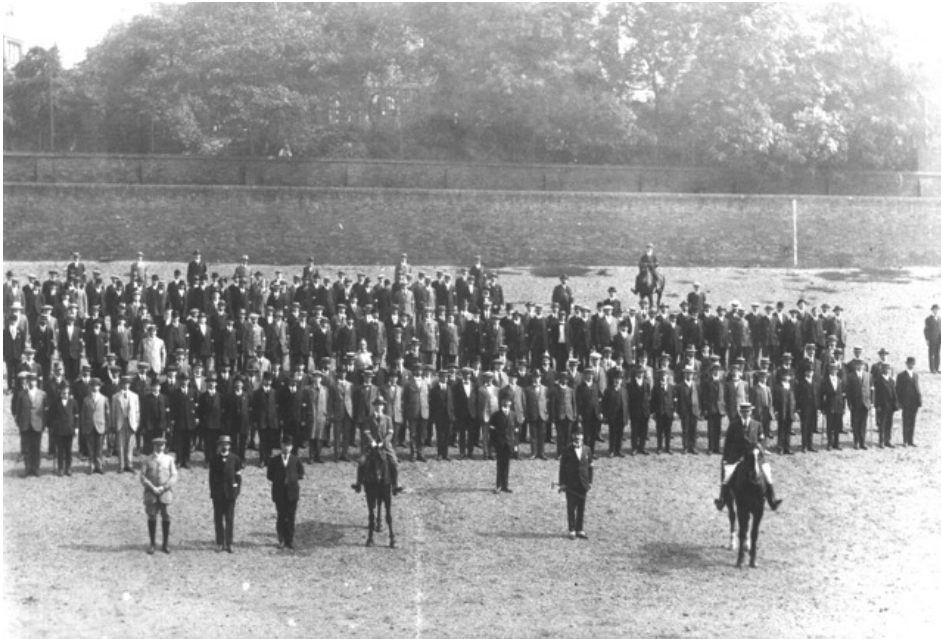
On arriving back at Severn House Elgar, too old for war service, enrolled in the Hampstead Constabulary as a special constable. His wife and daughter also busied themselves with charitable work. It was a bitter blow to both Edward and Alice that their country was now at war with Germany – a country in which they had holidayed, where Elgar's reputation grew and blossomed before it was generally noticed in England, and Elgar's earliest and most fervent supporters were either German or of German stock. His distress can be noted in the extraordinary outburst written in a letter to his friend Frank Schuster in August 1914:

"Concerning the war I say nothing – the only thing that wrings my heart & soul is the thought of the horses – oh! my beloved animals – the men – and women can go to hell – but my horses; - I walk round and round this room cursing God for allowing dumb brutes to be tortured – let Him kill his human beings but how CAN HE? Oh, my horses."

1914

The year 1914 saw quite a clutch of Elgar works published. Several part songs, including the very fine opp 71, 72 and 73, the anthem *Give Unto the Lord (Psalm 29)*, three delightful miniatures for an American *Progressive Music Series*, and *Sospiri* for strings, harp and organ. Most were written before the outbreak of war in early August, and so cannot be considered war works, although

¹ For a complete and detailed examination of Elgar and his music in these war years, the book *Oh My Horses!: Elgar and the Great War*, edited by Lewis Foreman, published by Elgar Editions (Rickmansworth, 2001) is essential reading.



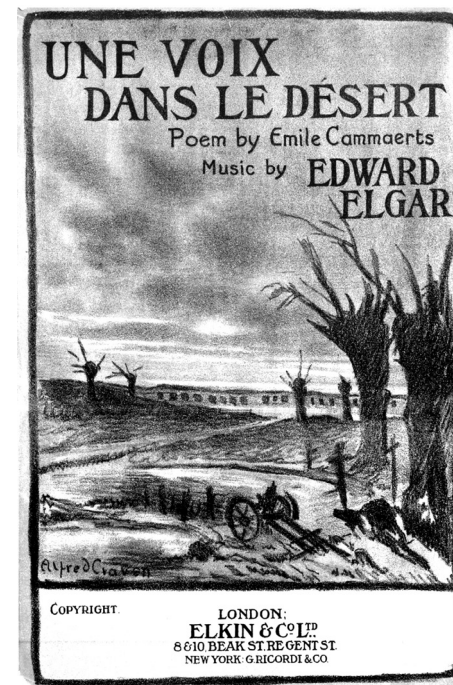
August 1914. The Hampstead Special Constabulary on parade. Staff Inspector Elgar is pictured on the lower left (Arthur Reynolds' Archive)

Sospiri, composed in February that year, has astonishing pre-echoes of the sorrow and heartache to come. First performed after the declaration of war later in August, Heaven knows what that Promenade Concert audience made of it, in the frenzied war-fever atmosphere that was developing.

Thereafter, until 1918, all of Elgar's work centred on the war, usually for commissions to help various charities.

1914 also saw his first works reflecting the mood of the times. Quick to jump on the bandwagon Boosey's published the song *Chariots of the Lord*, first performed in June, the Rev. Brownlie's words exhorting us to enlist the strength of God in the fight for rightness and truth. In truth it is not Elgar's finest song. What may now seem to us smug, self-righteous words are matched by a rather smug, pompous musical setting. Similarly *Follow the Colours*, a reworking of an earlier *Marching Song* (1908) was performed in October. Its overly patriotic, militaristic sentiments sit ill with modern sensibilities, but its rhythmic vigour and swing lift it above the commonplace, especially in its orchestral version. *The Birthright*, also published by Novello in 1914, smacks of the Boys' Brigade with its bugles and drums. But these are trifles. The first major work inspired by the war was *Carillon* (op. 75). The Belgian poet Emile Cammaerts had produced a poem decrying the overrun of Belgium by German forces, and the destruction of the country's famous bell-towers. Elgar was moved by the poem, and he set it for narrator with an enormous full-Elgarian orchestra. It was performed at the Queen's Hall in December, with Elgar conducting and the poet's wife, Tita Brand (who was also the daughter of the *Dream of Gerontius*'s first Angel, Marie Brema) reciting. It was

an enormous success, the fiery and at times gently nostalgic words touching exactly the mood of the times. The music pits a four note descending bell motif against the prevailing triple rhythm. Bells and glockenspiel add to the colour, and despite some lovely reflective moments, the desire for vengeance rings through and ends the work with jubilation. Elgar toured across the country with the London Symphony Orchestra and a variety of reciters, and took it to the recording studio early in the next year with Henry Ainley as narrator. It was, with the later *Fringes of the Fleet*, his most popular wartime success.



The cover of the Elkin & Co's published vocal score of *A Voice in the Desert*, 1916 (Lewis Foreman's collection)



Tita Brand was the translator and the reciter at the premiere of *Carillon*. Elgar also set her translation of *Une Voix dans le Désert*. She was the daughter of Marie Brema, who sang the Angel in the first performance of *Gerontius*. Tita Brand also translated Émile Cammaerts' poem *Après Anvers* into English and married the Belgian poet. (Arthur Reynolds' Archive)

Not a breath, not a sound, not a soul, Only the crosses, the crooked wooden crosses...
Plus un souffle, plus un bruit, plus un chat, Rien que le signe des croix de bois...

"Come, it is getting late
'Tis but a peasant girl
With her father living there. . . .
"Venez donc, il est tard, ne nous arrêtons pas,
Ce n'est qu'une paysanne restée là
Avec son vieux père.

They will not go away,
Rien ne peut les convaincre,

nothing will make them yield, They will die, they say, Sooner than leave their field." Not a
ils ne veulent pas partir, Ils disent qu'ils aiment mieux mourir Que de quitter leur terre." Plus un
lunga

breath, not a life, not a soul, Only a flight of crows along the railway line, The sound of our
souffle, plus une vie, plus un chat, Rien qu'un vol de corbeaux le long du chemin de fer, Le bruit de nos

boots on the muddy road... And a long the Yser the twinkling of the fires.
bottes sur le pavé gras, ... Et la ligne des feux clignotant sur l'Y-ser.

E. & C^o 878

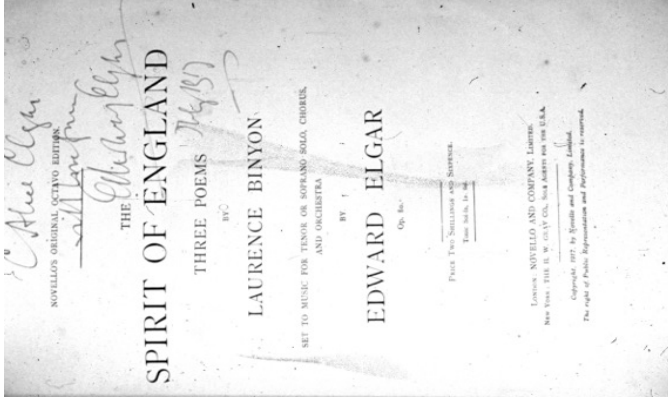
200 *

The last page of *Une voix dans le Désert* (Lewis Foreman's collection)

1915 saw three major war works. The Symphonic Prelude *Polonia* (op 76) was suggested by the Polish conductor and composer Emil Mlynarski, and it was first performed in July 1915, for a Polish Victims' Relief Fund Concert. Elgar conducted, and again used an enormous orchestra. The work is dedicated to Paderewski, a great admirer of Elgar's music. The idea of Fantasias on National Themes was never very much in Elgar's line, and this is his only example. He uses quotations from Paderewski's Polish Fantasy for piano and orchestra, and Chopin's G minor Nocturne, along with a couple of national hymns. The work is lavishly and colourfully scored, and at fifteen minutes length and divorced from words, it has achieved a certain popularity in recent years, not least in Poland.

Une Voix dans le desert (op 77) is the second recitation with orchestra, again with words by Cammaerts. It was first performed in January of the following year at London's Shaftesbury Theatre, astonishingly sandwiched between *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*! Of the three recitations with orchestra this one has seen more recent performances. The words reflect more the bleakness of the war-torn landscape, empty and desolate except for flights of crows, the silence only disturbed by the ring of marching boots. In the midst of this desolation stands a ruined cottage, from within which a girl's voice is heard singing. This beautifully written song *When the spring comes round again* looks forward to a time of peace, when Belgium is again prosperous and welcoming. As the girl's voice dies away the music of the opening returns, with soft drum beats, the birds' flight echoed in the strings, and flecks of colour from a suspended cymbal reflecting the lights glistening against the River Yser. The music dies to nothing. It is a moving and convincing work, perhaps the greatest of the recitations, although nowhere achieving the popularity of *Carillon*.

But 1915 also saw the production of Elgar's largest score for the theatre. Towards the end of the year he was approached by the actress Lena Ashwell to provide a score for her adaptation of Violet Pearn's play *The Starlight Express*, based on Algernon Blackwood's novel *A Prisoner in Fairyland*. The story involves a family of children whose spirits escape from their bodies at night, fly to the stars on a Starlight Express, and collect stardust to scatter on a confused and hostile world, thus bringing everything to right. This rather nostalgic piece of whimsy appealed to Elgar, with its visions of childhood innocence and cast of characters that he would have known from his own childhood – an organ grinder, dustman, tramp, chimney sweep, head gardener – and he felt the need for escapism at this time, when the war, far from being over in a few months, was grinding seemingly endlessly onwards. He started to adapt his *Wand of Youth* music, but the score soon grew to a substantial length. He and Blackwood, who became a good friend, were delighted by their work, but appalled at the heavy-handed production. From the end of December it ran for a month. The critics were enthusiastic about the music, less so about the play and production. Elgar always hoped for a revival, and recorded excerpts from the score in 1916, but score and parts were lost in a fire in the theatre in the 1920s, the Blitz destroyed more material, and it wasn't for another sixty years that the score was reconstructed and performed. I think it is one of Elgar's most entrancing scores. Much of it is short instrumental motifs to accompany stage action, but there are enough substantial items to make a convincing forty-five minute concert suite. The songs in particular are in Elgar's best light music vein, an element of his work still under-appreciated, and probably not bettered by any other composer of the time.



Alice Elgar's copy of the first edition vocal score of *The Spirit of England* published by Novello in 1917: inscribed "C. Alice Elgar with love from Edward Elgar, July 1917." (*Arthur Reynolds' Archive*)



War memorial in Liverpool with Binyon's famous lines, set to music by Elgar in *For the Fallen*

(*Editor's archive*)



The Spirit of England

Elgar's friend Sidney Colvin suggested in 1915 that Elgar set some of the poet Laurence Binyon's verse to music. Early in the war Binyon had published *The Winnowing Fan* and he gave Elgar a copy, who selected three poems, *The Fourth of August*, *To Women*, and *For the Fallen*. He began work enthusiastically, but at a chance meeting with the Cambridge composer Cyril Rootham he discovered that Rootham was also setting *For the Fallen* and Novello's were to publish it. Elgar decided to withdraw, recognizing that the market could not sustain two versions. He wrote to Binyon:

"I cannot tell you how sad I am about your poems: I still feel I cannot proceed with the set as at first proposed & which I still desire to complete: but I saw Dr Rootham, who merely wished to thank me for my 'generous attitude' etc. & said very nice things about my offer to withdraw – but his utter disappointment, not expressed but shewn unconsciously, has upset me & I must decide against completing 'For the Fallen'. I have battled with the feeling for nearly a week but the sight of the other man comes sadly between me & my music....."

Binyon and many others were bitterly disappointed and pleaded with Elgar. He was adamant: "There is only one publisher for choral music in England: Dr Rootham was in touch with Novello first – my proposal made his MS waste paper & I could not go on- that's exactly a bald statement of the case." Elgar's friends persisted, and when Rootham's setting was published Elgar felt more at liberty to continue with his own, and *For the Fallen* and *To Women* were performed in 1916. Rootham was offended and never forgave him.

Elgar was having more trouble with *The Fourth of August*, particularly the sixth verse, describing the enemy (Germany, though not so named) 'The barren creed of blood and iron, Vampire of Europe's wasted will...' He persevered, quoting at this point the Demons' Chorus from *Dream of Gerontius*, and the complete work, named *The Spirit of England* was finally performed in 1917. It received many successful performances, but gradually dropped from the repertoire, apart from occasional performances around Armistice Day. More recently it has come into its own, and better acquaintance has enabled it to be seen as one of his finest works, fervent and passionate in *The Fourth of August*, gently but sadly consoling in *To Women*, and achieving real grandeur and nobility in *For the Fallen*, with its quirky, ghostly central march as the soldiers march to war, and a final section of rapt intensity that finally settles to a peaceful close. It is surprising to think that Binyon's words, now so familiar to everyone at Armistice celebrations, were then quite new and unknown. And Elgar does them justice – *At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them*- brings forth music of a memorable and heartfelt sincerity.

The Spirit of England is one of the composer's finest works, and a fitting conclusion to the succession of choral works that started with *The Black Knight* in 1892. Its relative rarity is not due to the quality of either the music or the words. Perhaps Elgar gave it the wrong title (it is the second line of the *Fourth of August* poem), one which is not going to appeal to European audiences beyond our shores. Perhaps *War Requiem* might have given it greater appeal, for that is what it is.

The only other work from 1916 is another trifle, *Fight for Right*, a very short song dedicated to the 'Fight for Right Movement' whose published aims were 'to brace the spirit of the nation that the people of Great Britain, knowing they are fighting for the best interests of humanity, may refuse any temptation, however insidious, to conclude a premature peace, and may accept with cheerfulness all the sacrifices necessary to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion.' So, with sentiments similar to *Follow the Colours* and *Chariots of the Lord*, but with, unusually for Elgar, rather clumsily rhythmic word setting, it soon sank without trace and is no more than a curiosity.



Ina Lowther dances in one of her productions, believed to be *The Sanguine Fan* (Lewis Foreman's collection)



The cover of the programme for the first performance of *The Sanguine Fan*, 20 th March, 1917. (Arthur Reynolds' Archive)

1917

1917 saw the last of the war works, apart from one tiny exception. As part of a revue called *Chelsea on Tiptoe* Elgar was asked to write a short ballet. Entitled *The Sanguine Fan* its story (based on a Fan by Charles Condor) of Arcadian Nymphs, Shepherds and Satyrs is slight and ephemeral, but Elgar produced another delightful score in his best light-music vein, the Minuetto-like opening in particular so characteristic of the composer it could not possibly be by anyone else. But again the score disappeared, to be revived and recorded by Sir Adrian Boult in the 1970s.



The Fringes of the Fleet at the Coliseum Theatre: from left to right, Frederick Stewart, Charles Mott, Harry Barratt and Frederick Henry (Lewis Foreman's collection)



The Fringes of the Fleet at the Coliseum Theatre in London, June 1917 (British Library MS69836f02)

n. 3. Sandpaper effect

'Submarines'

Lento 3/4

crese *ppp*

voice collapse

crese *ppp*

rise, we lie down, and we

ships here a thou sand

ppp

Tempo *f*

(string) dies. when our

miracles

rise, we lie down and we

ppp

tacet

The percussion part for 'Submarines' in *The Fringes of the Fleet* with one of the instruments attached to it – the sandpaper used to recreate the sound of the waves crashing on the sea-shore (British Library MS634890 f.2; the BL website contains images of all of Elgar's wartime music, the result of a project funded by the EU: <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/BriefDisplay.aspx>)

Le Drapeau Belge (op 79) is the last of the recitations with words by Cammaerts. It is by far the shortest, with the colours of the Belgian flag – black, yellow and red – spoken as a refrain against a subdued marching rhythm. It summons up some spirit for the vision of the flag defying destruction, but it seemed half-hearted after the other two, and again soon disappeared from the concert platform. Much more successful was *Fringes of the Fleet*, settings of four poems by Rudyard Kipling, for four baritones and orchestra. In the first, *The Lowestoft Boat*, a trawler sets out with a motley crew to seek the enemy. It's a stirring and humorous song, whilst the second *Fate's Discourtesy* looks to the larger issue of 'the game is more than the player of the game and the ship is more than the crew.' The mood suddenly darkens for *Submarines*, then a new type of warfare with the crew facing the perils of the deep. A gloomy C minor prevails, with two sandpaper blocks rubbed together to give the effect of the soft swishing of waves. The final song lifts the spirits. *The Sweepers* tells of five trawlers equipped as minesweepers setting off on their quest. A ship's bell in D is called for in the score. First performed at the London Coliseum in June 1917, with Elgar conducting the four singers (dressed as seafarers) and the smallish orchestra, it was an immediate success, the swashbuckling high spirits and memorable melodies capturing a much needed cheerfulness at this time. Elgar added an encore song *Inside the Bar* (Gilbert Parker). After the jollity of *The Sweepers* this suddenly darkens the mood again. The orchestra is silent, the four singers remembering the town and girls they left behind, and in the final 'Yo ho' the harmonies beautifully wind themselves round the final cadence. Elgar toured with the four singers and orchestra round the provincial music halls for the next four months. On their return to the Coliseum in November Kipling, rather belatedly, objected to his poetry being used in this way, and the performances came to a stop. Elgar wrote bitterly to Alice Stuart-Wortley "He is perfectly stupid in his attitude. If I do happen to write something that 'goes' with the public and by which I look like benefitting financially, some perverse fate always intervenes and stops it immediately." Kipling's worry over his son, missing in France, must have added to his decision. Elgar recorded the songs with the original singers in 1917, and again the score quietly disappeared from view.

In 1918 Elgar's last piece for the war appeared. Published in *Teachers' World* in June, it is a tiny song called *Big Steamers*, another Kipling poem, telling of how the big ships bring our supplies, fearing nothing, and how much we depend on them. A charming and simple song, Elgar said, in a letter to Lord Rhondda 'The occasion seemed to call for something exceptionally simple and direct, and I have endeavoured to bring the little piece within the comprehension of very small people indeed.'

With this his war work ceased. He flatly refused to write any kind of anthem for peace, and instead retired to the Sussex woodlands where his thoughts were turning towards chamber music. These three chamber works with their elusive poetry, their tender expressive warmth and deeply intimate passions, along with the autumnal poignancy of the following Cello Concerto, are perhaps his Requiem for a vanished world.

A conductor's experiences

If I may end on a personal note based on my involvement in reviving and recording many of these scores some thirty years ago. Then I was conductor of the Rutland Sinfonia, a full strength semi-professional symphony orchestra, and we were working our way, amongst other things, through the entire Elgarian orchestral oeuvre, when it occurred to me that the one 'dark patch' in the composer's maturity was the music of the war years. Concert performances seemed to stop at *Falstaff* (1913) and begin again with the Cello Concerto (1919). What happened in between? Boulton

had recorded, splendidly, *Polonia* in the 1970s, and also the orchestral bits of *Carillon*, stitched together without narrator, which wasn't such a good idea, although it did give a glimpse of the quality of the orchestral writing. *The Spirit of England*, *The Starlight Express* and *The Sanguine Fan* were also recorded in the 1970s. Other than that, it was a blank canvas. That splendid pioneer of the obscure, Leslie Head and his Kensington Symphony Orchestra had revived the Recitations, also in the 1970s. Other than that, nothing was on record since Elgar's performances of 1917, and much had never been recorded at all.

And it was an uphill task to get hold of some of the music. Some of it was published by small firms like Elkin and Enoch which had become defunct, and their musical stock split up between different publishers, most of whom seemed to know nothing about it and denied that they had them. Fairly typical, I'm afraid, of the cavalier attitude of some publishers of the time. My conductor's score of *Une Voix dans le désert*, which had never been printed, was an almost illegible copy of Elgar's original sketch, difficult to decipher at the best of times. No full score existed of *Fringes of the Fleet*, only parts for voice and piano, so it was a case of having to pencil in all the orchestral cues. A careful listen to Elgar's 1917 recording with the original singers revealed that in certain places the singers added extra harmony and bits of counterpoint to the melodic line, obviously with Elgar's approval. This too had to be pencilled in, so that we could give as near a performance to Elgar's own as possible. We were lucky to secure the services of that fine Shakespearian actor Richard Pasco as narrator, and the soprano Teresa Cahill for the song in *Une Voix dans le desert*. Performances of all these works were given in Corby Festival Hall, in Malvern, and Worcester Cathedral, and then recorded for CD on the Pearl label. The smaller works, *Fight for Right*, *Follow the Colours*, *The Birthright*, and *Big Steamers* were all collected up on my 'Unknown Elgar' CD, again recorded by Pearl in the early 1990s. Since these were issued it is encouraging that there have been more recent recordings of all these works, except for *The Birthright* and *Fight for Right*.

What of the future for this music? Much of it – *The Spirit of England*, *The Sanguine Fan*, *The Starlight Express*, *Polonia* – can, and should, have a concert life quite divorced from wartime associations. *Fringes of the Fleet* is such good fun that it can, and should, bring the house down if performed in the right spirit. The Recitations are, by their very nature, tied to their time and place, but I felt that our live performances were always received with interest and a good deal of enthusiasm. After all, if we accept the marvellous Poetry and Art that the First World War brought forth, we can surely do the same with the Music of that same period.

Barry Collett is a conductor, pianist and lecturer. He is an honorary life member of the Elgar Society, and was awarded the Elgar Medal, the Society's highest award, for his research, performances and recordings of Elgar's lesser-known music, especially the First World War music and the Powick Asylum Music. In March 2017 he conducted the first performance since 1882 of Elgar's first orchestral work, the Air de Ballet.

(SOLO.)

* 3. Her skipper was mate of a buck-o ship Which al-ways killed one
 4. Her mate was skipper of a chap-el in Wales, And so he fights in
 5. Her en-gin-er is fif-ty-eight, So he's pre-pared to
 6. Her lead-ing-sto-ker's sev-en-teen, So he don't know what th

man per trip, So he is used to rov-in', a-rov-in',
 top-per and tails, Re-lig-i-ous tho' rov-in', a-rov-in',
 meet his fate, Which ain't un-like-ly rov-in', a-rov-in',
 Judg-ments mean, Un-less he cops-'em rov-in', a-rov-in',

cresc. (CHORUS) allargando
 rov-in', The Lord knows where!

cresc. f colla parte sf a tempo

(SOLO.)
 7. Her cook was chef in the Lost Dogs' Home,

* In these four stanzas (any of which may be omitted) the tune should be freely adapted, syllabically, to the lilt of the words.
 E. & S. 4984.

A document of recording history: The author's score of *The Fringes of the Fleet* with the vocal counterpoint pencilled in (Barry Collett's archive)

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

Kevin Mitchell

The first article appeared in the Elgar Society Journal for December 2015 to mark the centenary of the production; it set out details of Blackwood’s early life and the circumstances which brought about the novel ‘A Prisoner in Fairyland’ which formed the basis of the play. It summarised those involved in the transition from novel to stage – Violet Pearn, Muriel Pratt and Lena Ashwell, followed by an account of Elgar’s willing involvement in the autumn of 1915, the difficulties leading up to the first performance, the critical reaction to the short run and the acoustic recording made by Elgar, Charles Mott and Agnes Nicholls in February 1916. This article sets out the history of the work from 1916 onwards.

After the closure of the initial run of performances, the subsequent history of *The Starlight Express* was troubled: the prospect of a revival was hampered, for whilst the autograph score eventually found its way to Elkin & Co, it appears that the parts were subsequently destroyed in a fire at the Kingsway Theatre.¹ Whilst some of the music was arranged for BBC. broadcasts in the 1930s, this too was ill-fated, as the score and parts of that arrangement were destroyed in the blitz of 1940. Further attempts to broadcast the work met with obstacles and it was only in 1965 that a performance was eventually realised. The music then gradually became better known and a significant milestone was attained in 1976 when a recording of the full score was issued. Further individual productions and performances garnered increasing interest, until almost a hundred years after the premiere, it rose like a phoenix from the ashes, with the music and words being published for the first time followed by an enterprising recording of all the music intermingled with a new narration, which went a long way to solve the problem of how to marry the plot and the music in a relevant, modern manner.

1916

When the London production of *The Starlight Express* ceased in January 1916 there were few expressions of interest in arranging further performances. However Charles Mott gave two performances of the three Organ-Grinder’s songs with the Hereford Orchestral Society under the direction of G.R. Sinclair in April 1916.

¹ There was only ever one full score, being Elgar’s manuscript score, which was used as the conducting score in the original run and for performances in later years and eventually found its way to Elkin & Co.. In the 1960s Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore found the score on the floor in Robert Elkin’s office (then at Novello’s) in three big folios, one for each act (together with *Polonia* and *The Sanguine Fan*). Concerned to preserve these scores Dr Moore suggested to Robert Elkin that the three manuscripts be lodged with The British Museum. Elkin immediately agreed and Dr Moore carried the scores from Wardour Street to The British Museum. Letter Jerrold Northrop Moore to the author 20 October 2016.



Charles Mott with the children on stage in *The Starlight Express* (Lewis Foreman’s Collection)

A very different rendition caught the ear of Alice Stuart Wortley in October 1916 as she informed Alice Elgar:

Coming along Cheyne Walk, I saw two lads about 10 & 12 walking along singing at the top of their voices & very correctly too, ‘My old tunes are rather broken & they come from far away’ etc their fresh young voices rising above the wind.

I caught them up & stopped them & said What’s that yr singing & where did you learn it – oh that’s ‘My old tunes’ they answered – & we learnt it at the ‘Oratory Schools’ Miss Weston teaches us & we sing lots more! I said well done, go on sing it all the way home & tell Miss Weston how much pleasure you have given!

Isn’t that a pretty story – & is that not Fame?²



Algernon Blackwood and Edward Elgar at Hayes recording studio on 18 February 1916 when *The Starlight Express* was recorded (Arthur Reynolds’ Archive)

² EBM letter 9716, 20 October 1916

Blackwood and the Elgars

The friendship forged between the Elgars and Blackwood flourished and he became a frequent visitor at Severn House. They called him 'Starlight'. On 24 March 1916 Alice invited him to lunch at her club, followed by an afternoon at the cinema.³ On 10 May Blackwood accompanied her to one of the performances of *The Dream of Gerontius* given that week at Queen's Hall and joined her again the following evening. Blackwood brought his brother, sister-in-law and nephew to Hampstead on 13 July. Alice noted in her diary: 'The nice dear man stayed to dinner & he and E. played & played late pool⁴ – sad for him to go so far away to Salonika –'⁵

On 8 October on his way to Severn House in the Finchley Road he met Elgar, who had a toad in his pocket. Alice noted: 'E. had bought it off some boys for 2d. He did not think it was happy with them – He put it in the garden & calls it Algernon ...'.

Blackwood stayed again at Severn House from 26 to 28 November 1917. On 4 January 1918 he came to dinner: 'Very pleasant. E. & he played plate pool all the evening.'

He twice visited Brinkwells, the Elgars' West Sussex retreat near Fittleworth. After his first visit, on 18/19 July 1918, Alice, with whom he was now a firm favourite, noted that he 'Looked so refreshed by his stay – So sorry for him to go. Exactly the Brinkwells guest. He did wonderful feats with [a] leaping pole, jumping up to top of gate [at the] head of [the] lane & standing on the top of it.' Blackwood came again on 19 August 1919: 'About 12 Starlight ... arrived ... Did so enjoy seeing him – Many a merry laugh – He & E. had long talk over the Starlight Express – Do wish something might come of it. E. & A. walked through the woods with [him] going back -Starlight's clothes & boots wonderful: but he looked so fine'.

There was to be no revival of the production. In January 1916 Blackwood had hoped that they would collaborate on a second theatrical project,⁶ but nothing transpired. He was abroad when Alice Elgar died in April 1920 but wrote a heartfelt letter of condolence.⁷ He maintained his friendship; Elgar's and Carice's diaries record his subsequent visits to Severn House for dinner and plate pool.

On 5 January 1921 Elgar, Carice and Madge Grafton went to a matinee of Blackwood's play *Through the Crack* at the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead. Carice's diary noted they 'Enjoyed it on the whole, though Father thought it might have been improved – nice music'.⁸

3 They saw the 1915 silent epic drama film *Birth of a Nation* which told of the relationship of two families during and after the American Civil War and starred Lillian Gish. Available from Amazon and Blu-ray.com.

4 Plate pool is version of the billiards type game of pool. The metal (often brass) around the pockets of the pool table is called a 'plate'. In am indebted to Helen Norris for this information.

5 Blackwood had offered his services to the Field Ambulance Service and throughout 1916 expected to be summoned to work abroad, but there were continual delays. If he expected to go to Salonika, this was not realised. See Mike Ashley, *Starlight Man, The Extraordinary Life of Algernon Blackwood* (London: Constable, 2001), 216.

6 Blackwood to Elgar, 1 January 1916, BL-017AddMS69834f10.

7 EBM letter 409, 23 April 1920. 'It all makes me ache so for you-and the impossibility of helping or comforting is terrible.'

8 *Through the Crack* opened at the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead on 15 September 1920. This second Blackwood collaboration with Violet Pearn, partly based on Blackwood's novel *The Education of Uncle Paul*, was successful, being revived several times, and was Blackwood's only stage play to be published. The music was composed by a member of the company, Laurence Hanray. The cast included Felix Aylmer and Gilly Flower, who years later was to play Miss Tibbs, one of the elderly residents at Fawley

In 1923 Blackwood undertook a small acting part in John Drinkwater's play *Oliver Cromwell*, and Elgar travelled to Brighton for the opening night,⁹ but, with Elgar's move back to Worcestershire later that year, the friendship with Blackwood faded. Memories of *The Starlight Express* remained. In 1928, discussing a possible 'coupling' for a prospective disc to be recorded at a session on 3 February 1928 Elgar wrote to Trevor Osmond Williams at HMV:

For the other side of the disc I think we will avoid *The Starlight Express* as there is always the possibility that this may be revived in its entirety.¹⁰

Enquiries were set in hand to locate the music and Elgar wrote to Robert Elkin to advise that 'The orchestral parts were returned to your firm after the recording ten years ago & I do not think they have been used since they are not in my possession.'¹¹ Later he recalled that it was the orchestral score of *The Sanguine Fan* that had been returned; 'The orchl. 'material' of ... [*The Starlight Express*] belonged to the theatre & as you suggested was in all probability lost there.'¹² However 'on thinking over *The Starlight Express*, I remember that according to custom, the copying was paid for by the Theatre, then controlled by Miss Ashworth. Is it possible that some library (Goodwin) may have purchased the 'library' of the theatre – if there was one?'¹³ It is likely that the parts did remain in the theatre and were subsequently lost in a fire, but the original manuscript score reposed with Robert Elkin.

That a revival might become a reality was raised in November 1930 by Elizabeth Belloc, the daughter of Hilaire Belloc. As a child she had met Elgar and Blackwood at the Kingsway Theatre in 1916. After talking to Anthony Bernard, who shared the conducting at the original production, she wrote to Elgar that they both:

...discovered that we had a great enthusiasm for your & Mr. Blackwood's lovely play & we wondered if it would be possible to revive it. ... Mr. Blackwood adores your music but is much too humble about his unique libretto. He says it will need drastic cutting etc. It would not be impossible to shorten it, & shape it a little more & there may just be time to get it going by January ... One reason for an effort to get it on at once, in spite of the difficulties, is the fact that there is a need for lovely fantastic things like the *Starlight Express* about Christmastide... I felt that it failed only by a matter of inches – inches that could be dealt with successfully with a little effort ... I long to restore this enchanted memory of my childhood to the place that must wait for it in everybody's heart.¹⁴

Towers. For the second revival in 1922 Muriel Pratt was finally offered a part in a Blackwood/Pearn production. A third revival in 1925 marked the first professional theatrical work for Laurence Olivier. See Ashley *Starlight Man*, 242-243.

9 Elgar to Alice Stuart Wortley 19 February 1923, EBM letter 9709, and to Carice, 19 February 1923, EBM letter 247. The play opened on 19 February at Brighton Theatre Royal with Blackwood as Colonel Pemberton and Henry Ainley as Cromwell.

10 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar on Record* (Oxford University Press, 1974), 80.

11 Elgar to Robert Elkin, 3 August 1928, EBM Letter Book 259.

12 Elgar to Robert Elkin, 14 August 1928, EBM Letter Book 259.

13 Elgar to Robert Elkin, 18 August 1928, EBM Letter Book 259.

14 Elizabeth Belloc to Elgar, 6 November 1930, EBM letter 9021.

William Elkin,¹⁵ (who retained the original score), wrote to Elgar on 2 January 1931 to state that Elizabeth Belloc had contacted Blackwood and the libretto was being revised and she seemed:

... to think that there is a fair chance of the play being reproduced next Christmas. I much hope that will prove to be the case, for I have always felt it was a great pity that your delightful music should have been prejudiced by the obvious drawbacks in the libretto as it stood.¹⁶

Joseph Lewis and the BBC

Whilst no theatrical revival took place, there were moves by the conductor Joseph Lewis¹⁷ to revive it on the wireless. In November 1930 he wrote to the composer, and Elgar replied on 26 November: 'Anytime I shall be glad to discuss the possibilities of 'The Starlight Express'.'¹⁸ By January 1931 Elkin thought that the BBC plans had been dropped. It appears they were only in abeyance for on 23 October 1931 Elgar wrote to Elkin:

I have been waiting to hear from [the BBC] & and the last I heard some months ago, was that someone wd come here & talk it over: nothing has happened. I saw Mr Lewis at [a] concert on the 1st & he said nothing about it. I am sending him a note today.¹⁹

He enquired if the project was dead²⁰. Lewis replied on 27 October:

...I am very sorry that the matter of 'The Starlight Express' has been left over for so long ...The matter stands thus. The member of 'Productions Department' who suggested a radio version, is not very keen on the 'book' and desired to make numerous alterations. This I feared would not meet with your approval, and I therefore suggest that we use the music of the songs with the story (not acted) in between. There are also certain music episodes which might be used as connecting links. ... the parts are all lost, but we could make new ones from the Score.... I can forsee [*sic*] a charming little concert made from that material. Please let me know what you think.²¹



Joseph Lewis, conductor

15 William W.A. Elkin (1863-1937) founded Elkin and Co. in 1903. He published many of Elgar's works after 1914.

16 William Elkin to Elgar, 2 January 1931, EBM letter 1243.

17 Joseph Lewis (1879-1954), conductor *inter alia* of the City of Birmingham Choir. From 1923 to 1930 he was Musical Director of the BBC in Birmingham and after 1930 became a BBC staff conductor in London.

18 Elgar to Lewis, 26 November 1930, Music Library of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

19 Elgar to William Elkin, 23 October 1931, EBM Letter Book 261.

20 Elgar to Lewis, 23 October 1931, EBM Letter Book 261.

21 Lewis to Elgar, 27 October 1930, EBM letter 1633.

This met with Elgar's approval as Lewis responded on 3 November:

It is extremely generous of you to agree to a radio version of 'The Starlight Express'. I quite agree that it is indeed some of your loveliest music, and I will take up the matter with Mr. Boult at once.²²

Elgar informed the publishers, forwarding them letters from the BBC, and Elkin responded on 7 November:

I am glad to hear that there is every possibility of a radio version of 'The Starlight Express' being broadcast. Of course they ought to pay something for the privilege and presume they will communicate with you on that point.²³

The matter moved slowly for Lewis wrote to Elgar again on 15 February 1933:

I am still hoping that this year we shall be able to put on that suggested programme embodying the songs and incidental music from 'The Starlight Express'. The latest suggestion that has been made is not to use the book at all, but just to present the music, which I think perhaps, under the circumstances, would be the better plan.²⁴

Joseph Lewis continued to work on his arrangement of the songs and these were first broadcast on 22 December 1933, during Elgar's final illness. The artists were Alice Moxon and her husband Stuart Robertson with a section of the BBC Orchestra under Lewis.

In December 1935 Moxon and Robertson recorded five of the songs. The *Gramophone* was moved to:

... express gratitude to H.M.V. for recording the songs from Elgar's music to "The Starlight Express" ... *The Wand of Youth Suites* show Elgar's aptitude for writing children's music, and the opportunity to write for this production must have been a welcome relief from the patriotic music which was expected at that time.²⁵

For the second broadcast on 14 February 1935, Lewis wrote a substantial introduction to the music in *Radio Times* including the following:

The music, alas, is not available. The score²⁶ and parts were lost in a fire at the Kingsway Theatre, and when some months before his death I asked Sir Edward if he had a rough score from which he might give us at last some of the best numbers, he sent me a rough draft of the original score, telling me that he really hadn't the time, but authorising me to use it as I wished. So with a great deal of pains and much trepidation all the numbers [to be broadcast] ... (excepting the three baritone songs which had been published) were restored. It was with relief that this met with Elgar's approval, for it was nearly the last music he heard.²⁷

22 Lewis to Elgar 3 November 1931, EBM letter 1634. Adrian Boult was the BBC's Director of Music.

23 William Elkin to Elgar, 7 November 1931, EBM letter 1632.

24 Lewis to Elgar, 15 February 1933, EBM letter 2595.

25 *Gramophone* (December 1935), 285. The songs were issued on CD *Elgar's Interpreters on Record, Volume 1* (The Elgar Society: Dutton, 1997), CDAX 8019.

26 Lewis's recollection is incorrect. The autograph manuscript score *did* survive as this was the conducting copy retained by Elkin. Presumably Elgar asked Elkin to send the original score to Lewis so he could make up new parts for his broadcasts.

27 Joseph Lewis, *Radio Times*, 10 February 1935.

His arrangement was broadcast again on 16 February²⁸ and 26 November 1939, and, for the fifth and last time, on 20 February 1940 (approximately 45 minutes of music) as Lewis's score and parts were destroyed in the blitz later that year.

Blackwood, spending his first winter in England for many years, due to the outbreak of war, heard the Home Service broadcast in November 1939 and a dispute arose over the lack of his broadcasting fees as the BBC did not realise, when obtaining permission from the publishers, Elkin & Co., that this only covered the music and not the whole work. The question was resolved by Blackwood's agent A.P. Watt who heard from the BBC:

I understand that Mr. Blackwood is willing to accept a fee of ten guineas for his interest in the broadcast given on 20 February last. I have discussed the whole matter again with Mr. Elkin and we are now prepared to offer Mr. Blackwood a fee of five guineas for each of the three previous performances, making at total of twenty five guineas in all, the fee to be paid jointly by Messrs. Elkin and the B.B.C.²⁹

Further attempts at a revival

Violet Pearn – author of the 1915 script – attempted to interest the BBC early in 1939 when she sent it to Val Gielgud, the head of radio drama.³⁰ It seems that Gielgud did not comment on it but simply returned the script years later in January 1945.

Blackwood had started his broadcasting career in April 1934 when he read a ghost story on the wireless and thereafter he became an intermittent voice on the radio. In May 1944 Muriel Pratt (who in 1915 had interested Lena Ashwell in the play) was working in the Features and Drama department of the BBC so Blackwood sent her a copy of the 'Starlight' script, believing that it might form the basis of a children's programme. The BBC's attitude was set out in a memo of 22 May 1944:

Oh dear, oh dear! The combination of Algernon Blackwood and Violet Pearn results in complete lunacy. I just cannot read this wafty whimsicality. It can't have been put on the stage in this form. I suspect the blue-pencilled copy was very different.³¹

The Head of 'Children's Hour', Derek McCulloch ('Uncle Mac') wrote on 31 May 1944:

28 The singers were Gwen Catley and Henry Cummings (who was to record songs from *The Starlight Express* in 1946). The broadcast on 16 February, in a programme called 'To the Children', also included extracts from the two *Wand of Youth* suites and the *Nursery Suite*.

29 BBC to A.P. Watt 22 May 1940. Simmons papers on *The Starlight Express*, EBM, uncatalogued. There had in fact been five previous performances. Dr K.E.L. Simmons was a research zoologist who carried out pioneering research into *The Starlight Express*. His long essay 'Elgar and The Wonderful Stranger: music for *The Starlight Express*' appeared in *Elgar Studies*, ed. Raymond Monk (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990). The papers relating to his further research for a planned additional article- which was never realised - were lodged after his death at the Elgar Birthplace Museum (now *The Firs*). I am indebted to him and have utilised his papers for this study.

30 Val Henry Gielgud (1900-1981) English actor, writer, director, and broadcaster. In 1929 he was appointed Head of Productions responsible for all radio drama at the BBC, a post he held for 20 years.

31 BBC memorandum by Miss Jenkins of 'Children's Hour', 22 May 1944. Simmons papers.

We could not possibly use this sort of MS in 'Children's Hour'. With all respect I would say our standard is infinitely higher. I am sorry for anyone who may have to attempt an adaptation of this MS as it stands.³²

Pratt apologised 'for sending ... such a useless script'³³ but, undaunted, reported to Violet Pearn:

The Children's Hour Director has read the script of "The Starlight Express" and does not like it at all and I can understand it in a way, as the script as it stands, is so particularly unsuitable for radio. Strictly between ourselves, I am going to have a shot to see if it is possible to make a radio script of it. It may be a complete failure but if it is anything else I will get in touch with you for your collaboration and approval.³⁴

Pratt decided not to inform Blackwood of her intention – she carried out a considerable revision, particularly to the ending – but died in January 1945 before finishing the task. Violet Pearn then acquired Pratt's draft and had it typed and was able to write to Blackwood on 27 February 1945:

The script of 'The Starlight Express' will reach you in a few days. It was sent to me through Muriel Pratt's executors a short time ago, with the request that I should have a version typed and sent to Val Gielgud. It was complete but in hand-writing... I don't know at all if they will like it but they will communicate with you.³⁵

She sent the typescript to Val Gielgud on 28 February stating that she thought 'the play much improved. It has lost the slight pompousness left from Lena Ashwell's dreadful production',³⁶ and also to Blackwood who replied from the Savile Club on 16 March 1945:

The new script arrived safely and I've read it with very great interest. It's certainly a most gallant attempt to treat a difficult theme ... I've always felt that the original script was hopelessly difficult for the air and that's why I "condemned" it ... Anyway she [Pratt] has done wonders in the way of cutting and condensation ... I've always felt it was the absence of action and drama which makes the book so difficult for the stage... Now about the new version: It seems to me that the first thing is for me to see Elkin about the music. The script seems to omit this, using little more than the Organ Grinder's song. Yet I think it is Elgar's lovely music that might tempt the BBC to do something, rather than the play itself, and Elgar's music ... ran all through it reaching up to a really magnificent climax at the final curtain. I'll try to see Elkin tomorrow and see how and where the music can be used... My original idea, you may remember, was a new script so arranged as to bring in all, or most of the music. I hardly think the BBC could manage this as they don't know any of the music except one or two songs they occasionally perform.³⁷

In an attempt to win over Gielgud, Robert Elkin³⁸ wrote to him on 20 March 1945, first setting out

32 BBC memorandum, Derek McCulloch, 31 May 1944, Simmons papers.

33 BBC memorandum, Muriel Pratt, 1 June 1944, Simmons papers.

34 Muriel Pratt to Violet Pearn, 2 June 1944, Simmons papers.

35 Violet Pearn to Blackwood, 27 February 1945, Simmons papers.

36 Pearn to Val Gielgud, 28 February 1945, Simmons papers.

37 Blackwood to Pearn, 16 March 1945, Simmons papers.

38 Robert S. Elkin (1896-1964), son of William Elkin. He became Managing Director of Elkin & Co. in 1937. Author of a history of Queen's Hall (London: Rider & Co., 1944).

the history of this revised script, which Blackwood had shown to him:

I do not know whether you yourself have seen this script, or whether you have formed any opinion about a radio version of Mr. Blackwood's work, incorporating some of the music which Elgar wrote for the stage version; but it seems to me that we have here the germs of a unique 'Starred Programme' if the thing can be put into the right shape... My own interest in the matter ... arises from the fact that I possess Elgar's original full score and I have led the negotiations which led to an earlier radio production of the play (December 1933) when a selection of the music was prepared by Joseph Lewis.³⁹

Gielgud replied that he had not yet read the script but that he would be in touch if there was any reasonable likelihood of a broadcast.⁴⁰

But despite Elkin's views Gielgud once again rejected it replying to Elkin on 13 April 1945:

I have read the "Starlight Express" script, and it has also been considered by the Controller of Programmes, and our view is, that under present conditions of broadcasting we are not very happy about its prospects.⁴¹

... but he ventured to hope that after the war, with more than a single wavelength available, extra rehearsal time would permit more elaborate experimental productions.

Elkin passed the news on to Blackwood on 17 April 1945, enclosing Gielgud's letter, and suggested that:

... a programme of the music connected by a suitable narration, would not only avoid elaborate production and rehearsal but would also be more effective than a 'dramatic' script.⁴²

However nothing further came of this.

J.B. Priestley and Mary Mills

Alongside these negotiations another prospective script writer emerged, following the publication in January 1945 of an important article on *The Starlight Express* in *Music & Letters* by A.E.L. Keeton who wrote that:

... there happens to be alive now, and in the full flush of his artistic career, one with much the same kind of imagination as Elgar and Blackwood, who... could, if he would, distil a script from *A Prisoner in Fairyland* to fit Elgar's score perfectly. I am thinking of J.B. Priestley, who has the same insight into the child mind, the same brand of what one may term mystic clear-sightedness. He is ... musically equipped for the task, and above all completely at home in theatre or film world – and what a magnificent film ... the Blackwood-Elgar *Starlight Express* combination conjures up. Is there no one to put the proposition before Mr. Priestley?⁴³

39 Robert Elkin to Val Gielgud, 20 March 1945, Simmons papers.

40 Gielgud to Robert Elkin, 22 March 1945, Simmons papers.

41 Gielgud to Elkin, 13 April 1945, Simmons papers.

42 Elkin to Blackwood, 17 April 1945, Simmons papers.

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

Well, there was, as Elkin informed Blackwood on 22 January 1945:

I knew all about Miss Keeton's article long before it was in print, and I sent a copy of it to Priestley as soon as it appeared. (I rather think I mentioned it to you ... my idea of trying to interest him in the idea of writing a new script). I had a conversation with him on the telephone about 10 days ago, after he had read the article, and he seemed quite disposed to consider the project ... What I had in mind myself originally was not so much a new script for broadcasting as a new stage version; but I am now inclined to think that the film would be a still better medium.⁴⁴

After reading the novel J.B. Priestley was less disposed, as Elkin informed Blackwood on 24 January:

I had another conversation with Priestley yesterday. Since my earlier talk with him he has read "A Prisoner in Fairyland" and he now tells me that he is very doubtful whether he would be capable of making a good stage adaptation. Indeed he thinks it would be very difficult for anybody to translate the story satisfactorily in terms of the theatre.⁴⁵

Priestley confirmed this to Blackwood on 26 January 1945:

My own feeling is that, apart from some minor blemishes, the faults in the dramatized version are inherent in the original story, which is very much elaborately descriptive narrative and not drama. In short, your novel does not really lend itself to dramatization.⁴⁶

He thought that the ideal medium would be an animated film and suggested the novel be sent to Walt Disney!

Blackwood then sent a synopsis of the play and his novel to Mary Hayley Bell, wife of John Mills. She tactfully replied that it was:

... too good for a picture. It is not commercial enough unless people were prepared to make it in a child's fantasy picture, which would be wonderful. What a pity, because it is so beautiful.⁴⁷

Basil Ashmore and Nancy Bush

In 1948 the dramatist Basil Ashmore⁴⁸ wished to adapt Blackwood's story 'Ancient Sorceries'. On meeting him, Blackwood discovered that Ashmore was skilled in revising plays that had been unsuccessful, and so asked him to prepare a revised libretto for *The Starlight Express*. Ashmore agreed and informed Blackwood in October 1948:

44 Robert Elkin to Blackwood, 22 January 1945, Simmons papers.

45 Robert Elkin to Blackwood, 24 January 1945, Simmons papers.

46 Priestley to Blackwood, 26 January 1945. Mike Ashley, *Starlight Man* (London: Constable, 2001), 211.

47 Mary Bell to Blackwood, 12 November 1945. *Starlight Man*, 318.

48 Basil Ashmore (1915-1998) British theatrical director and author. Adapted and translated existing works such as *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* and *The Spoils of Poynton*.

I shall look on the Elgar proposition as a very great honour ... “Starlight Express” ought to be a very great success. I’ve just spoken to a BBC man & they are keenly interested.⁴⁹

Elkin sent Ashmore the score and reported to Blackwood ‘I have had a word with him on the telephone, and he seems to be keen on the job’.⁵⁰

That this would be no easy task was noted by Miss A.E. Keeton who, on sending her 1945 article to Ashmore, confided to Blackwood:

I should say it is an exceptionally difficult piece of work to evolve a good libretto out of your book, to fit into Elgar’s particular style. As I said in the *Music and Letters* article you are [an] essential elaborator and Elgar was essentially a condenser. However, Basil Ashmore seems to think he can do it – I hope that he can but it is very sad that there is no-one apparently willing and able to help him out.⁵¹

Ashmore retained the material for six months or more. At one stage he advised Blackwood that:

Starlight Express is held up a little by the difficulty of reading the Elgar score. This is in such a bad state that I have had to ask a musician to reduce it to a piano score for intelligibility due to the many alterations made by the composer in his score, with no definitive final edition.⁵²

Regrettably existing work commitments, and then an illness, forced him to withdraw.⁵³ Years later he recalled:

I was approached by Algernon Blackwood with the original text of the play and the full orchestral score of Elgar’s music. He was most anxious for me to prepare a new version of the text, fitting it to the music, as he said he had a manager waiting to present it in a West End theatre. Unfortunately, with the best will in the world (and a great liking for Blackwood’s fine tale) I was simply unable to see any way in which an inherently over-sweet fantasy could be made acceptable to a modern audience. So, regrettably, I handed the book and the score back to the author.⁵⁴

On returning the documents to Blackwood he recommended the television playwright Nancy Bush. Once again Elkin was midwife to the project, writing to Blackwood to ask if he knew her work and offering ‘to put the wheels in motion’⁵⁵ if he wanted to contact her. On 30 October he confirmed to Blackwood that he had ‘written pretty fully to Mrs. Bush and suggested that, if the idea appeals to her, she should get in touch with you. I do hope something will come of it.’⁵⁶ She gave Blackwood a holding response and replied more fully on 7 December 1950:

49 Ashmore to Blackwood, October 1948, Simmons papers.

50 Robert Elkin to Blackwood, 24 November 1948, Simmons papers.

51 Keeton to Blackwood, 1 December 1948, Simmons papers.

52 Ashmore to Blackwood, undated, Simmons papers.

53 He was already working on a new libretto of *Il Seraglio* for a Glyndebourne production, was involved with a new production of *Carmen* for the Carl Rosa Opera Company, and was working on three plays.

54 Ashmore letter to *The Gramophone* (March 1974), 1800. Years later he told Blackwood’s biographer, Mike Ashley, that ‘he was sorry he had not been able to complete the project as he knew how anxious Blackwood was to get the play back into production.’ Ashley, *Starlight Man*, 333.

55 Elkin to Blackwood, 26 October 1950, Simmons papers.

56 Elkin to Blackwood, 30 October 1950, Simmons papers.

I went to see Mr. Elkin yesterday and I went through the musical score of “The Starlight Express”. This is very long and complicated, containing besides the songs and set numbers a great deal of incidental music mingling with the actual dialogue. So I feel with Mr. Elkin that if I am to attempt to use all this music I should really have to see the original libretto, to understand how it is all fitted in. If you have a copy, as Mr. Elkin thinks you have, would you agree to letting me see it at this stage? ⁵⁷

She sent a three page outline of the play as she imagined it in three acts and perceptively added: ‘My feeling is that there should be a contrast between reality and the magical part’.⁵⁸ By 21st February 1951 she finished the first draft of the play and sent Blackwood, who was abroad, a summary, particularly of Acts II and III, and asked:

I wonder if you are now staying in the original village of your story? In writing the play, I have had in mind a little village called Beatenberg, above Lake Thun, where I once stayed for three months though I expect it was very different from the scene of your original story.⁵⁹

Blackwood approved of her work and on 27 May 1951 she wrote ‘I am so glad you like the three acts so far as they go.’⁶⁰ They planned to discuss it with the BBC. but once again the project came to nothing.

For over thirty-five years Blackwood had tried to revive his play and the music, which shows how much his ‘message of beauty and universal harmony’⁶¹ meant to him, but he died in December 1951, his intention unfulfilled.

*Raymond Raikes*⁶²

However, eventually the BBC considered a radio production was both viable and suitable. In December 1965 *Radio Times* noted:

The radio producer Raymond Raikes ... found the book-of-the-play – two acts only - at the British Drama League Library, and the missing act in a bookseller’s cellar. Now, after exactly fifty years, *The Starlight Express* can set out again on its magical journey to the stars to the accompaniment of Elgar’s scintillating music.

Lionel Salter, who edited the music and conducted the BBC Welsh Orchestra, recalled:

In 1965 the discovery of the complete text of the play prompted the BBC to mount a production,

57 Nancy Bush to Blackwood, 7 December 1950, Simmons papers.

58 *Ibid.*, 7 December 1950.

59 Bush to Blackwood, 21 February 1951, Simmons papers.

60 Bush to Blackwood, 27 May 1951, Simmons papers.

61 Ashley, 333.

62 Raymond Raikes was related to Alice Elgar. His grandfather, William Alves Raikes (1846-1920) was Alice’s cousin. He and his wife Vera (1853-1942) supported the marriage to Elgar, and the *Vesper Voluntaries* were dedicated to Vera. Their eldest son, Charles S.M. Raikes (1879 – 1945) was Raymond’s father.

for which I edited the score (going back to Elgar's MSS in the British Museum); and this proved so popular that it was twice repeated. Since then there has been a large number of enquiries for the music ... The very Elgarian score, which draws extensively on the "Little bells" movement of *The Wand of Youth*, contains much that is charming and fresh, both in fragile and sentimental vein, though the words are often somewhat embarrassingly fey.⁶³

Raikes' version was broadcast on 26 December 1965⁶⁴ and a longer, revised version was broadcast on 26 December 1968. It was given again in 'Archive Week' – having been voted for by listeners who wished to relive great moments of musical broadcasting – on 13 December 2004.

The Starlight Express on record

In September 1946 Charles Groves, in his first recording, conducted Henry Cummings in 'My Old Tunes' and 'To the Children'.⁶⁵ The *Gramophone* reviewer noted 'every word of Mr. Cummings's songs can clearly be heard and he has the right imaginative conception of the music. It is also a pleasure to hear such a lively and sensitive orchestral accompaniment'⁶⁶ – a prescient comment on a conductor who was to become a noted Elgar interpreter.

For most record collectors, their first acquaintance with the music may have come when the same two songs were recorded by Frederick Harvey, together with other Elgar salon pieces. Malcolm Walker recalled that he:

attended the sessions in March 1964 at Abbey Road Studios for the LP entitled "The Miniature Elgar" when Lawrence Collingwood conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The idea of him conducting a programme of Elgar's lighter music, made soon after the screening of the celebrated Ken Russell film, which opened many people's eyes to the music of Elgar, was [that of] EMI Records' house producer Brian Culverhouse ... John Whittle and other EMI colleagues wholeheartedly concurred and the project went ahead.⁶⁷

Collingwood had attended most of Elgar's recording sessions between 1926 and 1933 and knowing the music well, he was persuaded out of retirement to make this last recording. Unhappily the *Gramophone* reviewer, Trevor Harvey, was unsympathetic: 'The purpose, if any, of this recording escapes me. If it is meant to entertain, then somebody should have made a better programme of it'. The *Starlight* songs were:

extended pieces, full of mood changes, yet the most devoted Elgarian would be unlikely to want to hear them often. They are sometimes bracing: but they also have passages that slightly embarrass me, though whether this comes from the words or from the way Frederick Harvey sings them – or both – I am not sure.⁶⁸

63 Lionel Salter, *Gramophone* (January 1974), 1372.

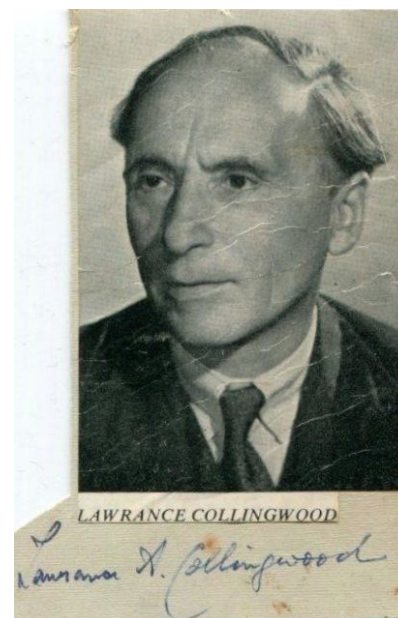
64 The cast included Patrick Barr as Henry Rogers, Noel Howlett as Daddy and Dennis Dowling as The Organ-Grinder.

65 Decca K 1995 issued in December 1948. For full details of all *The Starlight Express* recordings see John Knowles, *Elgar's Interpreters on Record*, Elgar Society website.

66 *Gramophone* (January 1949), 131.

67 Malcolm Walker, 'Lawrence Collingwood', lecture given to the London Branch of the Elgar Society at Queen's College Preparatory School, on 13 May 2013. Unpublished.

68 *Gramophone* (October 1964), 182.



Left: Lawrence Collingwood, conductor. Right: Collingwood with the EMI producer Brian B. Culverhouse in No.1 studio, Abbey Road in March 1964 when Collingwood came out of retirement to conduct 'The Miniature Elgar'. The wooden music stand is the one which Elgar's valet made for him when he supervised the HMV recordings from Marl Bank in January 1934, when Collingwood conducted excerpts from Elgar's cantata *Caractacus* in studio No.1 at Abbey Road, London, which Elgar heard in Worcester by Post Office telephone lines (*EMI Records*)

He concluded it was a dull collection with tame performances, but despite this carping review the recording was a commercial success, linked as it was to the Ken Russell television film. When the recording was reissued in 1979 *Gramophone* made amends; 'It is beautifully recorded, the stereo fresh and with luminous woodwind. The music is very successfully laid out so that the anthology makes an enjoyable concert'.⁶⁹ The songs from *The Starlight Express* were the highlight of the disc, together with the sympathetic conducting from Collingwood.⁷⁰

In 1969 Pearl Records started to reissue Elgar's acoustic recordings on LP and the second volume of 'The Elgar Edition' restored the 1916 78s of *The Starlight Express* to the catalogue.⁷¹ Lionel Salter in *Gramophone* welcomed the enterprise of a small company in making these available after the legal fifty year period, noting:

69 *Gramophone* (March 1979), 1562.

70 'On the LP Frederick Harvey sang the word 'rising' with a final 'G' whereas the sung text has 'risin'' without the final 'G'. This was removed by Abbey Road engineer Simon Gibson for the CD release'. Malcolm Walker lecture 13 May 2013. There are some further minor errors to the sung text in Harvey's diction.

71 GEM 111. Now available with all of Elgar's acoustic recordings, on four CDs excellently restored by Lani Spahr, Music and Arts CD-1257.

Charles Mott is splendidly relaxed and clear as the organ-grinder who is a quasi-Greek chorus, but the recording is not kind to Agnes Nicholls's upper register, and her words are unintelligible.

Existence of the songs led some to claim that the work represented Elgar's nearest approach to opera, but Salter correctly observed that 'the songs mostly stand, in a curious way, rather outside the action.'⁷²

In 1973 Polydor recorded an LP, *Elgar: Music for the Theatre* combining the world premiere recording of the *King Arthur Suite* and eight items from *The Starlight Express* with John Lawrenson and Cynthia Glover. George Hurst conducted the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, which was used as its size replicated the original theatre pit orchestra as used at the Kingsway Theatre. Roger Wimbush in *Gramophone* set out the chequered history of the score and parts from 1916, ending in Lionel Salter's creation of a new set of parts in 1965.

Sometime later a full score copied out many years earlier by the late Jack Beaver⁷³ came to light in the library of the Royal Academy of Music and George Hurst, in preparing for the recording, used this when he found the photocopy of Elgar's manuscript score difficult to decipher. However it was found that many orchestral cues and bar references in Beaver's RAM score and in Lionel Salter's BBC parts didn't agree and with little more than a fortnight to go before recording three London copyists were engaged to compile a set of orchestral parts from the Beaver score.⁷⁴

On an earlier examination of Beaver's score, Salter concluded that it was made from Elgar's manuscript, but there were small omissions relating to accents, bowing and dynamic markings and:

In some of the worst of the Elgar snakes-and-ladder pages it is not surprising that he has come out with a slightly different assessment from me about which bars are supposed to be in and which out. I would sum it up by saying that the differences between our two scores are minute...⁷⁵

Raymond Raikes, on seeing the Beaver score, agreed that it was based on Elgar's MS.

Where a word is illegible in the Elgar manuscript, Beaver has either omitted it entirely or makes a guess, sometimes a wrong one, and this is noticeable not only in the word cues, with their individual Elgar phrasing, but also in the lyrics of the songs...⁷⁶

This gave rise to a number of verbal infelicities in the recording due to a reliance on the mis-transcriptions in the Beaver score.⁷⁷

72 *Gramophone* (April 1970), 1656.

73 Jack Beaver (1900-1963), British film score composer. It is not known when Beaver edited the score of *The Starlight Express* but it was bequeathed to the Royal Academy of Music in 1964.

74 Roger Wimbush, 'Here and There', *Gramophone* (August 1973), 327.

75 Copy memorandum from Lionel Salter to the BBC music librarian. 9 February 1968. RAM library.

76 Copy memorandum from Raymond Raikes to the BBC music librarian, 15 February 1968. RAM library.

77 The Beaver score contains a number of incorrect words: 'how dull you are' as opposed to 'dull you be': 'Nu-wumble' as opposed to 'Un-wumble': 'weary world' as opposed to 'solemn world': 'star's reflected ray' as opposed to 'star's rejected ray': 'only tears of laughter' as opposed to 'really tears of laughter': 'to alight' as opposed to 'and alight': 'Laughter' as opposed to 'Laugher'. The Beaver score contains the word 'risin' but 'rising' is sung. As this score was used for the recording the incorrect words are sung. RAM library.

Once again Lionel Salter reviewed the record for *Gramophone*. In comparing it to Elgar's 1916 recordings he was disappointed, noting some rough-and-ready orchestral playing and slow tempi. He considered that 'To the Children' and the delicate 'Blue-Eyes Fairy' waltz lumbered along heavy-footedly. He was harsh on the soloists:

John Lawrenson is placed too distantly for 'My Old Tunes', so that in verse three (which wrongly repeats the words of the second verse so that the proper third stanza does not emerge at all) he gets drowned by the orchestra. Cynthia Glover seems ill at ease at the start of the 'Dawn Song' and is far from assured in pitch in several places.

The Finale was marred by poor ensemble between the organ and orchestra and overall he was 'sorry not to be able to greet this record, which aroused so many expectations, more warmly.'⁷⁸ Despite these strictures the recording of Elgar's theatre music introduced listeners to two unfamiliar Elgar scores in a modern recording⁷⁹ and was a valuable addition to the Elgar discography.⁸⁰

The Complete Recording

In April 1976 EMI issued a two LP box set of the complete music (including short fragments) with Valerie Masterson, Derek Hammond Stroud, Vernon Handley and the LPO. Thus for the first time listeners could hear Elgar's complete score. EMI's Christopher Bishop⁸¹ recalled:

I was the Chief Producer of the International Classical Division of EMI, where a repertoire committee approved recordings, but I and the other International producers also frequently worked for EMI Records, the English branch of the recording division of the Company. There was little bureaucracy where EMI records was concerned, and no difficulty in getting the recording approved, as John Whittle, the Manager was an avid Elgarian, and Honorary Member of the Elgar Society, as was his number 2 Douglas Pudney who was also very knowledgeable about Elgar.⁸²

Elgar was 'flavour of the month at that time' and Bishop 'enjoyed the recording as Tod Handley was always fun to work with, and it was fascinating to get to know music by Elgar I'd never heard.

78 *Gramophone* (January 1974), 1372.

79 For a further review see Andrew Neill, *The Elgar Society Newsletter* Issue N.2. (January, 1974), 16-18. His review concluded: 'A qualified acceptance therefore to this recording, made all the more regrettable by the great value of the music presented. Let us therefore hope that enterprise will enable a fuller production of the *King Arthur* music to be put before the public before long, together with a different view of *The Starlight Express*'. Both expectations were subsequently realised.

80 John Lawrenson and Cynthia Glover performed extracts from *The Starlight Express* with The City of Birmingham orchestra, under the conductor Donal Hunt on 30 August 1978, when a substantial suite was performed during the Three Choirs Festival..

81 Christopher Bishop joined the International Classical Division of EMI in 1964 as a recording producer. He became Chief Producer in 1972 and worked with Sir Adrian Boult on all his EMI recordings from 1966 to 1979. He left EMI in 1979 to become Managing Director of the Philharmonia Orchestra.

82 Christopher Bishop to the author, 26 September 2016. He added a family memory: 'My grandfather was an Elgar enthusiast, and took my father, aged nine, to the 1916 production. I asked my father what he thought of it, and he said he loved the music, but couldn't really understand the play.'

Jerrold Northrop Moore attended the sessions, and gave his advice.⁸³ Subsequently Dr Moore recalled: 'At that point no one had seen the play text (which was buried in Novello's files) which I found after the recording was made. Had we had this, many of the purely repetitive fragments could have been cut out without loss.'⁸⁴

Yet again Lionel Salter was given the discs to review. He pointed to the difficulty of how to present the score which consisted of a large number of fragments, to be played behind words, without the whole thing becoming scrappy:

The score was not ... designed for continuous listening, yet curiously enough Elgar so planned the music that each fragment links up in tonality with the rest.

Vernon Handley gave a creditable performance of the fresh and engaging score, 'which contains more development than is usually the case with theatre music'. Again he had a problem with tempi finding the orchestral prelude ponderous, the first Organ-Grinder's song dragging badly with the singer ill at ease and the Finale was hurried which marred the emotional climax. He had nothing but praise for Valerie Masterson: 'much the best singer of this music on records so far.' Happily he concluded:

Elgar enthusiasts will need no urging to get to know this unfamiliar music ... but then even non-Elgarians would find it hard not to recognise his lightness of touch or to find pleasure in his unaffected melodiousness.⁸⁵

Edward Greenfield drew attention to Handley's 'elegant and loving performance' and concluded:

But Elgar's airy inspirations, with themes lifted from the *Wand of Youth*, and unashamed forays into the idiom of musical comedy, are enchanting. By the middle of side four it tends to become music to snooze over ... but Handley throughout is the most persuasive interpreter. Even so I wish he had taken a little more note of Elgar's own recording manner – a conductor who whiffled through the lightest piece with such energy you can still see the great moustache bristling.⁸⁶

A Stage Production and Performances

Then in 1978 Theresa Kitchen and the Acorn Children's Theatre staged a production, first in Woking and then for three evenings at the Collegiate Theatre London, with her own adaptation of the text and music arranged for five instruments by Nigel Carver. *The Daily Telegraph* wrote:

There's a hint of the anthropological theory of the ultimate unity of souls in the play's philosophical content, though the story is on the simplest level. Yet what turns this meandering dream-tale into enchantment is the presence of the music written for it by Elgar. The result is like seeing "The Wand of Youth" made physical. Nigel Carver's sensitive arrangement for five instruments provides an admirable balance of sound ever-present but not dominant. Theresa Kitchen, who made this special adaptation of the text ... kept her 60 youthful players busy dancing and miming. The few adults, notably singers Robert Stuart and Elizabeth Keyte, stood up well to the competition.⁸⁷

83 Bishop, 26 September 2016.

84 Jerrold Northrop Moore to the author, 20 October 2016.

85 *Gramophone* (May 1976), 1757.

86 Edward Greenfield, *The Guardian*, 6 April 1976.

87 *Daily Telegraph*, 21 December 1978.

This proved to be so successful and popular that it was repeated in Woking for three nights in 1982 and again in 1984. She arranged a further production in 1989.⁸⁸

In September 1979 the indefatigable Barry Collett gave a nearly-complete performance (37 items) with the Rutland Sinfonia in Uppingham School Hall. The idea of performing the work had been with him since he first heard the music in Collingwood's recording and the Raikes radio play, so 'when I formed the orchestra in 1976 it was high on my list of priorities.'⁸⁹ Ken Simmons found 'the music cast its spell over listeners and audience alike. The score – sympathetically and idiomatically conducted ... stood up remarkably well on its own...'⁹⁰ Subsequently Barry Collett has conducted a further six performances of all the songs plus the substantial orchestral pieces and he found that 'on every occasion the audience, and the orchestra, were entranced by the music'.⁹¹

Simon Rattle and the Philharmonia Orchestra played extracts at the 1980 Malvern Festival. William Mann noted that 'Elgar was enthusiastic about the subject, a group of children and their fantasy play-world, so much more sensible than the confused society of their seniors. It reminded him of his own fantasy-games in childhood...and produced a score much of it typical of his finest music.' Rattle conducted the Overture, an orchestra entr'acte and nine of the songs:

It was a joy to hear them so sympathetically delivered by Nan Christie and Thomas Hemsley, both cogently musical, she with radiant top notes, he astonishingly attentive to words without risking embarrassment – and the lovely orchestral music sumptuously played by a fine symphony orchestra.⁹²

Bryn Terfel and Sir Charles Mackerras

In 1990 Argo issued a recording of the suite with Bryn Terfel and Alison Hagley conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras, together with the two *Wand of Youth* suites with the Welch National Opera Orchestra. The disc contained all the vocal items⁹³ of *The Starlight Express* save for the 'Curfew Song' and the *Gramophone* reviewer welcomed this well-recorded disc:

Bryn Terfel is listed by Argo as a bass, but his attractive voice has baritone qualities and he brings an appropriately light and imaginative touch to his songs. Alison Hagley has less opportunity to shine. Nevertheless, she sings most beautifully and her contributions have warmth and insight. Mackerras conducts very sympathetically, although he is perhaps a little too constrained and the orchestral playing could have slightly more bounce and flair.⁹⁴

Given the problems with the Blackwood/Pearn libretto, Kenneth Richardson made a stage

88 For a detailed review of the 1978 production see *The Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.1, No.1 (January 1979), 9-10. A photograph of the production is reproduced in *The Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.1, No.2 (May 1979) 30.

89 Barry Collett to the author, 11 September 2016.

90 K.E.L. Simmons, 'The Starlight Express at Uppingham', *The Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.1, No.5 (May 1980), 7-8.

91 Collett, 11 September 2016. One review of one of his performances in 1985, found the music 'vintage Elgar and thoroughly delightful.' *Leicester Mercury*, 4 March 1985.

92 *The Times*, 26 May 1980.

93 Some text is incorrectly sung in this recording.

94 *Gramophone* (October 1992), 160.

adaptation for Elgar's 150th anniversary. The performers were Elizabeth Atherton (soprano), Mark Stone (baritone) and the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Barry Wordsworth. In making the adaptation Richardson constructed a narration – read by Simon Callow – interspersed with short extracts of dialogue from the play. It was given on stage at the Mermaid Theatre and broadcast on 14 November 2007.

Sir Andrew Davis

In 2012 Chandos issued a complete recording with Elin Manahan Thomas, soprano, Roderick Williams, baritone, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis and again with Simon Callow as narrator. Davis was entranced by the project: 'I had not thought of doing it but when Chandos came with the proposal, I fell for it straight away; got quite obsessed, actually.'⁹⁵ This obsession led him to Switzerland:

... I visited the village of Bole in the Swiss Jura, the real Bourcelles ... Most of the places mentioned in the book still stand: the Pension, the church, the sentinel tree – though the Citadelle ... burnt down ... in 1925. I also walked through the gorges of the river Areuse, and even stumbled on what could have been the entrance to a 'Star Cave' in the weirdly eroded cliffs.⁹⁶

He found Blackwood's novel 'a wondrous, if flawed, book.' and fashioned a new narrative for he considered:

that performing the play, even in a heavily cut version, was not an option ... on the other hand, all the music, excepting the songs and interludes, was designed as melodrama and in some cases ... is meaningless on its own. I [took] ... the bold step of writing a narrative which is partly based on the play and partly on A Prisoner in Fairyland.⁹⁷

The work needed 'a coherent thread of text to allow the music to breathe and make narrative sense, but you couldn't possibly record the whole thing – it's almost as long as *Parsifal*.' He 'fell in love with the music all over again and wanted to give it the best chance it could have.'⁹⁸ That he succeeded was endorsed by Andrew Aschenbach in *Gramophone*:

Davis receives absolutely first-rate results from the Scottish CO, Elin Manahan Thomas's light and silvery soprano could hardly be more suited to the parts of the Laugher and Jane-Anne while Roderick Williams is in glorious voice throughout. Everything has been captured ... with ingratiating amplitude, bloom and glow.⁹⁹

Simon Callow was praised for being 'a consistently involving story-teller'. This recording with its linking narrative was only possible because Jerrold Northrop Moore had correlated the rediscovered Pearn play text with Elgar's manuscript for the Elgar Complete Edition, making this recording totally different from all predecessors. It really does resurrect the original play-with-music which

95 Geraint Lewis, 'Elgar in the Theatre' *Gramophone* (November 2012), 22.

96 Sir Andrew Davis, notes to Chandos CD recording CHSA 5111(2), 2012.

97 *Ibid.*

98 Geraint Lewis, *op.cit.*, 22.

99 *Gramophone* (November 2012), 75.

had not been attempted since 1915. Davis also included world premiere recordings of three of Clive Carey's songs, written for the earlier putative production, orchestrating these himself, and 'charming they are too, if lacking in true melodic distinction'.¹⁰⁰

Elgar Complete Edition Volume 19.

The Elgar Complete Edition published the full score and libretto for the first time in 2010, together with an introductory note, a list of source manuscript material, a commentary and bibliography in a scholarly edition edited by Roger Dubois, with the assistance of Jerrold Northrop Moore who had long been an advocate and champion of *The Starlight Express*. The text of the play was interspersed with the music and Dr Moore worked on the placing of the melodrama.

In a detailed review J.P.E. Harper Scott noted the difficulties in establishing an *Urtext* or definitive edition (a problem fully recognised by those working on the edition),¹⁰¹ but welcomed the volume, noting 'it is delightful to have at last an edition, very handsomely produced, of what is at times truly delightful music', recognising this was a 'quite unique piece in its composer's output'.¹⁰²

K.E.L. Simmons

In 1990 Dr K.E. L. Simmons published a pioneering study of *The Starlight Express*.¹⁰³ His essay and accompanying appendices with notes running to 72 pages, was the result of many years research and showed for the first time the detailed history of the work's genesis and the multifarious parties involved. The importance of the essay was immediately recognised by E. Wulstan Atkins:

Dr Simmons, with his meticulous and detailed research, has made available ... the most complete account of *The Starlight Express*, the reasons for its composition, its background and the personnel involved. This information adds greatly to our enjoyment when listening to the music, and is essential if one is fully to appreciate the brilliance of Elgar's writing. Up to this essay *The Starlight Express* has remained ... the least known of Elgar's compositions. The article is of special interest to me since I was privileged to attend one of the original performances in January 1916, and I still have vivid memories of that enchanting evening.¹⁰⁴

Dr Simmons even prepared a performing version with the full Elgar score in strict original sequence, and a planned stage performance – under the aegis of the 'Starlight Express Project' – was to be given at the 1988 Three Choirs Festival, but alas this never reached fruition.

100 *Ibid.*

101 John Norris and Jerrold Northrop Moore, 'Tales from the Complete Edition 2: The Starlight Express', *The Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.16, No.4 (March 2010), 36-44.

102 J.P.E. Harper-Scott, 'Elgar, *The Starlight Express*', *The Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.17, No.1 (April 2011), 50-53.

103 See footnote 31 above.

104 E. Wulstan Atkins, Introduction to Raymond Monk, *Edward Elgar Music and Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), xv.

Critical Reaction

Elgarian commentators have in general praised Elgar's contribution to the play. The early writers on Elgar - Porte, Maine, Reed – merely mentioned the production and provided little analysis or comment. Percy Young provided a more detailed commentary in 1955 after studying the manuscript score retained by Robert Elkin and concluded:

There have not been many composers with such understanding of children's tastes... As it is Elgar's music almost makes the work as a whole credible. It is an example of his capacity to restrain the too imaginative impulse: with one foot on the ground he strengthens the whimsy with something which is substantial.¹⁰⁵

Diana McVeagh found the music:

... fragmentary, some nimble, much musing, some improvisatory. One or two all-too-brief passages are profoundly stirring. Most of the set pieces have a charming Edwardian light music touch. Over it all waves the wand of Elgar's own youth.¹⁰⁶

Michael Kennedy wrote that the score was enchanting and the songs a 'revelation':

... but it is the closely-woven, intoxicatingly scored orchestral music which ... entitles it to a high place among Elgar's evocations of a world beyond recall. The use of *The Wand of Youth* tunes is poignant, and, in the world of 1915, must have seemed well-nigh unbearable.¹⁰⁷

The play's Barrie-like whimsy would not appeal today, but it evoked from Elgar his most poetic and haunting vein of lyricism and nostalgia.¹⁰⁸

It is one of Elgar's most attractive scores, with echoes of the Violin Concerto and even of *Gerontius*, the dreamer of dreams at his most tenderly poignant.¹⁰⁹

Even though Robert Anderson concluded that the concept 'was both an inspiration to Elgar and a means of diverting him into a project that turned out pretentious and naïve.'¹¹⁰ Anderson accepted that Elgar 'felt rejuvenated by *The Starlight Express*'¹¹¹ and that it was his most extensive composition during the war.

Jerrold Northrop Moore, after working on the Elgar Complete Edition and the integration of the words and music, concluded:

Working concentratedly to reconstruct the Melodrama has brought a gradually growing conviction that *The Starlight Express* is another of Elgar's great works. Reuniting the Melodrama words and music to the rest has seemed to reveal the whole work as an obverse of the medal he had struck fifteen years earlier in *The Dream of Gerontius*.¹¹²

105 Percy M. Young, *Elgar O.M.* (London: Collins, 1955), 357-358.

106 Diana McVeagh, *Elgar, The Music Maker* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 164.

107 Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 268.

108 Michael Kennedy, notes to 'The Lighter Elgar', EMI CDM 5 655393 2, 1996.

109 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 144-145.

110 Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 268.

111 Anderson, 124.

112 Jerrold Northrop Moore, 'The role of melodrama in *The Starlight Express*', Roger Dubois (editor), *The Starlight Express* (Rickmansworth: The Elgar Society Edition, 2010), xvi.



Captain Fry in the centre between deckchairs with his hands in his pockets. (The author thanks Martin Bird for providing this excellent photograph from Captain Fry's son.)

But perhaps the most moving comment on the music was that written by Captain Lawrence Fry to Elgar on 5 October 1917. Fry¹¹³ was in the Royal Field Artillery and survived the war.

Though unknown, I feel I must write to you tonight. We possess a fairly good Gramophone [*sic*] in our Mess, and I have bought your record *Starlight Express* 'Hearts must be star-shiny dressed' [*sic*]. It is being played for the twelfth time over. The Gramophone [*sic*] was anathema to me before this War because it was abused so much. But all this is changed now, and it is the only means of bringing back to us the days that are gone, and helping one through the Ivory gate that leads to fairyland, or heaven, whatever one likes to call it. And it is a curious thing, even those who only go for Rag-time revues, all care for your music ... music is all that we have to help us carry on.¹¹⁴

What of the future? As we have seen there have been several performing versions over the last 50 years – Raikes, Kitchen, Richardson and Davis – but mostly these have been isolated events. Perhaps J.B. Priestley, Robert Elkin and Mary Mills were right and that the tale and music should be married on film by a sympathetic director and producer – an ideal project for Disney?

113 Joseph Lawrence Fry (1887-1955) served as a Captain in the Royal Field Artillery in the Great War. Born in Beckenham he became an accomplished musician and composer whose music was broadcast by the BBC. Email to Martin Bird from Fry's son, Alex, 2013

114 EBM letter 6367.

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Kevin Mitchell is a long-standing member of the Elgar Society and is currently Vice-Chairman of the London branch. He is a Solicitor who is Clerk to the All Saints Educational Trust in the City of London, a charity involved with the furtherance of Religious Education, Public Health and Food Nutrition.

Remembering a Musical Centenary Charles Mott and *The Fringes of the Fleet*

Ian Morgan

On 11 June 1917, at the London Coliseum, Edward Elgar entered the orchestra pit to conduct the first performance of the new song-cycle *The Fringes of the Fleet*, a group of four settings of verses by Rudyard Kipling.

Uniquely (as far as the author has been able to establish), these poems were to be sung by four baritones – Charles Mott, Frederick Henry, Frederick Stewart, and Harry Barratt, with Mott taking the lead, and the others acting as a mini-chorus. It is worth noting, because of the war, almost all the orchestra musicians were women. Elgar later hosted a lunch for them. The singers appeared on stage before a rustic rural pub.

The titles of the four Kipling songs were:

1. *The Lowestoft Boat*
2. *Fate's Discovery*
3. *Submarines*
4. *The Sweepers*



Charles Edwin Mott (1880-1918) in *The Fringes of the Fleet*
(Lewis Foreman's collection)

These songs contain a number of memorable lines, which would have meant something to the original audiences. Perhaps the most significant was: *The game is more than the player of the game, and the ship is more than the crew*, although this might have jarred with those who had lost relatives at Jutland! My personal favourite of the four is *Submarines* which is sparsely scored, and uses sandpaper blocks to simulate the sounds of the sea as the submarines pass through the depths of the ocean. The scoring of *The Sweepers* even includes a part for a *Ship's Bell in D!*

They were so successful that a provincial tour was planned before the London run had ended, and the songs were recorded on 4 July 1917. Near the end of the run, Elgar made a setting of Gilbert Parker's *Inside the Bar* for the four singers alone, as an encore song, which was also recorded (27 July).

It is a memory of a port inn with a lovely girl, who the sailor loves and loses to a (*land*)*lubber*. It is, in my view, one of the most moving songs Elgar wrote, but almost forgotten now. The last shows at the Coliseum preceded Mott's call-up, so there was precious little jocularity offstage. Elgar presented him with a small silver ship, wishing his friend 'clear sailing'. The baritone, George

Parker, stood in for Mott as they toured the provincial music halls. Kipling suddenly decided that he no longer wished his poems to be used (perhaps recovering from the shock which he had suffered since his only son, John, had been posted 'missing' at Loos). The company limped back to London for its final performances on 1 December.

Mott enlisted at Paddington, and was posted to The Artists' Rifles (1st Battalion, London Regiment), at Romford. He was 37 years old at the time, and was promoted Training Corporal. Also in his squad was another baritone who is better known today, Roy Henderson (1899-2000), who said: *'Mott was very popular and very kind to me personally but didn't conform to the spit and polish of the Battalion and was sent to France, where he became the life and soul of the Battalion there'*. Near the front, Mott scribbled a note to Elgar, just four days before they went into action. Almost as it arrived, came news of his wounding and subsequent death:

Saturday 11th May, 1918

Dear Sir Edward,

.. you probably know that I have been 'out here' for about five weeks...and look forward to heaps of 'fun' (admittedly of a rather grim nature) within the next few hours... I could not help deploring the waste of power, which if directed in another channel might preserve life instead of shatter it. There is one thing that 'puts the wind up me' very badly & that is of my being wiped out & thus miss the dear harmonies of your wonderful works... But I have a supreme confidence in my destiny & feel that I have some useful work to do... before I am called away... I only dread my comrades coming to grief & seeing them wounded. I pray that they may all get through safely...

It seems that Mott was mortally wounded during a bombardment of Aveluy Wood on 20 May 1918, and died two days later. He was buried in Bagneux Military Cemetery, close to the village of Gezaincourt, about 2 km south-west of Doullens.

Author's notes

You can hear Mott and his colleagues' recordings of *The Fringes* on the CD set: *Elgar Conducts Elgar: The complete recordings, 1914-1925* (MUSIC&ARTS CD-1257 (4), 2011).

The basis of this article is a chapter by Charles A Hooey, *An Elgarian Tragedy: Remembering Charles Mott*, taken from *Oh! My Horses: Elgar and The Great War* (Elgar Editions, 2001). [This article appears by kind permission of Sam Eedle, newsletter editor of Worcestershire and Herefordshire Branch, Western Front Association, and the author. It was first published by them on 22 July 2017.]

Ian Morgan was a voluntary assistant to the archivists at The Birthplace between 1996 and 2016, and has been a member of the Elgar Society (West Midlands Branch) since 1997. He served on the branch committee for several years, and was a member of the Society's Council between 1998-2001. He has also given several talks to the Branch. His other great passions are collecting, and listening to, CDs of (mainly) classical music, and all aspects (military and cultural) of the Great War, 1914-1918. He has lived in Malvern all his life, not far from Elgar's former home at 'Forli'.



Charles Mott's grave
(Lewis Foreman's collection)

Elgar's 'Angel': Hubert Parry in Perspective

Michael Trott

100 years ago, on 16 October 1918, Great Britain was still preoccupied with war, and the Armistice was almost a month away. Along with most of the key figures in British music, Sir Edward and Lady Elgar attended a memorial service in St Paul's Cathedral for Sir Hubert Parry, who had died nine days previously at his Sussex home. Thomas Dunhill, the composer and writer on musical subjects (including Elgar), was a steward and had difficulty finding places for the Elgars, so packed was the cathedral. From late Victorian times Parry had been an outstanding figure in the musical world: a prolific composer, a significant writer on music, an educator and administrator, but also a music scholar and free-thinker, whose keenness of vision was an inspiration to his many students and whose humility and integrity endeared him to all who met him.



Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry, 1st Baronet (1848-1918), c. 1890 (Michael Trott's collection)

Elgar had first met Parry twenty years previously when Parry attended rehearsals of *Caractacus*. Elgar's sense of indebtedness to the older composer is well recorded. On a postcard to Jaeger, Elgar had written of Parry as 'an angel as ever, God bless him'. Parry was one of the first to recognise Elgar's *Enigma Variations* for their originality, famously saying, 'Look out for this man's music; he has something to say and knows how to say it'¹ and sending Elgar what his wife described as a 'rapturous letter'.² Elgar biographer Basil Maine wrote that Elgar once intended Parry as a subject of the *Enigma Variations*.³

A more recent Elgar biographer, Robert Anderson, considered that Parry was 'unstinting in his support for Elgar if suspicious of his frank emotionalism and apparent waywardness'.⁴

Parry's first biographer, Charles Graves, wrote:-

In the previous year (1904) Sir Edward Elgar offered, in gratitude for an act of friendly intervention on Parry's part, to relieve Parry in any way in his administrative work - copying, transposing or adapting, 'anything in fact that an ordinary copyist could or could not quite do, I would take the greatest pride and pleasure in doing it for you'.⁵

In Elgar's inaugural lecture as Peyton Professor of Music at Birmingham University in 1905, he had referred to Parry as 'the head of our art in this country'.⁶ In May of the same year Elgar told Rupert de Cordova of *The Strand* magazine that the articles in Grove's *Dictionary of Music & Musicians* that had helped him most were those by Parry, who had contributed over a hundred articles from the dictionary's inception in 1877.⁷ Elgar wrote in 1920 of 'the many occasions on which Parry advised and encouraged' and 'his ungrudging kindness'.⁸

Writers have found similarities between Elgar and Parry that are not immediately apparent. Michael Kennedy touched on something fundamental:-

It seems likely that Elgar instinctively recognized the idealist artist inside Parry, the radical free thinker who often found himself, as he said, in a minority of one, who felt ill at ease among the hunting, shooting gentry of his native Gloucestershire, who had bouts of black depression and had had to overcome the prejudice of his family against music as a profession.⁹

Both Elgar and Parry had nervous temperaments, that characteristic of the latter well attested by his pupil Vaughan Williams. Both were keenly interested in things outside music. Landon Ronald was impressed by Elgar's general knowledge and memory.¹⁰ Many, Herbert Howells included,

- 1 Sir Landon Ronald, *Myself and Others* (London: Sampson Low, 1931), 154.
- 2 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 78.
- 3 Basil Maine, *Elgar: His Life and Works* (London: G.Bell & Sons, 1933), Book II, p.101.
- 4 Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: J.M.Dent, 1993), 462.
- 5 Elgar letter to Parry, quoted in Charles L.Graves, *Hubert Parry: His Life and Works* (London: Macmillan, 1926), Vol. II, 35.
- 6 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 459.
- 7 W.H.Reed, *Elgar* (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1939), 11.
- 8 Letter dated 7 March 1920 from Elgar to *Music & Letters* magazine.
- 9 Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 156 & 157.
- 10 Sir Landon Ronald, *Myself and Others* (London: Sampson Low, 1931), 163.

have remarked on the extent to which Parry took a keen interest in all sorts of things non-musical (and urged his music students to do the same), and this is abundantly evident in Parry's writings.

When Kevin Allen spoke on 'Elgar and Parry: Blest Pair of Sirens?' at the Three Choirs Festival in 2004, he too found similarities. Listening to the orchestral prelude to Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens*, it was not difficult for him to imagine that he was hearing some forgotten Elgar: 'his stylistic fingerprints are all there, an exuberant, wide-spanned opening gesture, leading to music with an atmosphere of alternate surge and repose, very much built on sequences, and flavoured with prominent falling sevenths, suspensions and chromatic inflections.' As Parry's career largely predated Elgar's, Kevin Allen asked if we should not describe Elgar's music as Parryesque? He went on to say perceptively, 'If you were to describe one of the pair as handicapped in the pursuit of his chosen career by the circumstances of his birth, forced by family pressure to seek work in an office, having to endure a long struggle for musical education, and finally carving out a successful career against various difficulties and virtually lifelong psychosomatic illness, then you might say much the same about the other.'¹¹

To those comments on the musical similarities between Elgar and Parry we must surely add that Elgar's characteristic *nobilmente* style echoes the noble music of Parry, such as we find in *Jerusalem* and the Bridal March from *The Birds* suite.

Elgar and Parry both moved away from conventional religious beliefs. Vincent Waite found interesting Elgar's praise of the agnostic libretto for Parry's symphonic poem *The Vision of Life*, as 'it shows how, even in 1907, (Elgar's) philosophy of life was moving away from the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.'¹²



Elgar, Edward German, Dan Godfrey, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Parry and Stanford at the Winter Gardens in Bournemouth for a gala concert in 1910 (Michael Trott's collection)

11 Kevin Allen, Wulstan Atkins Memorial Lecture on 'Elgar and Parry: Blest Pair of Sirens', Three Choirs Festival, Gloucester, 9 August 2004 (published by Kevin Allen).

12 Vincent Waite, *Elgar Society Newsletter*, May, 1978, 7.

It is hard to imagine Elgar not being drawn to one who was, in Sir Hugh Allen's words, 'a radiant being who produced in one a remarkable feeling of warmth, energy and well-being'.¹³

Two anecdotes serve to show a marked difference between the two men. Firstly, there is a startling story passed down to us by Herbert Howells, who as a student witnessed a visit by Elgar to the Royal College of Music at the invitation of Parry, its Director. At the end of the visit, Parry invited Elgar to sign the visitors' book where there was sufficient space underneath the last signatures, but Elgar turned over and signed right across a fresh page. After Elgar had left, Howells saw Parry return to the book and tear out Elgar's entry. Secondly, the music critic and writer W. R. Anderson recalled a visit to *Highbury*, the Birmingham home of the Chamberlain family, when, perusing the family's autograph book, he came to a 'spreading half-page', bearing a huge signature 'Clara Butt'. Inside the letter 'C' was inscribed 'C.Hubert H.Parry' complete.¹⁴ Elgar felt at times that he had to promote himself, whereas Parry hated self-promotion.

Another significant difference between Elgar and Parry is that Elgar was thin-skinned and defensive, whereas Parry showed a startling openness and readiness to accept criticism.

A common attitude to Parry is conceding that he was a most agreeable man and that a handful of his works are outstandingly good, but judging the rest as dull and commonplace, unworthy of exploration. There is something in this reservation.

It is tempting to explain Parry's dullness by the indisputable fact that he was over-worked. But the lesser works do not correspond to periods in Parry's life when there were exceptional difficulties or distractions; moreover, he was not impelled to write them by factors imposed on him rather than by inspiration.

Parry's dullness lies surely not in his scoring. Elgar told Vaughan Williams at the 1922 Three Choirs Festival that Parry's music 'could be scored in no other way'.¹⁵ This view was shared by Herbert Howells ('a great deal of loose critical scorn has been directed at Parry's scoring'¹⁶) and Gerald Finzi ('Parry's scoring was the right scoring for his particular texture'¹⁷).

The truth is that Parry was weighed down by a streak of puritanism that derived from his high-minded father, Thomas Gambier Parry, and the moral collapse of his adored brother, Clinton. He could not bring himself to produce pleasant sounds unrelated to the artistic (and frequently ethical) purpose of his compositions and had a disdain for 'those who want merely pleasant feelings'.¹⁸

Elgar bore no such burden and was able, happily for us, to let his emotions, as well as his reason, give full rein to his music. But if we regard Elgar as a master of the orchestra, then surely Parry was a master of writing for the human voice. We may speculate on how different Parry's music might have been, had he not the strain of puritanism in him, but none the less his achievement was remarkable, as evidenced not only by the universally-applauded *Blest Pair of Sirens*, *I was Glad*, *Jerusalem* and the *Songs of Farewell*, but the unjustly-neglected *Ode on the Nativity* and *Invocation to Music*, of which this Parry centenary has prompted revivals. Although Parry's music has long been overtaken in popularity by Elgar's, there is much to enjoy among the many and varied works of this remarkable man who was once a towering figure in British music.

13 Hugh P.Allen, *Hubert Parry*, The R.C.M. Magazine, May, 1933, 7.

14 Letter dated 23 August 1978, in the writer's possession, from W.R.Anderson to Michael Pope.

15 Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 63.

16 Herbert Howells in *Music & Letters*, April 1969, 229.

17 Transcript of broadcast by Gerald Finzi on BBC Third Programme, 27 February 1948.

18 Hubert H.Parry, *Style in Musical Art* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 402.

Parry's popularity, like Elgar's, declined in the decades after his death, yet in our times enthusiasts have worked hard to promote his legacy. Much research has been done and several books published as well as a documentary film. Michael Pope, a former Chairman of the Elgar Society, worked hard at the BBC to bring Parry greater recognition through radio. A large proportion of Parry's music has been recorded in the last 30 years, including all the published orchestral works. Parry was a great choral composer, yet only a third of his choral works have been committed to disc, glaring exceptions being *Scenes from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound'*, which Ernest Walker famously claimed to herald a renaissance in English music in 1880¹⁹, and *Judith*; Vernon Handley and Stephanie Martin conducted memorable revivals of these works in London in 1980 and Toronto in 2015 respectively. *Jerusalem* has almost become a second national anthem, and *I Was Glad* has been sung at all British coronations since that of Edward VII and at royal weddings in 1981 and 2011. However, it is undeniable that Parry's works are infrequently scheduled in concert programmes, and we might reasonably expect concert-organisers to be more adventurous in this respect.

Parry was a hearty yet lonely, lovable, immensely-principled, rigidly-honest, sadly self-dissatisfied personality, who attained enduring greatness in much of his music and kindled influence for good in others, a fine moulder of minds young and old. Somebody once said that he was a great man of his time but his time passed, and his belief in the transformative power of music seemed hopelessly outdated in later, cynical times. In spite of the absence of a Parry Society, the groundwork has now been done for a change in Parry's fortunes: only time will tell if a wider listening and reading public responds.

Michael Trott is an Honorary Life Member of the Elgar Society who joined in 1974 and has been twice Chairman of the West Midlands Branch. He edited 'Half-Century, The Elgar Society, 1951-2001'; '2007: The Year of Elgar'; and 'A.T.Shaw on Elgar'. His book 'Hubert Parry: A Life in Photographs' was published in February 2018 by Brewin Books.

19 Ernest Walker, *A History of Music in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), 300.

Elgar's Voice

David Matthews

I am going to contrast two different sides to Elgar's composing voice, which I'm calling 'public' and 'private'. And I shall concentrate exclusively on his instrumental music, excluding an important side of Elgar, the religious, Roman Catholic, side of him, supremely represented by *The Dream of Gerontius*, which might be considered a private work expressed in a public way. When Elgar's faith declined in later life, so that eventually by the time he died it seems he was no longer a believer, his music became more and more suffused with loss and regret, something I shall return to later.

A number of composers have had contrasting public and private voices, for instance Britten – think of the wide difference between *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* and *Noyes Fludde* on the one hand, both of them occasional pieces, and on the other the private voice in the cello suites or the song cycles. The most extreme recent example of differing voices I can think of is Shostakovich, whose public voice, where he had to try to conform to Communist Party strictures about the necessity of Socialist Realism, is often one of false, hollow optimism. His private voice, in which all his inner anxiety is openly exposed, but also his sense of humour and even genuine delight in life, he put into his chamber music, especially his string quartets, where he felt free to disregard any criticism.

With Elgar, there are the same two main contrasting voices, and his public voice is by no means a false one. It's essentially confident, extrovert, urban maybe: we can associate it with Elgar's own time – what more appropriate music to accompany the images of Edwardian England could there be than the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, or the opening of the First Symphony? But it's a voice grounded in the past too, in visions of medieval chivalry, English poetry, and the plays of Shakespeare of which Elgar had a deep knowledge. Despite his swagger, Elgar was an uneasy Edwardian: even at his most confident his music has a precarious stability, which became more pronounced as he grew older. He was conscious that he stood at the end of an era, and that what he celebrated would soon vanish. Hence his taking refuge in the past, though here he found confirmation of what he sensed in the present. In what is I think his greatest orchestral work, the symphonic poem *Falstaff*, which I shall come to later, chivalric splendour fades into wistfulness, and finally into disillusion and death – though death is very tenderly and compassionately expressed.

In *Falstaff* we also encounter Elgar's other voice. This is reflective, nostalgic, sometimes heartbreakingly poignant: it's a rural voice, the voice of his native landscape, the Severn valley near Worcester where he grew up. For most of his life Elgar chose to live close to this landscape – in Worcester, Hereford and Malvern – and his music drew strength from its being composed in proximity to the source of its inspiration. Since, however, the musical influences on Elgar's style were almost wholly German – Schumann, Brahms, Wagner – it might seem surprising that he sounds so English. There is no explicit influence of folksong, as in Vaughan Williams or Holst, yet his melodies have a naturalness that is like folk music. Elgar's characteristic melodic fingerprints

may be traced back to his childhood: the tunes he invented when a boy are remarkably like those he wrote as an adult. Elgar in fact made his own folk music, and it's not too fanciful to suggest that it came out of the Worcestershire landscape, since this is what he himself said. In his sixties, he wrote these famous words to a friend: "I am still at heart the dreamy child who used to be found in the reeds by Severn side with a sheet of paper trying to fix the sounds and longing for something very great." The special quality of Elgar's pastoral music was well expressed by Vaughan Williams when he wrote that it "has that peculiar kind of beauty which gives us, his fellow countrymen, a sense of something familiar – the intimate and personal beauty of our own fields and lanes." Vaughan Williams emphasized that this quality was not found in Elgar's 'popular' style, "but at those moments when he seems to have retired into the solitude of his own sanctuary." We may fairly claim that this private side of Elgar is his truest side, while remembering that when Elgar put his own self-portrait into the *Enigma Variations* he expressed himself in his most opulent public style, though as Jerrold Northrop Moore noted, this variation is headed 'E.D.U.', his wife's name for him, so it's almost certainly intended to be more as his wife saw him than Elgar himself.

One of the most brilliant examples of Elgar's public style is the opening of *In the South*. What command of the orchestra! Those splendid horns, which always make my hair stand on end! It's Elgar at his most exuberant. There's a clear influence of Richard Strauss – the music is in E flat major, the same key as *Ein Heldenleben* – and although Elgar called it a 'concert overture', it's more of a Straussian tone poem, although completely Elgarian in its manner, with the general evocation of Italy where he and his wife went on holiday in the winter of 1903-4, and its particular descriptive passages such as the grand clash of Roman arms at its centre. Contrast that passage with the 'Canto popolare' at the centre on in the piece, Elgar's private voice, expressed as so often mostly by strings.

This pastoral passage, sometimes thought to have taken from a popular song, is actually pure Elgar; it's separate from what has come immediately before, an episode rather than a development, though at the end of the viola solo it does use a phrase we've heard earlier derived from the name 'Moglio', a little town they visited. And also at the end notice how Elgar brings back the opening theme of the piece gently on all the violas. The sudden return of the opening music after this episode is just a bit too abrupt – a result of Elgar's habit of composing in long separate paragraphs and only later joining them up. In *Falstaff*, his second tone poem composed a decade later, there are also separate episodes but the joins are mostly better managed.

In *Falstaff*, everything on one level is descriptive. In the analytical essay he wrote for *The Musical Times* before the first performance in October 1913, Elgar goes carefully through the score noting everywhere connections with particular lines of Shakespeare. The listener should, however, bear in mind Elgar's caveat in his essay: "Some lines quoted from the plays are occasionally placed under the themes to indicate the feeling to be conveyed by the music; but it is not intended that the meaning of the music, often varied and intensified, shall be narrowed to a corollary of these quotations only." He is still more insistent in a letter to Ernest Newman, shortly before the premiere: "I only want you to understand - as I think *you* will already – that *Falstaff* (as programme says) is the name but Shakespeare – the whole of human life – is the theme". And, as several commentators have remarked, *Falstaff* is as much about Elgar himself than about Shakespeare's tragicomic knight: his feelings about growing old and his fears – underlined by the cool response to the work's premiere – that he was beginning to lose the admiration of his public. Finally, it is quite possible to listen to *Falstaff* as if it were an abstract symphonic work – Elgar's subtitle is 'Symphonic study in C minor'. Its overall shape broadly corresponds to a one-movement symphony with exposition, development, recapitulation and coda.

The opening of *Falstaff*, in his public manner, demonstrates the sophistication of Elgar's voice,

and also its modernity: to think of Elgar as always backward-looking, as some have done, is mistaken. The piece begins with the main Falstaff theme, unaccompanied: the scholarly Elgar quotes Maurice

Morgann's 1777 *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir J. Falstaff* to indicate the picture of Falstaff this theme is intended to evoke, "in a green old age, mellow, frank, gay, easy, corpulent, loose, unprincipled, and uxorious". It rollicks along in typically Elgarian long/short note values, pivoted on the note G with which it begins, ends and rests at its mid-point, but its tonal stability is undermined by the series of descending augmented fourths by which it progresses. The first three bars (plus the upbeat) contain ten of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale. What key is it in? It could be G major or minor, or G could be felt as the dominant of C minor, as would be appropriate. In fact G turns out to be the mediant of E flat major, the key in which the next theme appears, though this too is chromatically inflected to a degree that make its tonality hard to pin down. This theme evokes Falstaff's wit, and its melodic shape is highly adventurous with spectacular upward leaps of a 13th and downward cascades that imitate Falstaff's laughter and are very similar to those at the opening of Verdi's *Falstaff*, surely not coincidentally. The opening theme returns, with trilling descending harmony above it which sounds like a preparation for C minor, but instead the music cadences again into E flat and Prince Hal's main theme, one of Elgar's great swaggering tunes and placed so that it appears the culmination of everything that's happened so far. This theme and the opening theme are linked: the first four notes of Hal's theme are notes 1,3,2 and 5 of Falstaff's, so it is as if Hal is Falstaff's idealisation of his younger self or, as Jerrold Northrop Moore puts it: "now the hero looked backward through his friend as if to a strength he himself no longer possessed."

Contrast this with another private voice passage at the centre of the work: Falstaff is asleep, and in his dream he remembers nostalgically the time when he was page to the Duke of Norfolk. This beautiful music is again scored mostly for strings, with harp and some woodwind near the end, in a straightforward A minor in strong contrast to all the chromaticism of the previous music. The whole score of *Falstaff* shows Elgar at his most eloquent and also his most adventurous, so it's hardly surprising that early audiences were somewhat bewildered by it. Elgar was not at all as conservative as many commentators continue to say. For much of the first 500 bars the tonality is remarkably fluid: the music rarely stays in one key for more than a few bars without change. Only in the second half of the work does it settle down. Although *Falstaff* is Elgar's most tonally advanced work, this was not a new departure: there are passages in the Second Symphony that are equally unstable, for instance the second subject of the first movement, and others where the melodic writing is just as 'progressive', for instance the 'ghost' passage in the first movement's development which is recalled in the scherzo. After *Falstaff*, Elgar continued to pursue a 'progressive' path in his chamber music, notable the outer movements of the String Quartet, which at times sound like the Schoenberg's first two quartets; while the Cello Concerto, in general a more backward-looking work, nonetheless has some exceptionally disruptive chromaticism in the coda of its finale.

Before I talk about the String Quartet and the arrangement for strings I've made (it was played by at the Elgar Festival on 2 June in Worcester Cathedral by the English String Orchestra conducted by Kenneth Woods), I want to mention one of the most private of all Elgar's works, and a somewhat mysterious one – *Sospiri* for harp and strings, which he wrote in 1914, and which was first performed at a Promenade concert the day after the First World War was declared, an appropriate date for such a sad piece, though few in the audience would have realised this. A version for string quartet that I have recently made was premiered at the Elgar Festival. *Sospiri* means 'sighs' and the whole piece is full of the most intense regret: Michael Kennedy called it a 'wounded heart-cry'. What it's really about we don't know – could it even be poignant thoughts of Elgar's first love Helen Weaver, who emigrated to New Zealand in 1885 and whom he never saw

again? I agree with Michael Kennedy that the 13th Enigma Variation is about her rather than Lady Mary Lygon, whatever Elgar may have said himself. (In James Hamilton-Paterson's wonderful novel *Gerontius*, about Elgar's curious voyage to the Amazon in 1923, Elgar meets his lost love again, now changed into a German widow, in Manaos; this is total fiction, though rather satisfying.) But as Richard Westwood-Brookes pointed out to me, it's more likely that *Sospiri* refers to Elgar's American friend Julia Worthington, whose death in 1913 we know much affected him. Notice how at the repeat of the melody the passionate phrases of the first climax are replaced by gestures of tenderness and longing. And also how the piece ends not in the D minor in which it began, but in the relative major, F.

Around fifteen years ago I was listening to a performance of Elgar's String Quartet and noticed that at times it seemed to be almost bursting at the seams, and I imagined that it might work well in an arrangement for string orchestra. I had already some experience of doing this sort of thing: I had completed the string arrangement of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet that Mahler had begun but not finished – he'd only completed the slow movement – and also edited his arrangement for strings of Beethoven's Op.95 Quartet. The key to such arrangements is deciding how much to give to the basses: certainly you don't want them just to double the cellos all the time, and in fact Mahler uses them rather sparingly in the Beethoven Quartet in particular.

Comparing two passages from the middle of the first movement (from figure 8) demonstrates what I meant about "bursting at the seams". At the start, I used the original solo lines – I kept them in just three places in the piece. The textures then soon become quite dense and forceful, and that's where the basses come in first in unison and then an octave below the cellos; the 1st violins are divided in octaves, and soon you really hear the advantage of more strings and the music begins to sound rather like the *Introduction and Allegro*, as I'd imagined it would, before dying down, again with divisions in the violins.

I think this is still Elgar's private voice. In an article written shortly after Elgar's death called 'The Two Elgars', Frank Howes said "The two Elgars may roughly be described as the Elgar who writes for strings and the Elgar who writes for brass", and he is, roughly, making the same distinction as I am between private and public. In contrast to my version of the String Quartet, Donald Fraser's arrangement of the Piano Quintet for full orchestra turns what was originally a private work into a public one: the character of the music is fundamentally changed by means of his scoring.

In an article written in 1957 called 'Elgar: The First of the New', Hans Keller gave an interesting Viennese reaction to Elgar's music, suggesting that the Englishness of its melodic material, in which, as he says, a folk idiom is often alluded to, but all but submerged in his European, diatonic idiom, was the main reason Continental audiences found Elgar's music difficult. I experienced this myself when I went to a performance of the Second Symphony by the BBC Philharmonic in Stuttgart and talked to a number of members of the audience afterwards who seemed quite baffled by it. "We arrive at the paradoxical conclusion", Keller said, "that the conservative Elgar's manner is still a little too new for the broad Continental public." The themes from the opening of *Falstaff*, for example, or in *Sospiri*, are decidedly strange and novel. At one point in *Falstaff* (fig.) the extraordinary wide-leaping theme that according to Elgar represents Falstaff's "boastfulness and colossal mendacity" is presented in a way that makes it sound almost like Webern.

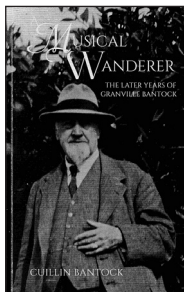
I have often wondered if Elgar was at all aware of what was going on in Vienna in the years before the First World War. Did he ever hear any Mahler, for instance? – Mahler who conducted the *Enigma Variations* and the *Sea Pictures* in New York shortly before his death, and who had programmed the Second Symphony for the 1911-12 season, but did not live to perform it. In his

Portrait of Elgar, Michael Kennedy pointed out similarities between Elgar and Mahler. As he says: "Both composed their autobiographies in music, with many references to external events and many internal cross-references between works . . . Elgar made less use than Mahler and Strauss of commonplace ingredients absorbed into the symphonic scheme, but he shares Mahler's vulnerability . . . Both, by sheer musical sensibility, can sustain a long, seemingly fragmented structure as a coherent, narrative whole." I'm not sure about "less use of commonplace ingredients" – think of *Cockaigne* – as it seems to me that Elgar was as fond of the vernacular as Mahler, and I'd love to have known what Elgar would have made of the first movement of Mahler's Third Symphony, with its extensive use of a popularist march – but Mahler's Third was not performed in this country until 1961 (I was there as a teenager).

In conclusion, I want to say a little about my own feelings as a composer about Elgar's music. I'm much concerned with tradition, more so I think than most of my contemporaries. I can still feel I have a link – as Elgar did – to the Classical symphonic tradition, especially to Beethoven. I can trace this link through Bruckner, Mahler and Sibelius, all of whom have profoundly affected me. I also feel close to the revival of the English tradition that Elgar chiefly inaugurated, and which continued through Vaughan Williams and Holst, Walton, Britten and Tippett. I don't feel that Elgar's music is irrelevant to the present day, even though it might seem so rooted in its own time. Where I feel closest to Elgar is in his expression of deep feelings about life, and in his use of expressive melody to convey these feelings. In every note of the music he wrote, you can hear Elgar's voice speaking directly to us with passionate intensity. In contrast, I find most of the music of our own day to be inhibited in its capacity to express feeling, and when it does so these feelings are often negative.

Sigmund Freud, who was almost Elgar's exact contemporary (though I doubt if Elgar knew much about him; I've found no mention of Freud in his correspondence, nor in any of the Elgar literature) was much concerned with polarities, and one of the most important for him was the opposition of the life instinct and the death instinct. On the one hand, some people aim at happiness and fulfillment, attempting to transcend the state of ordinary unhappiness that Freud thought was our natural condition; on the other hand some give in to despair and negation of life – the death instinct. Elgar's music is never simply optimistic. In writing about the Second Symphony, James Hepokoski noted, with superb insight, that "it is touched throughout by a melancholy awareness of the dreamlike quality and transitoriness of things: ghosts of unsustainability, regret, and loss of innocence lurk everywhere. In this valedictory world the magnificent *fortissimo* moments of attainment and affirmation seem simultaneously to be melting away; and Elgar often shores up such moments with rises and underswells in unexpected places, as if he were trying to sustain an illusion forever slipping away from his grasp." Yet even in the Cello Concerto, which has more moments of uncertainty and regret than any of his other major works, Elgar never gives in to despair. At the end, after the most searching and anguished passage he ever wrote, Elgar returns to his opening heroic solo gesture, as if to say, here I am, Edward Elgar, not to be defeated. He is always on the side of the life instinct, in opposition to much of the music of today which seems crippled by the death instinct. We live in terrible times, to be sure, but we always have: in Elgar's lifetime the worst war in human history took place. Yet throughout his creative life Elgar gives us a model of what I think art ideally should be, an affirmation of life without ever being unaware of, or ignoring, its opposite. Elgar's underlying affirmativeness is something we composers today can still connect with, and learn from.

David Matthews is an English composer of mainly orchestral, chamber, vocal and piano works.



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BOOK REVIEWS

Cuillin Bantock: *A Musical Wanderer – The Later Years of Granville Bantock*

Elgarians will recall that a firm and lasting friendship was established between Elgar and Sir Granville Bantock (1868-1946) beginning in July 1899 when Elgar travelled to New Brighton (across the River Mersey from Liverpool) where Bantock had established concerts of music by modern English composers. Here Elgar conducted his *Enigma Variations* and others of his works. At the same time he was introduced to Bantock's friend Alfred Rodewald. Michael Kennedy, in his book, *The Life of Elgar* also notes that Bantock visited 'an ailing Elgar' in 1933.

This book has been compiled from Bantock's diaries by Cuillin Bantock, a grandson of the composer. It covers the period January 1938 until the composer's death on 16th October 1946. Since Elgar died on 23rd February 1934, Cuillin's book is, of course, of peripheral interest to Elgarians. Nevertheless, it throws light on Bantock the man, his late compositions, his interests and tastes (especially his love of the cinema – particularly Walt Disney's cartoon classics) and, most importantly, his unstinting, stamina-demanding service, across the globe - criss-crossing, for instance, both the USA and Canada and Australia and New Zealand - as an examiner for the London-based Trinity College of Music.

SOMM Records have recently released a recording of Bantock's piano music. It includes a composition called *Memories of Sapphire* (1938) inspired by an affair the composer had with a lady in North Carolina. The liaison, eventually, came to nought. Bantock was not a faithful husband. Lady Bantock may not have been aware of her husband's American dalliance but she certainly was very concerned, shattered even, about his fling with the singer Denne Parker. (The age-old battle between frolic and constancy is celebrated in one of Bantock's most popular compositions – *Fifine at the Fair*.)

Original works composed by Bantock during this period are covered including *The Cyprian Goddess* and the *Celtic Symphony*, two cello sonatas and the aforementioned *Memories of Sapphire*.

The book also includes details of his work for, and his many collaborations with the BBC and the Paxton Music Publishing Company. [The composer's daughter Myrrha Bantock's book on her father, *Granville Bantock: A Personal Portrait* is now available through J. M. Dent]

The strictly chronological format can enforce tedious repetition of like material particularly of Bantock's examination journeyings but there are

compensations including vivid descriptions of the harrowing experience of living through the London Blitz of World War II.

Interestingly the book records his often quite cutting comments about other English composers and their work. For instance, he thought Bax's Symphony No.1 in E flat to be vague and pretentious and that a BBC Broadcast of Britten's *Peter Grimes* – 'A painful ordeal and exhibition of idiocy.'

There are many photographs of Bantock and his family, friends and colleagues plus a list of works – new and revisions to his existing works – together with arrangements of other composers' music (including those of Mendelssohn Mussorgsky and Schubert) plus more lightweight material including arrangements of Strauss waltzes for piano and chorus of mixed voices (words by Lynette Roberts).

Ian Lace

Stephen Connock: *Toward the Sun Rising, Ralph Vaughan Williams Remembered*

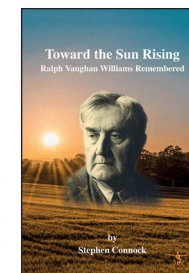
At the start of his *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*, Jerrold Northrop Moore acknowledges the 'galaxy of [Elgar's] relations, friends, and near-contemporaries still alive in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and eager to tell me what they vividly remembered of a great and much-loved man'. Forty years later Stephen Connock, co-founder and first chairman of the Ralph Vaughan Society 'had the idea that [he] should meet and record people with memories of RVW. This would involve those who knew him as relatives, friends or musical colleagues during his long life ... I worried that I might be too late. To my surprise, there were a great many people around who still remembered him'. Moreover, the majority of these had not previously been contacted by researchers and biographers.

It is the recollections of these people – 67 in all – that form the background of this tremendous book, and, glancing through its pages, one is struck by how nearly it was to being 'too late': many a contributor has sadly died before its publication.

These recollections alone would have marked down the book as an indispensable and invaluable contribution to our knowledge and appreciation of the composer, but there is far, far more. To these 'Primary Memories' Stephen has added an additional 39, culled from a variety of published and unpublished sources, and illustrated the whole with more than 100 photographs. The icing on the cake is what is described as a 'Biographical Note Informed by the Memories'. Some note! At 75 pages it is a book in itself, and a delightful picture of a great composer and great human being.

Receiving the book close to the *Journal's* publication deadline, I have taken Stephen at his word that these 'contrasting recollections are there for "dipping into" whenever the mood takes you'. But I have no doubt that I shall continue to dip into them in the coming weeks and months, and that this well-produced and relatively inexpensive volume will take an honoured place on my shelves.

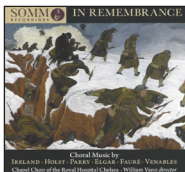
Martin Bird



Tonbridge: Albion Music, 2018

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CD REVIEWS

'In Remembrance'

Ireland – Greater Love Hath No man

SOMMCD 0187

Parry – Jerusalem
 Guest – For the Fallen
 Elgar – They are at rest
 Harris – O Valiant Hearts
 Parry – There is an old belief
 Holst – I Vow to thee My Country
 Stanford – Justorem animae
 Holst (arr. Farrington) – Ode to Death
 Fauré (arr. Farrington) – Requiem
 Venables – Requiem aeternam

Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea
 Chelsea Pensioners Choir
 Katy Hill & Leah Jackson, sopranos
 Gareth Brynmor John, baritone
 James Orford & Hugh Rowlands, organ
 William Vann, director

So we come to the end of four years of remembering the agony of The Great War and, after the centenary of its formal conclusion next summer I hope we can move on as, in a way, this delightful record encourages us to do. Yes, it contains music reflecting on death and the war but it also contains music of comfort looking beyond the world that destroyed the old Europe. Recorded in Temple Church last January these pieces have a warm clarity which kept my attention from the opening piece by John Ireland to the brilliantly subtle *Requiem aeternam* by my friend Ian Venables, a contemporary composer who has never lost touch with his audience.

Iain Farrington, well known to members of this Society, has arranged two works for the recording: Holst's Whitman setting and Faure's masterpiece which follows the British music seamlessly and, in Farrington's arrangement for soloists choir and organ, sounds as fresh as ever. There are other reasons for Elgarians to be interested in this recording. I have, tucked away, an old LP recorded by the Westminster Abbey choir on which is a recording of Douglas Guest's *For the Fallen*. How good it is to hear it again! This is a setting of Binyon's famous verse and lasts less than 90 seconds but is to the point and made me think again about the now so familiar words: the first two lines ending anxiously before hope returns 'in the morning'. Guest was a former Chairman of this Society, first chairman of our London Branch and Organist and Master of the Choristers at the Abbey (1963-1981).

Recently I enjoyed a discussion with a friend (a devotee of Parry) about whether it was appropriate for the Elgar orchestration of *Jerusalem* to have been played at this year's Proms rather than Parry's 'less vulgar' (my friend's words) original. There is no problem here as this version for organ conveys Parry's great melody with clarity allowing Blake's eccentric words to shine. However, Elgar's *They are at rest* is at the heart of the recording (one of his finest and most subtle of anthems – no 'vulgarity' there) and is a good bridge between the Guest and the Reverend Dr Charles Harris's wonderful hymn tune *The Supreme Sacrifice* set as *O Valiant Hearts*. To words by Sir John Arkwright, who was well known to Elgar as MP for Hereford (1900-1912), these are as good a tribute as any to the dead of the war: 'In glorious hope their proud and sorrowing land commits her children to Thy gracious hand'. Here, as in the other two hymns, the choir is enlarged by the Chelsea Pensioners' Choir their red coats reminding us of four hundred of sacrifice by those in uniform. William Vann moves the music forward but allows the shorter pieces to breathe. The Stanford (sung in Latin) only has the English words printed. Holst's extraordinary *Ode to Death* also works in this version; the sopranos providing a secure halo of sound in the second verse: 'but praise! praise! praise!'

The two sopranos were drawn from the choir. Katy Hill manages Fauré's 'Pie Jesu' without difficulty and Brynmor John has a pleasant rounded tone which is well balanced in the 'Offertoire'. The cover illustration of John Nash's "'Over the Top" 1st Artist's Rifles at Marcoing, 30th December 1917' could not be more appropriate and Michael Quinn's notes are brilliant. The reader may well have detected that I recommend this recording wholeheartedly; and I do!

Andrew Neill

The Hills of Dreamland

Orchestral Songs & Complete Incidental Music for *Grania & Diarmid*
 Bonus Disc: 11 songs with piano accompaniment

Oh, soft was the song*	Op 59 No 3
Was it some golden star?*	Op 59 No 5
Twilight*	Op 59 No 6
The Wind at Dawn§	
The Pipes of Pan*	
The Torch§	Op 60 No 1
The River§	Op 60 No 2
Pleading§	Op 48
Follow the Colours: Marching Song for Soldiers*	
Grania & Diarmid – Incidental Music	Op 42
Grania & Diarmid – Funeral March	Op 42
Grania & Diarmid – There are seven that pull the thread§	Op 42



SOMMCD 271-2

Bonus Disc±

Like to the Damask Rose
The Shepherd's Song Op 16 No 1
Dry those fair, those crystal eyes
The Mill Wheel Songs – Winter (Premiere Recording)
Muleteers Serenade (Premiere Recording)
As I laye a-thinkyng
Queen Mary's Song
The Torch Op 60 No 1
The River Op 60 No 2
In the Dawn Op 41 No 1
Speak. Music Op 41 No 2

Kathryn Rudge, mezzo-soprano§
Henk Neven, baritone*
BBC Concert Orchestra
conducted by Barry Wordsworth

Bonus Disc

Nathalie de Montmollin, soprano±
Barry Collett, piano±

Elgar's songs constitute undoubtedly the most unknown segment of his widely diverse oeuvre and one of the reasons might be the unsystematic genesis and release, including several uncompleted song cycles. Another problem is the fact that the poems Elgar choose for his musical settings are of rather inconsistent quality. A further argument might be that Elgar's handling of a piano accompaniment remains generally far behind his originality in writing for other instruments, not to mention his ability of dealing with orchestral colours. However, most important – and on first sight paradoxical – seems the fact that Elgar's musical language "speaks" more idiomatically in his instrumental music, when no words are needed or involved. Due to Elgar's secluded and enigmatic character, his vulnerable soul and heartfelt emotions conceal either behind and between the instrumental lines – or, in the other extreme, exuberantly reveal themselves in the (auto)suggestive flamboyant outbursts of pithy confessions. Overall, Elgar's songs seem in a difficult position. This double CD box sheds some light on this neglected genre.

Abundant insight on two CDs

The title of the double CD box *The Hills of Dreamland* (what a wonderful Elgarian motto!) is borrowed from Arthur L. Salmon's poem *Pleading*, one of Elgar's best-known songs. The first CD of this meritorious production includes most of Elgar's songs for solo voice and orchestra (though not his most prominent example, the *Sea Pictures*) in fine recordings with the

BBC Concert Orchestra under the baton of Barry Wordsworth. This second and smaller of the London-based radio orchestras matches absolutely most of the qualities of its bigger sibling with the symphonic appellation.

The booklet, though furnishing very instructive liner-notes, contains an inaccuracy by mismatching *The Wind at Dawn* (Elgar's first setting of a poem from his future wife) and *The Pipes of Pan* to the *Song Cycle* Op.59. It is embarrassing for a commendable label like SOMM, which has contributed considerably to make Elgar's songs more popular, to hype Elgar's beautiful, but only three pieces of *Grania and Diarmid* as "Complete incidental music"!

Nevertheless, the compilation of the songs is a pleasant journey through Elgar's vocal corpus. In particular, the well-balanced mezzo of Kathryn Rudge is a revelation to my ears: she possesses a radiant treble, and the intimacy of her *mezza voce* in *Pleading* is as touching as her vocal power in *The Torch* is resounding. Her male Dutch co-soloist Henk Neven proves to be, with his agile baritone, a fine and intelligent constructor of Elgar's vocal lines; but sometimes he exceeds his *tessitura*, his voice getting too close and thin in the highest notes (one-line E-flat and F in *Follow the Colours*).

Elgar Society's audible merits

The impetus of *Follow the Colours* emerges from the martial spirit, which preceded and prepared for the Great War. The recording is one of the discoveries on this CD, though its musical value is of lesser importance. Nevertheless, the orchestration brings us closer to Elgar's emotional exuberance, one significant trait of his complex character. 100 years after the end of the Great War, the song's patriotic marching militarism (the vast percussion section is cast with timpani, side and bass drums, triangle and cymbals) can only be regarded with the same suspicious distance Edward VII showed about the warmongering stomping of his German nephew, Wilhelm II. However, this orchestra version is meritorious as a first recording, a fruit of the Elgar Complete Edition, published in 2012.

The Elgar Society financially supported the first disc and has contributed the bonus CD with 11 of Elgar's piano accompanied songs: two of them (*The Mill Wheel Song* and the habanera-highlighted Spanish *The Muleteer's Serenade*) were never recorded before, their scores only issued in 2013 in Vol. 15 of the Complete Edition. Here, the two performers are the Swiss soprano Nathalie de Montmollin and Barry Collett as her partner at the piano. German Elgar fans had the opportunity to get acquainted with Nathalie de Montmollin in *The Kingdom* in Aachen earlier this year. On this CD, you enjoy both her creative sensibility and dramatic impact on the song miniatures – once you got used to her wide vibrato. The pianistic partnership of the Elgar-experienced and laudable Barry Collett is sensitive, whereas for my taste the microphones have rendered his colourful playing a bit dull.

An attractive chance is the immediate comparison between the two CDs, listening to the piano version of two songs (*The Torch* and *The River*, 1909/10) and discovering distinct differences to Elgar's later version in an orchestral

setting, his Op.60 (1912): this interrelation unfolds the obvious supremacy of the big-size version in Elgar's idiomatic instrumental impact.

Speak, music is the last track on this CD, to a poem by Arthur C. Benson, expressing the wish that the song should whisper "something more true than death". Music overcoming death – this orphic yearning has become true for Edward Elgar, as his works have enshrined his immortal soul. Therefore, this fine CD project is adequately concluded with the lines

"Soar, voice, soar, heavenwards, and pray for me,
Wondering, wandering; bid me rest."

Michael Schwalb

When I joined this Society I was welcomed enthusiastically by a number of 'elderly' members particularly as I represented 'youth' and, the future! Little did I know how deeply I would become involved. I suspect many of those generous souls were younger than I am now; more than fifty years later! For any Society like ours the recruitment of the young is always a challenge and, because this is so difficult, adds to the need to review, from time to time, where we are going, what we might do to recruit new members and then consider how to keep them. Despite these challenges the Society (or rather the Council) has managed a number of achievements in recent years, notably the support for new or first time recordings of Elgar's music. Although there may not be much that is 'new' in this recording of Elgar's songs for orchestra this is the first time they have been grouped together in this way and, in so doing, reveal further miracles that lie buried within Elgar's music.

Once more SOMM has come up with a recording which, with its usual immaculate production standards, is commended to all members of the Society and beyond. At the heart of the disc are two young singers with great promise, the ever reliable BBC Concert Orchestra and that fine Elgarian Barry Wordsworth. In addition a bonus CD is supplied which, under the expert leadership of Barry Collett with the Swiss soprano Nathalie Montmollin, offers a selection of songs is given for our additional pleasure. It is Barry Collett too who is at the heart of these recordings, his excellent notes subtly displaying his intimate knowledge and understanding of the music. The orchestral disc mixes the voices of Rudge and Neven and ends with the complete music Elgar wrote for *Grania and Diarmid* in the autumn of 1901. 'Hot on the heels' of the Hallé recording under Sir Mark Elder (CD HLL 7544) this performance has the great benefit of Kathryn Rudge's rich and beautiful voice in 'There are seven that pull the thread'. She is one of the most intelligent of young singer's around and, despite its brevity, she invests this song with the mystery and gravity it warrants. Wordsworth's 'Funeral March' is the broadest of those recorded recently (see also Sir Andrew Davis on Chandos (CHSA 5188). The BBC Concert

Orchestra is more than able to hold its own here, the recording reflecting the subtlety of Elgar's orchestration and 'sound-world' he so brilliantly creates.

Barry Collett, in his notes acknowledges that Elgar's songs 'have had a bad press' but that 'his solo songs contain some gems' and some of these 'gems' he orchestrated and, whenever Elgar touched the orchestra his music comes alive. The rhythmically challenging *The Torch* and *The River* are but two examples, Kathryn Rudge investing the music with the passion and sense of regret it requires. *The Wind at Dawn* from 1888, as Collett points out, is 'lift[ed] to a level above the original with Elgar's 1912 'orchestral wizardry''. This is Rudge at her best, as she embraces Alice Elgar's complicated words as Wordsworth and his orchestra move the song thrillingly forward in a song which anticipates 'The Swimmer' from *Sea Pictures*, over ten years in the future. Lastly Rudge and Wordsworth produce a stunning version of the increasingly ubiquitous *Pleading* and do their best with *The Kingsway*; a setting of one of Alice Elgar's least successful poems the trio tune from P&C No 4 seemingly out of place as Elgar attempts to invest the song with the gravitas Alice and he no doubt hoped it deserved.

So to Henk Neven who sings one of the longest and one of the worst songs written by Elgar: *Follow the Colours: Marching Song for Soldiers* written in 1908 and orchestrated in 1914 as the world was consumed by war. It is one of those pieces of music that seems as twice and long as it is despite Neven, Wordsworth and the orchestra's best efforts. Anyway it is now recorded in this form and it is possible that I may be wrong and that others fall under its elusive charms! Happily Neven is much more at home in the other songs on this disc which include the three songs from Op. 59 and *The Pipes of Pan* that mysterious composition from 1900. His warm baritone enters seductively with *Oh, soft was the song* his subtle phrasing apparent in the second of the Gilbert Parker settings in the opening lines. These three songs shine in Elgar's orchestration and Neven's softer tone offers a contrast to the more direct voice of Roderick Williams in the recent Chandos release (with Davis, as above). Neven is particularly good in *Twilight* with words guaranteed to get Elgar's attention: 'and the old days never will come again'.

It is good to have this bonus disc of songs with Barry Collett's sympathetic accompaniments preserved at last. Nathalie de Montmollin has become a great advocate for these songs and is performing them in Germany where she now lives. In this we have the opportunity to compare two versions of *The Torch* and *The River* and, although I prefer Rudge's voice the urgency of *The River* is conveyed with the unflinching passion de Montmollin feels for the music. Our Chairman and Council, were determined that de Montmollin's performances with Collett should be preserved (following a performance in Rickmansworth) and they will not be disappointed.

These two discs contain three premiere recordings: the *Mill Wheel Song 'Winter'* and the *Muleteer's Serenade* on the bonus disc and the first complete version for voice and orchestra of *Follow the Colours*. In conclusion this release offers an opening for the listener to a less well known area of Elgar's music and is tremendous value (two discs for the price of one). To return to

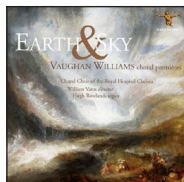
my opening point: the Society receives a high profile in the booklet and I hope that it will encourage buyers to explore the benefits of membership. It should be noted that I attended the recording sessions on 27 November 2016 and 21 March 2017. In addition, I wrote the note for the CD booklet on the *Incidental Music for Grania and Diarmid*.

Andrew Neill

choral music making. From the 'Christmas' CD I would single out the nine arrangements for unaccompanied male voices dating from 1941 that were commissioned by the British Council for British troops stationed in Iceland to sing: and from the other the *Hymn of Freedom, England, my England, A Call to the Free Nations*, and *Land of Our Birth*.

Suffice it to say that within these CDs you will find your own personal treasures, and that is reason enough for acquiring them.

Martin Bird

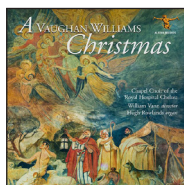


Albion Records

ALBCD034

Vaughan Williams: *Three Vocal Valses; Sound Sleep; The New Commonwealth; O Praise the Lord of Heaven; My soul, Praise the Lord; Little Cloister; A Hymn of Freedom; England, my England; A Call to the Free Nations; The Airmen's Hymn; Land of Our Birth; Hymn for St. Margaret of Scotland; Folk song arrangements*

Hugh Rowlands (organ); Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, directed by William Vann



Albion Records

ALBCD035

Vaughan Williams: *Eight Traditional English Carols (1919); Two carols (1945); Carols from The Oxford Book of Carols (1928); Nine Carols for male voices (1941)*

Hugh Rowlands (organ); Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, directed by William Vann

Back in April I wrote: 'Yet again the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society has put us entirely in their debt by issuing a CD of complete unknown Vaughan Williams' music'. And now here are two CDs from the Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea offering now fewer than forty-six of his choral compositions and arrangements, both unknown and familiar.

If I put the caveat that this time I do not feel 'entirely' in the Society's debt it is because of a sense of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of pieces on offer. These are not CDs to be listened to at one sitting. Even the most ardent enthusiast might reasonably feel a little jaded after the twenty-two carols of 'A Vaughan Williams Christmas', no matter how well performed and recorded – and William Vann and his forces are first-rate, and the recordings, made in St. Jude-on-the-hill, Hampstead, excellent.

Over the past two months I have dipped into these CDs as the mood took me, and have heard every track. In all honesty I must confess that there are probably some I shall never listen to again, and equally feel a sense of relief that some thirty of his arrangements for *The Oxford Book of Carols* have not been included.

But there are unexpected treasures here, particularly amongst those pieces written during the Second World War, not in a tub-thumping patriotic vein, but out of a compulsion to preserve something of the traditions of British

ELGAR VIEWED FROM AFAR

On the 11 October 1910 the Italian Francesco Balilla Pratella (1880-1955) published his *Manifesto of Futurist Musicians* which was one of the earliest documents of Futurism's influence in fields outside of the visual arts. Pratella mentions composers of various European countries who according to his point of view contributed to the struggle to overcome the past with innovatory contributions – Edward Elgar is among these musicians.

Excerpts from Pratella's Manifesto of Futurist Musicians:

'I appeal to the *young*. Only they should listen, and only they can understand what I have to say. Some people are born old, slobbering spectres of the past, cryptograms swollen with poison. To them no words or ideas, but a single injunction: *the end*.

I appeal to the *young*, to those who are thirsty for the new, the actual, the lively. They follow me, faithful and fearless, along the roads of the future, gloriously preceded by my, by our, intrepid brothers, the Futurist poets and painters, beautiful with violence, daring with rebellion, and luminous with the animation of genius.

A year has passed since a jury composed of Pietro Mascagni, Giacomo Orefice, Guglielmo Mattioli, Rodolfo Ferrari and the critic Gian Battista Nappi announced that my musical Futurist work entitled *La Sina d'Vargöun*, based on a free verse poem, also by me, had won a prize of 10,000 lire against all other contenders. This prize was to cover the cost of performance of the work thus recognized as superior and worthy, according to the bequest of the Bolognese, Cincinnato Baruzzi.

The performance, which took place in December 1909, in the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, brought with it success in the form of enthusiasm, base and stupid criticisms, generous defence on the part of friends and strangers, respect and imitation from my enemies.

After such a triumphal entry into Italian musical society and after establishing contact with the public, publishers and critics, I was able to judge with supreme serenity the intellectual mediocrity, commercial baseness and misoneism that reduce Italian music to a unique and almost unvarying form of vulgar melodrama, an absolute result of which is our inferiority when compared to the Futurist evolution of music in other countries.

In Germany, after the glorious and revolutionary era dominated by the sublime genius of Wagner, Richard Strauss almost elevated the baroque style of instrumentation into an essential form of art, and although he cannot hide the aridity, commercialism and banality of his spirit with harmonic affectations and skillful, complicated and ostentatious acoustics, he nevertheless does struggle to combat and overcome the past with innovatory talent.

In France, Claude Debussy, a profoundly subjective artist and more a literary man than a musician, swims in a diaphanous and calm lake of tenuous, delicate, clear blue and constantly transparent harmonies. He presents instrumental symbolism and a monotonous polyphony of harmonic sensations conveyed through a scale of whole tones—a new system, but a system nevertheless, and consequently a voluntary limitation. But even with these devices he is not always able to mask the scanty value of his one-sided themes and rhythms and his almost total lack of ideological development. This development consists, as far as he is concerned, in the primitive and infantile periodic repetition of a short and poor theme, or in rhythmic, monotonous and vague progressions. Having returned in his operatic formulae to the stale concepts of Florentine chamber music which gave birth to melodrama in the seventeenth century, he has still not yet succeeded in

completely reforming the music drama of his country. Nevertheless, he more than any other fights the past valiantly and there are many points at which he overcomes it. Stronger than Debussy in ideas, but musically inferior, is G. Charpentier.

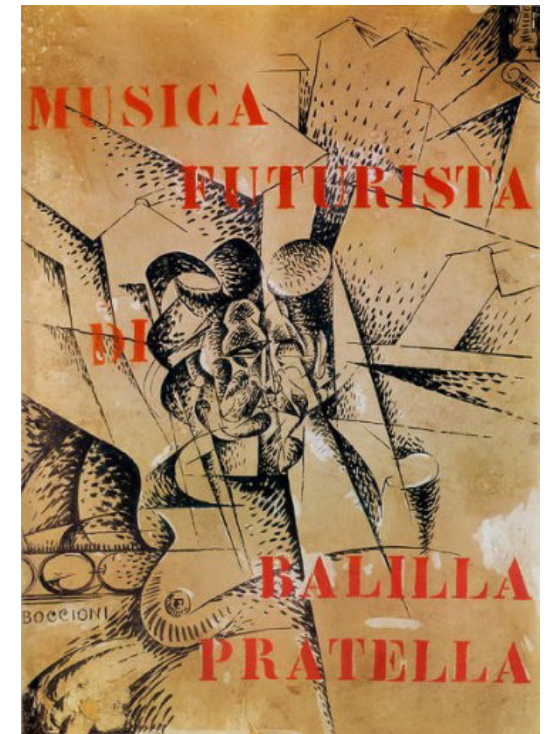
In England, Edward Elgar is cooperating with our efforts to destroy the past by pitting his will to amplify classical symphonic forms, seeking richer ways of thematic development and multiform variations on a single theme. Moreover, he directs his energy not merely to the exuberant variety of the instruments, but to the variety of their combinational effects, which is in keeping with our complex sensibility.

In Russia, Modeste Mussorgsky, renewed by the spirit of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, grafts the primitive national element on to the formulae inherited from others, and by seeking dramatic truth and harmonic liberty he abandons tradition and consigns it to oblivion. Alexander Glazunov is moving in the same direction, although still primitive and far from a pure and balanced concept of art.

In Finland and Sweden, also, innovatory tendencies are being nourished by means of national musical and poetical elements, and the works of Sibelius confirm this. [...]

[...] And now the reactions of the traditionalists are poured on my head in all their fury. I laugh serenely and care not a jot; I have climbed beyond the past, and I loudly summon young musicians to the flag of Futurism which, launched by the poet Marinetti in *Le Figaro* in Paris, has in a short space of time conquered most of the intellectual centres of the world.'

[Umbro Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos*, translated by Caroline Tisdall, London 1973.]





'Brinkwells', the cottage near Fittleworth, Sussex (Alan Webb)

100 YEARS AGO ...

At the beginning of September Elgar made a brief visit to London: staying overnight with Lalla Vandervelde at her Kensington Square flat before travelling with her to Ridgehurst, the home of her parents and Elgar's old friends, Edward and Tonia Speyer. He returned on the 3rd, 'so peased to be back & in country again'. Next day while he was 'Writing Sonata, Sheep came to graze'. On the 6th 'He wrote & offered dedication to Mrs. Joshua'. But four days later 'Marie Joshua died suddenly, did not hear of it till following Saturday 14th great shock to us'.

On the 15th he was writing 3rd Movement of Sonata growing most beautiful – Wrote part of Quintet wonderful weird beginning same atmosphere as "Owls" – evidently reminiscence of sinister trees & impression of Flexham Park'.

Next day 'The Reeve came. I bought the near underwood for £3 & proceeded to cut a boundary'. Billy Reed came again on the 18th, 'Most enthusiastic over Sonata. Said there is nothing at all like it & so perfect for both instruments. Delighted with wood too'. There was now 'Splendid [war] news on all sides', and on 7 October Elgar noted: 'Germans suing for peace'.

On the 11th the Elgars returned to Severn House where, on the 14th, there was a 'Large party to hear E. & Mr. Reed play new Sonata – Very nice afternoon all entranced with E's booful new music – All went like magic after such short notice'.

On the 16th Elgar went to stay with Frank Schuster at The Hut, coming up to London on the 21st for a couple of day for a charity performance of *The Fringes of the Fleet*.

A growth had been discovered on Alice's face, and on the 29th she 'had a little operation: removal of a 'wen' sort of thing. She is going on quite well & shd. be about again soon'.

At the beginning of November Elgar went to Ridgehurst again for a brief visit: 'Made them very happy, & in aft. played all kinds of old romantic music to them, Mr. Speyer sang & shouted & seemed quite young again'.

On the 11th 'E. & A. heard Armistice was signed – E. put up our Flag, it looked gorgeous – E. & A. to Brinkwells'. Carice went to the Coliseum that evening 'where 'Land of Hope & Glory' was sung twice the 2nd time the words of refrain were thrown on the screen & people stood & joined in – Very exciting & moving'.

At Brinkwells, Elgar 'Wrote music & tried to recover the threads – (broken)'. Across the pages in his diary for the 21st to 24th November he wrote: 'All these days writing music & working a little in the wood'. He was 'deep in 1st movement of his 5tet'. On 3 December Reed came ' & sd. the 4tet was the most advanced ever written & was amazed at Quintet'.

On the 16th a telegram came 'to say burglars at Severn House – poor dear A. decided to go'. Alice had informed Hampstead Police Station of their absence from Severn House, so that an eye could be kept on the property: two members of the force availed themselves of the opportunity to help themselves to the contents. Alice found 'E.'s coes & all wine & c stolen'. She returned to Brinkwells that evening.

On the 24th 'E.'s beautiful 4tet finished – Thrilling last movement'. He and Carice returned to London on the 27th, leaving Alice all alone at Brinkwells to pack up and close the cottage. She returned to Severn House on the 31st.

Martin Bird

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