

# The Elgar Society JOURNAL



MAY  
1989

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

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ELGAR SOCIETY JOURNAL

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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May 1989

## EDITORIAL

The starting point for this editorial must surely be an apology to readers for the late arrival of the January issue. This reached United Kingdom members in February, but I think it was the first time that copies had been so delayed. Much of the editorial and preparation work had been done in good time, but unfortunately our typesetter had to go into hospital in the middle of preparations for printing. There was no way we could get round the problem, and the only option was to await his return so that we could go ahead. Nobly, he worked on it almost as soon as he was back home, otherwise it would have been much later than it was. So, with apologies to those who missed concerts and announcements earlier in the year, we hope that this issue will be in your hands at the beginning of May.

There are a number of announcements in this issue which are important to Society members — most important of all, of course, being the Annual General Meeting. Last year we had an excellent attendance, and we hope for even better numbers this year.

Festivals seem to abound, and there is a great deal for Elgarians to enjoy. We expect good things from Malvern and the Three Choirs, but this year we have the added attraction of the Nottingham Festival, with its emphasis on British Music and artistic achievement. We hope that all the events will be well-supported.

I again appeal to members to let me know of events, recitals, lectures, exhibitions, etc. which will appeal to members, but please let me know well in advance. It is no good our learning of concerts after they have taken place, or in the week when the Journal is to be published. I hope too that the new policy of accepting advertising will bring in welcome revenue to the Society, and we look to members to suggest the Journal when considering advertising of local concerts, though we appreciate that the fact that we only appear thrice-annually can be a problem for some organisations.

April marked the centenary of Adrian Boult's birth, and in our September issue we hope to include several items in tribute to Sir Adrian, the first President of the Elgar Society. Meanwhile, enjoy the summer, and enjoy your music.

RONALD TAYLOR  
Editor

## ELGAR AND MAHLER: More than Nationalists'

by Neville Cardus

[This article appeared in Radio Times for May 1, 1931, and appears here by kind permission of the editor of that publication.]

Not long ago I asked a distinguished Austrian musician, "When are they going to understand and take to Elgar's music in Vienna?" His reply was very much to the point: "As soon as you in England take to and understand Mahler." The answer went rather deep. For it is the fact, despite all the easy platitudes about the 'universality' of great art, that there are certain sorts of genius which reveal their secrets wholly to none but the people of a like racial psychology, to none but those of a like soil and air and habit of thought and tradition.

We cannot translate Robert Burns into German, and the difficulty is not a mere external one of finding dialect equivalents in an alien tongue. This particular problem of translation involves a way of thought and life, a natural accent, not possible to anybody but a Scot, and a Scot of a certain period. So with Heine; to get his essence into English would take much more than translation in language; the job calls almost for an operation in blood transfusion! Even in the art of music, where we have a language more or less common to all places and countries, there has happened from time to time the phenomenon of a composer whose essential spirit reveals itself but slowly and reluctantly to foreign sensibilities.

Elgar and Mahler are poles apart as makers of music, but they are both in that indefinable category of artists of whom it is possible to say that they are not only national, but, what is more they 'belong' - as the Americans say - to a particular region of their own land and a particular period in their land's social, intellectual, and aesthetic development. Elgar is an Edwardian - and it would be difficult indeed to explain what is an Edwardian to a Viennese. But we are dealing with subtler matters than just epochs, and national points of view; we are dealing with an *attitude*. And just as the Edwardian secret must always baffle the man born by the Danube, so must the naive provincialism of Mahler leave Englishmen a little at a distance.

I despair of ever getting on to paper even a remote notion of Mahler's finely-shaded compound of a simple domestic sentiment and a cultivated romantic technique of expression. The one was the result of environment; the other came from his study and practice in a city where the world's music is constantly in the air. A few weeks ago Gerhardt sang Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* in London. Some of the critics completely misunderstood the point of them. They thought it was 'hitting below the belt' for a composer to exploit anything so intimate as the death of children. The objection might have been valid if Mahler really had 'exploited' his very tender subject. But the songs are entirely remote in expression; Mahler puts his painful theme behind a kind of veiled sentiment, cool and implicit. He is a composer of naive heartfelt themes - and of very fastidious diction. Elgar is the opposite; a writer almost fulsome in his mode of expression, yet thoroughly English in his choice of those very emotions which make for decent presentation in public places. Elgar's music often goes into great depths of feeling, but he endows it with a ceremonial gait and stature in which we can share without embarrassment to our British dislike of making ourselves too individual in our displays of sensibility. Elgar's music is always praising England or seeking God - in places like Whitehall or Worcester Cathedral, where there is no danger of anything but a ceremonial exhibition of what lies in our hearts. You can't give yourself away in the presence of a poised and collective or public nobility.

need for reticence in the kneeling group or slow-moving procession! I feel that Elgar's music is usually either opening something or closing something institutional; we have in Elgar the

Laureate rather than the poet (I need hardly say that all this is not intended as a belittlement of the greatest living composer; I am merely trying to classify style).

Mahler lives a more personal existence in his music than Elgar in his; for that reason his emotional content is less sophisticated. Elgar's music is his own in technique and general style, but, as I say, we can most of us pray with him and march with him, if we are men of England. Mahler had democratic ideals; he wished to establish a species of symphonic music which would appeal to all sorts and conditions of the musically faithful. In his Eighth Symphony he used a gigantic apparatus — a very full orchestra, two mixed choruses, a boys' choir, and seven soloists. But all these many voices sing with Mahler's voice; the discourse aims at a cosmic consciousness, but the accent is domestic and simple. Mahler's music is most times homely, of his particular soil. The dress of culture is — a dress.

To the end of his life, with all its wide ranges of knowledge and culture, Mahler remained a naive composer, using music to provide him with a way of life and a means whereby he might elucidate his emotional experiences. Though he had a style entirely his own — it is nonsense to speak of Mahler, as some of his critics do, as though he were purely a derivative composer — there is an almost innocent idiom in his melodies which really keeps him close to the folk-song learned in his childhood. The organization of Mahler's music, the texture of it, is subtly civilized enough, but the accent frequently has the poignant unself-consciousness of nature. We need always to remember that before Mahler became the greatest of conductors Vienna has ever known, he was a boy in the village of Kalischt, in Bohemia, son of a shopkeeper.

Professor Adolf Weissman argued that restlessness and scepticism overthrew faith and naivete in Mahler. Sometimes, in the symphonies, a curiously frustrated sense is to be felt, as of a man cultured beyond the needs of his original genius. In his songs, though, there is no such note of spiritual and aesthetic discord. The music is direct in sentiment, deliciously scored for orchestra, with melodies that demand the wood-wind's purity of intonation; they are very difficult for the human voice to sing without sullying them. The *Leider eines fahrenden Gesellen* has an untranslatable title; usually it is rendered 'Songs of a Travelling Journeyman', but that merely suggests a plumber's mate with lead piping round his back. A better equivalent might be 'Songs of an Apprentice's Wanderyear'. The title is not really relevant either to the words or music of this beautiful cycle, which tells of the lamentations of a kind of Shropshire lad — only Mahler has none of Housman's bitter-sweet cynicism and pathos. This sadness is mild-eyed, a little *gemutlich*. The songs tell of a lad whose beloved has apparently been stolen from him. The first begins 'When my sweetheart weds the day will be sorrowful for me'. No solace will he find in the fields or in the quietness of his little chamber. Then he sings of the loveliness of the countryside; the birds seek to cheer his gloom. But no; 'what I wish can never bloom for me'. Here the melody is one which is heard in the first movement of Mahler's first symphony; throughout all of his music recur themes with a poignant aptness to those who know their different origins. Mahler's works are usually autobiographical. The third lyric begins stormily as the apprentice announces that in his breast is a burning knife. Quavers beat out the passion in D minor. Then there is a calm transition — 'When I look upwards into the heavens I see two blue eyes; when I go into the fields I see blond tresses blown by the wind'. And at last another outcry: 'Would that I rested on the black bier, never to open again my eyes'. The music sinks; cor anglais, viola and bassoon call back the strains of the beginning; the end is a low E flat in the double basses and harp, with drum and tam-tam effects — very characteristic of Mahler's childlike essays in the *macabre*. The fourth and last lyric of the cycle begins with a cortege-like movement in E minor. The development brings to mind Mahler's first symphony again, the third movement. Mahler now goes beyond the surface significance of his words; he identifies the apprentice's solitude and pathos with the solitude and pathos of his own life. 'I fared alone in silent night. My companions were love and sorrow. By the wayside stood a linden tree. I rested under it and blossom fell on me like snow. Then I forgot the soreness of life, and all was well — love, sorrow, world and dreams'.

Mahler's style as a song-writer was peculiarly his own. He does not count amongst the writers of the art-Lied proper, as we know it from Brahms, Strauss and Wolf. Sometimes he approximates to the Schubert of the 'Winterreise', but without the full human urge of Schubert. There is the fineness of musical silver-point about the writing in the *Leider eines fahrenden Gesellen*. Perhaps of all Mahler's work his songs will last the longest. Elgar's songs, of course, are terribly perishable. Not a lyric poetry, but the swell of blank verse has been Elgar's choice.

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## THE LAST OF POWICK . . .

(This article is made up from two accounts which have reached us, dealing with the events of 23rd/25th September, 1988. The greater part was written by Jack & Vivienne McKenzie, and a note of the music and the forthcoming recording by Barry Collett. We have combined the two to make one account. EDITOR)

About a year ago the imminent closure of Powick Hospital was thought to be an occasion worth recording: it could hardly be *celebrated* when local feeling was so rampant. Ideas were shuffled between authoritative departments, but by Bank Holiday, 29th August, virtually nothing had been arranged although a concert of Elgar's music and a Thanksgiving Service were planned and Powick PCC were supplying parking wardens and wine waiters. The conductor, Barry Collett, asked Mr & Mrs McKenzie to check on-site arrangements — the short answer was, none had been made.

The agreed concert venue was the Hospital Chapel which had been unused for five years. There was no electricity, the piano out of tune, the organ unplayable, and dust was everywhere. Facilities of a Green Room (changing space, mirrors, toilets, safe place for instruments and music, etc.) did not exist for the orchestra of 16 coming from Rutland, a choir of 8, and a string quartet. The Altar was where the players needed to sit, but there were no chairs, and the choir wanted to stand. Everybody asked said that somebody else was in charge of arrangements!

A consultation with the Hospital Chaplain, Canon Williams, and the Head Porter, Mr. de Boer, identified the problems. Eventually the Malvern Hills District Council provided a generator and electrician on the day of the concert, and at last we had hot water and power to enable us to start the cleaning. The Altar, every lectern and prayer desk, the Bishop's Throne, and Vicar's Chairs and piano were moved, cleaned and polished. Jack waged a solo war on acres of plain red carpet and drapes, and set out the orchestra seating. The pews were washed, the kneelers and cushions tidied, and the oddments neatly stacked. Kenny, a very special patient, helped move things and polished the Communion Rail. Anna of the Greenhouses arranged a bright display of pot plants, and instructions for Vivienne to collect greenery from the grounds, to go with the flowers dried by the patients, for the vases.

It was all right on the night, the concert was a success. Unfortunately, the 'mothballing' of the hospital had already overtaken the ballroom, but the music sounded very well in the fine acoustics of the Chapel.

The performers were members of the Rutland Sinfonia, under their conductor Barry Collett, who is well-known for his performances of Elgar's lesser-known music. Their recent recording of Elgar's *First World War Music* on the Pearl label has been highly acclaimed, and it is therefore appropriate that it should have been these performers who gave what must have been the first performance ever of these delightful pieces. The music is written for an unusual combination of instruments — strings, piano, piccolo, lute, clarinet, two cornets, trombone and euphonium; and the charm, high spirit, and sheer tunefulness of these polkas and quadrilles surprised and delighted the audience. It is good news that the performances have been recorded, and will be issued later this year.

The Company of Music sang slightly later Elgar songs to piano and violin accompaniment. These songs have local connections: words by Alice, Elgar's wife, whom he courted in Malvern, Mrs. Fitton of Malvern, mother of 'Ysobel', and patron of our good friend Olive Gosden; words by Longfellow, a favourite poet who planted a tree in Lawnside garden when he visited Malvern; and others dedicated to Worcester's W.M. Dyson and Hereford's Percy Hull.

The Richey Quartet gave an excellent performance of the Elgar String Quartet, of 1918. Although written in Sussex, the music simply exudes the atmosphere of the Malvern Hills, and was especially moving to those of us who had seen the Hills during the day and as the sun set, from the Hospital grounds, standing by the rare weeping-ash tree, to which Elgar used to tether his horse. It is little wonder Alice loved this work, and it was played at her funeral at St. Wulstan's Church, Little Malvern, by W.H. Reed and friends. The concert was followed by a reception in the Common Room, during which the Rutland Sinfonia played an arrangement of *Idyll*, Op.4, original written for violin and piano. But the piano in the Common Room was even more out of tune than that in the Chapel!

Next morning a small audience heard a most interesting talk by Dr. Jerrold Northrop Moore about the importance of the Powick Music in Elgar's career. On Sunday, 25th September the volunteers restored the Chapel to its formal layout, creating a safe passage to the Vestry for the Bishop. At the Thanksgiving Service that evening the shining brass symbolised the love and care which permeates the Hospital, but that seems to have been ignored by officialdom for the premises have now closed. The Chapel was well-filled with friends, staff, patients, and guests for the service. It was preceded by a short recital by Mr. Windsor, former organist of the Chapel, playing a Chopin study on the piano, as, regrettably, even with generous help and advice from the Directors of the firm, it was impossible to retune the 1886 Nicholson Palace Yard organ for the weekend. \*\* The Worcester Salvation Army Band then played a selection of Elgar's music, of which their performance of Nimrod was outstanding. The Band and Powick Church Choir led the hymns, and the service was conducted by Canon John Williams.

After the service we were invited to join the Clergy for light refreshments; a generous and appetising spread had been prepared by the Staff, and the good food and drink was complemented by the good company.

Unfortunately the other event of the weekend was arranged by MHDC for the same time on Sunday evening. Consequently only a small audience heard *The Music Makers* in Malvern Festival Theatre by Philomusica of Gloucester.

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NOTE: At the time of writing the Nicholson organ is without a home, and unless a suitable place can be found for it, it must be broken up. The organ has a Manual Compass CC-G, 56 notes, and a Pedal Compass CCC-F, 30 notes. Anyone interested should try to contact the authorities at the Powick Mental Hospital, Worcester, or make contact with Jack McKenzie via the Journal.

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The following are required by Barry Siebelt, 5570 Netherland Avenue, Riverdale, N. Y. 10471, U.S.A.: Dream of Gerontius — the 1916 records conducted by Henry Wood; the 1924 recording conducted by Batten; Melodiya C10 23075; a video or audio tape of the 1984 Three Choirs performance; ditto of the 1982 performance at Boston's Symphony Hall. Any offers direct to Mr. Siebelt, please.

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## ELGAR'S 'TOP TEN' ON RADIO 3

during 1988

INTRODUCTION & ALLEGRO, Op. 47	12 performances
ENIGMA VARIATIONS, Op.36	9 "
SERENADE FOR STRINGS, Op.20	7 "
CELLO CONCERTO, Op.85	6 "
SYMPHONY NO.1, Op.55	5 "
FROISSART OVERTURE, Op. 19	5 "
IN THE SOUTH OVERTURE, Op.50	5 "
SYMPHONY NO.2. Op.63	4 "
PIANO QUINTET, Op.84	4 "
FALSTAFF, Op.68	3 "

In addition we had the treat in August (28th) of a repeat broadcast of the delightful "Wood Magic", this feature in words and music being an evocation of Elgar's life and music, and portraying his character and life-long love and closeness to Nature. Also on 6th August there was a fascinating comparison programme of recordings, from 1915 to 1984, of eleven versions of his glorious *Violin Concerto*. The all too brief excerpts captured not only various styles and techniques of the different artists, through some seventy years, but also displayed the true greatness of the work since it first saw the light of day in November, 1910.

After 11 months without *The Music Makers*, a musical miracle happened in December, with two performances of one of his most poignant major works, a sadly neglected creation.

And now rarities. These works each received but one performance, and include the following: *Sospiri*, *Dream Children*, *Suite from The Crown of India*, *Suite from The Spanish Lady*, *Sanguine Fan Ballet music*, *King Arthur Suite*, *In Smyrna*, and not forgetting *Four Part-Songs*, Op.53, no.4 being 'Owls' with words by the composer.

So, all in all, there were 136 performances on Radio Three in 1988. I am hoping that this figure will be exceeded in 1989, but surveying the past three years' totals it can be certain that Edward Elgar has not lost his musical magic.

Tom Rowbotham

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## ELGAR—THE ASTROLOGICAL CONNECTION

by

David Colbeck©

Part II

What we astrologers call the ascendant, the sign 'rising' over the horizon at the time of birth, is most important. In Elgar's case it was Leo, which signifies that his outward personality would be expressed in a grandiose manner — another source of the famous 'nobilmente' perhaps. There is a strong tendency to 'play out one's personal drama'. Remember those letters where Elgar rants and raves, like a kind of musical King Lear, as if he were the most neglected mortal alive? Also the quotation referred to earlier — can Elgar have been play-acting, a strong dose of self-pity, quite soon after the death of his wife, epitomised, I would suggest, in the *Cello Concerto*.

However, a Leo ascendant would also make him wholehearted, generous, powerful, steadfast, dedicated, faithful and honest, also having a real need for personal appreciation. Tales of his great generosity are legion, often at great personal cost of time, money, and effort to himself.



To continue: of proud and handsome appearance, a lover of clothes and beautiful surroundings. 'Dorabella', for one, in her book on Elgar gives a vivid description of his powerful physical presence, which is supported by many others, and also by photographs and archive film, even into his seventies!

As far as career matters are concerned, we know that Elgar underwent early struggles, well into his thirties. However, his undoubted musical genius gradually emerged, like a summer flower. His chart tells us that he would want to establish himself securely in his chosen profession, and also enjoy the fruits of his labours. He will build upon firm foundations, working patiently and solidly towards his goals. (There is also a link in this area of his chart between mathematicians and the formation of musical structure, often prominent in the charts of singers and musicians alike — this is the planet Venus in its own sign of Taurus.) There is also a strong desire to like harmony, beauty with his work — to be artistically self-expressive.

One of the specifics outlined earlier has yet to be analysed — that is Elgar's relationship with women. This is so involved and intricate that it can only be touched on here. However, there are numerous indications in the chart which may increase our understanding of this complex personality. For example, the very same aspect which makes him a consummate artist also gives rise to the likelihood of long-lasting, deeply involved, romantic relationships. From his fiancée, Helen Weaver, (so sadly, it did not work out) to his wife, to 'Dorabella', Alice Stuart Wortley, Mary Lygon, et al., there is a consistent polarity (beautifully and symbolically expressed in the Violin Concerto), the male/female dilemma.

It is constantly repeated throughout Elgar's chart that he would have great personal attractiveness, even charisma. It could be variously described as "a charming speaker", "a love of harmony in his own and other's personal relationships." An interpretation of his first/seventh House signs even states that this type "could have hidden love affairs, which become the proving ground through which he will express his naturally creative and romantic instincts." And later, on marriage, "although he *needs* marriage to achieve his goals, there is some difficulty in maintaining a lasting relationship with one mate." I would assert that it was only the incredible selfless and supporting role of Alice Elgar which kept the marriage on an even keel. For *she* was exactly the kind of wife which Elgar needed. To return to my source: "Divorce is common with this placement, but can be avoided if the mate is non-demanding and philosophically able to understand the idea of mutual independence within the state of marriage." I maintain that Alice had an instinctively complete understanding of 'Edu's' needs, and this is why she turned a blind eye to his platonic dalliances. She knew that he needed this extra-marital stimulation because it was vital to the creative powers. When discussing the fourth/tenth my source states: "He needs a . . . partner who will encourage him to achieve career stability and power that will ultimately give him the security he is crying out for." I consider that to be a very accurate description of Elgar's marital circumstances.

In this brief space I have not been able to explore fully the many facets of this absorbing subject. Elgar was a complex bundle of contradictions, the answers to which emerge only when we examine his chart in greater detail. I hope to enlarge on this subject in another place, and do fuller justice to the subject matter. Such areas as his religious convictions, his views on the after-life, his use of modern recording techniques — all are there supported by aspects in the chart. In the meantime I hope that I have whetted your appetite for more of the 'astrological connection.'

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Sources: "Portrait of Elgar", Michael Kennedy; "Elgar — a Creative Life", Jerrold Northrop Moore; "Complete Astrology", Alan Oken; Faculty of Astrological Studies; "The Astrology of Sexuality", Martin Schulman.

## THE FIRST ELGAR CHORAL FESTIVAL

The City of Worcester hosted a new and exciting event on the weekend of the 21st and 22nd October 1988. This was the first Elgar Choral Festival, which was conceived and directed by Dr. Donald Hunt, the Master of the Choristers and Organist of Worcester Cathedral, brought to fruition by a small committee of hard-working volunteers, and financed by the City of Worcester and many generous sponsors.

The Festival comprised competitions of some 14 classes of Choirs of different sizes, ensembles, soloists, and a class for composition, which were all adjudicated by an eminent panel of judges led by Sir Charles Groves.

All classes were required to include a work by Sir Edward Elgar and as an example these included *Light of the World* from *The Light of Life*, *Weary Wind of the West*, *Fly, Singing Bird*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Rapid Stream*. It was most interesting to learn from many of the choirs taking part that they had never before included Elgar's works in their repertoires, but having prepared the Elgar work for the Festival they were very enthusiastic to include such works in the future. This was, of course, one of the many purposes of the Festival, and there is no doubt that many of the competitors and their followers, having heard their own and other classes, went away with a greater knowledge and enthusiasm for Elgar's music.

Nearly 2000 men, women and children competed at the Festival, the initial rounds for which took place in and around Worcester Cathedral and the Countess of Huntingdon Hall. The finals were incorporated in an outstanding evening of entertainment in the Cathedral on Saturday night, attended by a large audience. Competitors and their friends apparently enjoyed themselves immensely, and the finalists in each group of choirs had the pleasure of singing the Elgar work together under the direction and baton of Sir Charles Groves, following the awards for the prize-winners for each event.

The Festival was promoted by the *Elgar Foundation* who provided a handsome bronze bust of Elgar, and a cash prize which was presented by Wulstan Atkins to the outstanding Choral winner — The Nelson Arion Glee Union Male Choir. *The Elgar Society* awarded a prize, which was presented by Christopher Robinson, to the most promising Choir, who were the Imperial Male Voice Choir, London.

The next Elgar Choral Festival will be held on 24th and 25th October, 1991, in Worcester. I very much hope that many lovers of Elgar's music who read this article will encourage choirs, with whom they are acquainted, to take part next time. They themselves, I hope, will attend the great Final Concert in the Cathedral on the Saturday night.

**S. Driver White.**

Chairman of the Festival  
Director of the Elgar Foundation

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Raymond Monk, 19 Severn Street, Leicester, LE2 0NN urgently requires copies of:  
J. Bennett. 'King Olaf'. Book of words with analytical notes 1899.  
H. Thompson. 'Caractacus'. Book of Words with analytical notes 1900.  
Any reasonable price paid for the original or subsequent editions.

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Part of the audience in Worcester cathedral at the Elgar Choral Festival. Photo by Berrows' Newspapers.

## THE ELGAR SOCIETY

### Annual General Meeting and Weekend Arrangements

The Annual General Meeting will take place at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday, 3rd June, at the Guildhall, Worcester. Tea will follow at 4.25 p.m.

In the evening there will be a choice of concerts. The Donald Hunt Singers will present 'A Birthday Appreciation in Words and Music of Sir Edward Elgar' in the Chapter House. The Secretary has a limited number of tickets at a concessionary price of £2 each. Please let her know if you wish to go. (Mrs. Carol Holt, 20 Geraldine Road, Malvern. 0684 568822).

Alternatively, as part of Malvern Festival, the C.B.S.O. will include *Introduction & Allegro for strings* as part of its orchestral concert. Tickets for this event can be obtained from the Theatre Box Office, Grange Road, Malvern.

On Sunday, by kind permission of the Reverend and Mrs. Michael Vockins, coffee will be served from 10.30 a.m. at Birchwood. The A.T. Shaw Memorial Lecture will be given by Dr. Percy Young, on "Newman, Elgar and The Dream of Gerontius", at 12 noon at Huntingdon Hall, Deansway, Worcester, followed by lunch for members and guests at £2.50. Admission to the Lecture will be £1.

The Elgar Evensong and Wreath-laying Ceremony will take place in Worcester Cathedral at 4.00 p.m. and, following the service, all are invited to the Birthplace for sherry and birthday cake.

## NEWS ITEMS

We are indebted to U.S. member Barry Siebelt for the information that a performance of THE BLACK KNIGHT, was given on March 11, 1989, at Norwalk, Connecticut, by the Fairfield County Chorale, and the Amor Artis Orchestra, conducted by Johannes Somary

We understand that the two performances of *Gerontius* which were to have taken place in Leipzig and East Berlin have now been postponed. This is most unfortunate, and we hope that performances may take place at some future date.

In 1978 the Acorn Children's Theatre Trust presented a new version of Elgar's THE STARLIGHT EXPRESS, prepared by Therese Kitchin. This was performed in various theatres in the south of England, and has been in their repertoire ever since. The Trust is now part of the Quercus Theatre Company, and we are pleased to hear that *The Starlight Express* is to be performed once more. This time at the Wilde Theatre, Bracknell, Berks, part of the South Hill Park Arts Centre. There will be four performances over three days, 11th to 13th May. The theatre box office can be reached at 0344 484123.

Earlier this year our distinguished Vice-President Dr. HERBERT SUMSION celebrated his 90th birthday. It was not possible to include our good wishes in the last issue, but we send late greetings now, and our best wishes for his continued health and happiness.

**ELGAR WEDDING CENTENARY.** The marriage of Edward and Alice Elgar took place at Brompton Oratory on 8th May 1889. London Branch has arranged with the Oratory that suitable commemorative music will be included in the Vespers/Benediction Service at 3.30 p.m. on Sunday 7th May. This will include *O Salutaris*, *Tantum Ergo*, and a Motet. Members able to attend are cordially invited to do so. Our thanks are due to the Church Authorities and the Director of Music at the Oratory, Mr. John Hoban.

SETTLE PLAQUE. The January Journal referred to plans afoot to place a plaque on the National Westminster building in Settle to commemorate the friendship of Edward Elgar and Dr. Charles Buck. It can now be reported that an unveiling ceremony will take place at noon on Saturday, 13th May, accompanied, it is hoped by suitable music and readings. A number of members from Yorkshire and London Branches will journey to Settle, and, indeed, any member able to be present is more than welcome.

The two branches have been involved in not a little expense in the arranging of this occasion — which it is hoped will attract good media coverage, and any donation towards the cost of the plaque (over £300) will be gratefully received by John Greig, Orchard Barn, Derringstone Street, Barham, Canterbury, Kent CT4 6QB. Cheques should be made payable to The Elgar Society.

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## A FURTHER ATTEMPT ON CHURCH STREET

As we go to press we hear of another attempt by developers and the owners of the organist's house in Church Street, Hereford, to build on the garden. Previous attempts to destroy this link with Elgar were turned down by the local authorities, and this was fully reported to the Journal by Jacob O'Callahan. The new application appears to conflict with the reasons already advanced for rejecting any planning application for the premises, and vigilance is needed by those living in and around Hereford. We understand that an offer by Landmark Trust to restore and preserve the property has not been accepted by the owners.

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## ELGAR STUDIES

To say that this volume is 'long-awaited' would be to emphasise a cliché — something the Journal would scorn to do — but the volume, to be published by Scolar Press, really will appear this year.

Edited by Raymond Monk, to whom credit must go for the original idea and for the impetus behind the project, the final list of contributors is as follows: PETER DENNISON, MICHAEL POPE, PERCY YOUNG, IAN PARROTT, ROBERT ANDERSON, DIANA McVEAGH, RONALD TAYLOR, K.E.L. SIMMONS, MICHAEL KENNEDY (two contributions). Sir YEHUDI MENUHIN has contributed a foreword, JERROLD NORTHROP MOORE an Epilogue, and JOHN KNOWLES a select discography. The Editor, Raymond Monk, has written a preface.

Each of the contributors has given their services, not only to Elgar research, but also to the Elgar Society, for the Society will benefit entirely from the success of the book. Scolar Press have an excellent reputation in publishing for producing good books, and they have shown great interest in the project throughout. The Society is greatly indebted to all concerned, and believes that the work will have permanent value as a contribution to Elgarian studies.

Two 'spin-offs' have resulted from the original idea for this book. Professor Brian Trowell, an early contributor, sent in such a monumental essay on "Elgar and Literature", that it plainly deserved special treatment of its own. Happily, Scolar Press, are to publish this as a separate work, thus adding an important item to the growing Elgar bibliography. Similarly, Dr. Christopher Kent, who readily responded with an essay on Elgar's *Falstaff*, produced such a superbly researched and detailed study of the manuscript materials and revisions of this work, that it too required special treatment. The nature of the material demanded many music illustrations, something rather outside the layout of ELGAR STUDIES as planned by the publisher. We understand that this study will now appear in a forthcoming issue of the Royal Musical Association Journal.

## MALVERN FESTIVAL 1989

21 May to 3 June

Sixty years ago George Bernard Shaw and Sir Barry Jackson began a festival in the town of Malvern, at the newly rebuilt Malvern Theatre. For that first festival Shaw wrote *The Apple Cart*. The festival was a success and became an annual event drawing more and more attention and extending its activities. Elgar, a 'local' and friend of G.B.S. and Jackson, took a keen interest in the development of this Worcestershire Festival of Arts and Drama, until ill-health struck him down. The war caused a long gap in the Malvern story, but in the late 1940s, a number of local people, with, it must be said, more hope than finance, re-established the festival, this time with more emphasis on music. Today the Malvern Festival is an important event, which not only attracts fine artists, but has given rise to many 'Fringe Events', not least of which are the regular Art Exhibitions. This year there is once more an exhibit of paintings depicting Elgar's Malvern.

The play this year is Shaw's *Pygmalion* running from 23 May to 3 June, and the very full concert and choral programme includes several Elgar works. These are the *String Quartet* on the 26th May, the *Serenade for Strings* on the 27th, some choral songs on the 29th, and *Introduction and Allegro for strings* on 3rd June. The latter combines the Alburni Quartet with the CBSO, conductor, Christopher Seaman. Full details and brochure available from the MALVERN FESTIVAL THEATRE, GRANGE ROAD, MALVERN, WORCS, WR14 3HB. Tel: 0684-892277.

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## THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

GLOUCESTER 18—26 August 1989

The brochure for the Three Choirs Festival is before us, and as we write there are several Elgar items of significance. Full details and up-to-date information may be obtained from the Festival Office, Community House, College Green, Gloucester, GL1 2LX, but here is what we have so far.

Sunday 20 August:	THE KINGDOM
Wednesday, 23 August:	FALSTAFF (programme also includes Michael Berkeley's Organ Concerto, and Bliss's Colour Symphony)
Friday, 25 August:	Song Recital by Brian Rayner Cook, which may include some Elgar items.
Saturday, 26 August:	CARACTACUS

As usual early application is advised as many events sell out quickly.

The orchestras include the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic. Other artists include the Endellion String Quartet, the Gabrieli Brass Ensemble, and the Renaissance Singers of Ontario. Among the singers are Anne Mackay, Jeffrey Talbot, Robert Tear, Penelope Walker, Sarah Walker, and Michael George. The guest conductors include William Boughton and Vernon Handley.

## **THREE CHOIRS TEA, GLOUCESTER**

### **Sunday, 20th August**

ALL MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE SOCIETY TEA, following the Opening Service of the Festival. The tea will be held in the Upper School Room, St. Mary d'Crypt, Southgate Street, Gloucester. This is always a happy occasion and a popular meeting place for Elgarians. Please let the Secretary know if you are coming. There will be a charge of £2.50.

Mrs. Carol Holt, 20 Geraldine Road, Malvern. WR14 3PA. 0684 568822.

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#### **Advertising in the JOURNAL**

Until now the Journal has not accepted advertising as such, though we have often inserted leaflets or brochures which we considered would be of interest to our members, or which supported worthy causes.

The Journal is increasingly expensive to produce — each year sees a percentage increase in costs, which always seems far in excess of official inflation figures! The time has come when we must recoup some of that expenditure, and therefore the Committee of the Society has agreed with the Editor's proposal that we accept advertising in the future. Not only shall we solicit advertising from publishers, music organisations, record companies, etc, but we shall also institute a classified column (starting with the September issue) for use of members. This means of course that we can no longer accept 'free' adverts from members requiring books, records, and other items. However, I am sure that members will realise that for a Journal to survive in the present-day world of publishing for as long as we have WITHOUT any advertising revenue is a remarkable achievement, and we have kept costs to members at a very low level. These are:

£1 per line, full width. (Approx. 16 words). Minimum 3 lines. Payment should be included, with advertisement. Copy is required at least 6 weeks before date of publication (Jan. 1st, May 1st, Sept. 1st)

Costs for display advertisements (camera ready copy preferred) will be:

Full page:	£50
Half page:	£27
Quarter page:	£15

Those in contact with organisations who may wish to place advertisements in the Journal should write to the Editor. All advertisements appear at the discretion of the Editor, and in the event of a dispute at the discretion of the General Committee.

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Mr. K. Braithwaite, 24 Glenfield Avenue, Market Weighton, York, YO4 3HH, is seeking a copy of the record of Elgar Songs, Duett for Trombone & Double Bass, etc. issued on Wealden Records WS 152. Offers to Mr. Braithwaite please.

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## NOTTINGHAM FESTIVAL 1989

27 May — 15 June

An elaborate brochure advertises the ambitious Nottingham Festival this year, and its subject "Hope & Glory? British Art 1880—1915." There are, of course, many fringe activities, and the festival will take place at various venues in the City.

As might be expected Elgar figures strongly in the music events, and the concerts includes *Froissart*, *Symphony no.1*, *Symphony no.2*, all conducted by Andrew Davis. Sir Charles Groves conducts a performance of the *Violin Concerto*, and a 'Last Night at the Proms' features the Halle Orchestra, conducted by Orwain Arwel Hughes. The programme contains three Elgar pieces: *Enigma Variations*, *Romance for cello and orchestra*, and (of course) *Pomp and Circumstance March, no.1*. Other concerts include the *Piano Quintet*, *The Severn Suite* for brass band, *Give unto the Lord* sung at Evensong at St. Mary's Church on 11th June, and music from *The Starlight Express* as part of a song recital. Additionally, Ken Russell's films *Elgar* and *Song of Summer: Delius* will be shown, as will Central Television's documentary on Elgar *Hope and Glory*.

This is a feast indeed, and the Elgar items are just part of a remarkable series of events, concerts and exhibitions. Information may be obtained from THE CITY OF NOTTINGHAM TOURIST AND INFORMATION CENTRE, 14—16 Wheeler Gate, Nottingham NG1 2NB. Tel: 0602 470661. Monday to Friday, 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

11 - 13 May	The Starlight Express R. Jackson (bar), H. Charnock (sop)/ Quercus Theatre Company	Wilde Theatre, Bracknell, Berks. (Box Office: 0344 484123)
20 May	Serenade for Strings; The Dream of Gerontius. English SO/Gaddarn/Hodgson, Hill, White	Fairfield Halls, Croydon 7.45 pm
20 May	Symphony no. 2 Rutland Sinfonia/Collett	Corby Festival Hall Northants. 7.30 pm
20 May	The Kingdom Tewkesbury Choral Soc/Glos Concert Soc/Fox/Bremar. Finch, Berkeley- Steele, Noble	Tewkesbury Abbey 7.30 pm
27 May	Dream of Gerontius; Serenade for Strings. Eng. SO/Croydon Phil. Choir/Gaddern/Hodgson/Hill/ Opie. Special pre-concert talk by Kenneth Loveland at 5 pm. Members special concession price for this talk £1. Concert normal prices.	St. David's Hall, Cardiff 7.30 pm
4 June	From the Bavarian Highlands Cantate Camerati/G. Bowyer	Purcell Rooms South Bank



## BOOK REVIEWS

ELGAR. Symphony no.2. Study score.

Novello, £12.95  
(Wrappers)

The volumes of the Elgar Complete Edition continue to make their slow but steady progress. It follows that as each appears it becomes necessary to take a fresh look at the scores with which we are familiar, and which have served us for so long. In some cases changes are minimal, but others show that a number of changes have to be made, for over the years various discrepancies, and inconsistencies have crept in, or remain uncorrected. One of the earliest volumes to appear in the Complete Edition was the *Second Symphony*, and now Novellos have published a revised study score, based on the larger Complete Edition copy. This replaces the old miniature score which has been available since the work was first published. It is in rather larger format than of old (your near-neighbours in the concert-hall will be able to read it easily over your shoulder), and it has the great advantage of some of the notes and analysis of the larger edition as prefatory matter. Additionally there are some facsimiles of the original ms. This is a very welcome issue, at a moderate price, and we look forward to seeing other 'new editions' in the future.

R.P.T.

GERONTIUS, a novel. by James Hamilton-Peterson.

Macmillan, £12.95

Some years ago we had the first Elgar novel — "Elgar on the Journey to Hanley". I remember reviewing it, and, whilst I found much that was entertaining, I never felt that the author had depicted a composer as his chief character.

Mr. Hamilton-Peterson is a poet. A Newdigate Prize-winner, no less, and he writes with the imagination of a poet. This is his first novel, and though he is occasionally uneasy in the different form he displays a fine way with words and a genuine affection for his main character. This is, of course, a fictionalised Sir Edward Elgar, but a believable one. The author has clearly researched his character in some depth — almost too many facts are dropped in to the narrative, but it is all the more believable for that. "Gerontius" (the title makes sense when you have read the book, and when you consider that Gerontius is the journeying of a soul) takes as its setting an event in Elgar's life of which comparatively little is known. His voyage, in 1923, to the Amazon River on the "Hildebrand". We travel with Elgar to Liverpool, thence across the Atlantic, we journey with him in that unfamiliar continent, and then, having exhausted the pilgrimage, speedily return. Much of the novel is introspective — Elgar wondering, as surely he did, just why he was *there*. The author makes Elgar keep a diary, sometimes a soul-searching diary, with much owed to Alice's own diary-making. Out of Elgar's Leipzig past he comes face to face with a lost love, a conscious re-working of the Helen Weaver character, but with nationality and setting changed. Surprisingly, all of this works well, and Elgar's restlessness is finely depicted. I am somewhat less certain of the suggestion of a haunted Elgar, and the vivid, almost occult, dream in the first chapter goes uneasily with the rest of the work. There are amusing moments: the steward who believes that Elgar's 'instruments' in heavy cases must be trombones. They turn out to contain a microscope! The pointless chatter of a group of people on board ship thrown together by the merest chance. The author has put together an intriguing story, where, although little happens, we remain interested in the characters. Elgar's memory has not been tarnished, and anyone reading this novel will learn a lot about the composer.

Two small by-products of the author's research: he has examined the ship's log, and it transpires that the ship's captain was called Maddrell and not Mandrell as biographies of Elgar have had

it. Additionally he has discovered that the story of the pilot having to be taken on to Madeira because of violent storms at sea, is simply not true. The ship previously called at Oporto and Lisbon, where the pilot could have safely disembarked. Of course, Elgar would not be the first traveller to exaggerate a rough sea into a tempest . . . but the ship took its normal time and followed its normal course.

R.P.T

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## RECORD REVIEWS

Symphony no.1, Op.55  
Introduction and Allegro for strings, Op.47

Halle Orchestra/Barbirolli  
Nixa NIXCD 6002

Barbirolli's 1956 Elgar First, with the Halle Orchestra, was one of the first of the old 1950s Pye recordings to appear in PRT's original series of mid-price CD reissues a couple of years ago. It now features again amongst the first batch of Nixa CDs — thus helping to launch the revival of a pioneering label of the early LP days, which, incidentally, had already disappeared by the time these recordings were made in 1956.

This second CD transfer deserves a 'feature' review, rather than merely being mentioned under the CD Roundup heading, as I feel it to be an exceptionally important release. The original CD, no. PRT PVCD 8379, only contained the Symphony, and it is the fill-up on this new CD which I would like to mention first — mainly because it is a performance of the *Introduction & Allegro* which may not be familiar to many Elgar collectors. As far as I can recall, it was never issued in the 50s, appearing eventually only as one item in a Barbirolli memorial compilation in 1971. Why, I cannot imagine: it is an absolutely superb performance, with outstanding string playing and a flair and vitality quite missing from Barbirolli's otherwise very fine later recording with the strings of the Sinfonia of London. Further, the old Pye recording sounds very good indeed in this digital transfer. The balance is just about ideal (the solo quartet being placed naturally within the body of strings, without undue highlighting) and the slightly recessed recorded sound manages to combine exceptionally natural orchestral perspectives, with outstanding clarity of detail.

The recording of the A flat Symphony, made in the same week, in December 1956, has been available, in various forms, since its original release, and is recognised as a classic interpretation — again more dynamic and characterful than Barbirolli's later Philharmonia version. It is a pity that the recorded sound does not quite match that of *Introduction & Allegro* and the *Enigma Variations*, recorded six months before. There is a little more tape hiss than on the exceptionally silent *Introduction & Allegro*, but it is not obtrusive — less so, in fact, than on the earlier PRT transfer, and the sound is generally somewhat warmer. For some reason though, the original engineers chose a 'flatter' sound picture, with reasonable balance, but little depth. The string sound is far from ideal, the close-miked first violins being given a rather dry quality, too often dominated by individual vibrati, and incidentally, making any momentary imperfections in ensemble clearly audible.

The limitations in the sound quality should not, however, deter Elgar collectors with CD players from acquiring Barbirolli's Pye recording of the *First Symphony* in its new CD transfer. It is a flexible, warm, deeply committed interpretation, Barbirolli's total identification with Elgar's world clearly evident in every bar. In this sense it is much like the later recording in detail, but with a greater sense of forward movement, so that it all hangs together much more

successfully symphonically. I was particularly struck by the way Barbirolli shapes the last movement, which, after a slower than usual start, builds up to a climax of overwhelming power. A classic interpretation indeed.

The earlier series of PRT CDs was criticised for unimaginative packaging, with no notes and a rather bare, plain cover, featuring a not always very successful drawing of the composer represented. The simple folded insert with this new issue is a definite improvement, although space is still limited. The writer of the notes, Lyndon Jenkins, has devoted the inside double-page spread to a potted history of the Halle, leaving space for only a total of about 400 words about the music on the back page.

G.H.L.

Symphony No. 2 in E flat, opus 63

*Philharmonia Orchestra/Giuseppe Sinopoli*

*Deutsche Grammophon 423 085-4 (cassette)  
423 085-2 (compact disc) (no LP available)*

I have said before that I regard the 'British tradition' of Elgar interpretation as a myth — and nowhere is this more obvious on record than in the diversity in the approach of British conductors to the Second Symphony. Indeed the Elgar discography has already been enriched by widely differing recordings of the Second Symphony from such non-British conductors as Barenboim, Haitink, Solti and Svetlanov, each of whom adds something individual from their own musical and cultural backgrounds to our appreciation of our own traditions.

Now we have Guiseppi Sinopoli — probably the first Elgar recording by a native-born Italian conductor since Sabajno's 1909 extract from 'In The South' (but don't let us forget the musical influence of Barbirolli's origins). I must admit that I approached this new recording with some anxiety. Sinopoli has a reputation for being a rather more expansive conductor — and my fears were not allayed by a preliminary glance at the timings on the back of the CD box. Two years ago I was critical of Bryden Thomson's extremely slow speeds in this symphony. My heart sank when I noted that Sinopoli takes as long over the first movement as Thomson, while in the *largo* he is even slower, taking a full five minutes longer than Vernon Handley on his superb Classics for Pleasure recording.

Playing the record, I was at once irritated by Sinopoli's very slow opening. Elgar's markings are quite specific: by the fourth bar the tempo should ease into 92 dotted crochets per minute, increasing to 104 at bar nine, thus immediately introducing a slight sense of urgency. Sinopoli starts at slightly below Elgar's marked tempo (around 88 per minute), and then continues steadily at his initial speed. Indeed throughout the first movement I was unconvinced by Sinopoli's interpretation. He has not yet, I feel, lived with the music long enough to feel instinctively the rhythmic flexibility within the phrase necessary to bring Elgar's long melodic strands to life, and he ignores many other clearly marked minor but important tempo adjustments. On the other hand Sinopoli's operatic recordings have already shown his remarkable ability to keep a firm grip on rhythm, even at slow tempi — and this quality helps to keep things moving positively forward right to the end of the movement.

Nevertheless, despite this unpromising start, as the symphony progressed, I found myself warming more and more to this recording. It is again the firm rhythmic control that keeps the *largo* moving inexorably forwards, without the tempi really seeming to slow as it undoubtedly is (Bryden Thomson, three minutes quicker, actually *feels* slower). It is, in fact, a most moving account — and I quarrel only with Sinopoli's slowing for, and unnecessary emotional underlining, of the two climaxes of the movement, although he quickly returns to his earlier, steadily controlled speed. In the scherzo, too (although there is here less disagreement amongst conductors over the tempo) Sinopoli's skilful control of rhythm keeps things moving,

and the sudden biting harshness of the climax satisfactorily raises the hair on the back of the neck.

Boult (in his earlier two recordings) and Handley (following Elgar's own 1927 recording) have reminded us that the last movement, far from being an autumnal 'dying fall', is an optimistic looking forward, after the sadness, regrets, and bitterness of the earlier movements (William Mann, in his notes for the record, reminds us of Elgar's enigmatic description of the work as 'joyous and lighthearted!'). Sinopoli cannot be blamed for missing this aspect, which has eluded many interpreters, at least on record, and his steady, sober, slightly understated finale is in every way a satisfactory summing up and a confirmation of his intellectual grasp on the symphony as a whole.

A consequence of Sinopoli's great emphasis on rhythmic clarity (supported by the superb playing of the Philharmonia and DG's exceptionally clear but rather dry recorded sound) is the amount of internal detail revealed, which will even surprise listeners long familiar with this great symphony. I cannot recommend this recording as a 'safe' first choice Elgar Second: it is just too far from the 'mainstream' of Elgar interpretation. On the other hand Sinopoli has given us a thought-provoking alternative approach, which for me, at any rate, has cast a new light on a very familiar musical masterpiece.

G.H.L.

*The Kingdom, Op.51*

*Yvonne Kenny (sop), Alfreda Hodgson (con),  
Christopher Gillett (ten), Benjamin Luxon (bar).*

Bach, trans. Elgar. Fantasia & Fugue in C minor

Handel, trans. Elgar. Overture in D minor

*London Philharmonic Choir & Orch/  
Leonard Slatkin.*

RCA Victor RD87862(2)

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*The Dream of Gerontius, Op.38*

*Felicity Palmer (mezzo), Arthur Davies (ten),  
Gwynne Howell (bass)*

Parry. Blest Pair of Sirens; I Was Glad

*London Symphony Orch/Richard Hickox*

Chandos: CHAN 8641/2

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The Spirit of England, Op. 80; Give Unto the Lord, Op.74, O Harken Thou, Op. 64,  
The Snow, Op.26, no.1; Land of Hope & Glory, arr. Fagge.

*Felicity Lott (sop), London Symphony Chorus, Northern Sinfonia/  
Richard Hickox*

EMI: CDC 749481 2

EL 7 494811

EL 7 494814

Riches indeed: the fourth *Dream of Gerontius* and the second recordings of *The Kingdom* and *The Spirit of England* to appear on Compact Disc! Two of these records were something of a disappointment to me, whilst the remaining one is a triumph and one of the great Elgar recordings of recent years. Leonard Slatkin is clearly a committed Elgarian, and his *Kingdom* gives us all an opportunity to re-appraise the work, beside which "Gerontius is the work of an amateur."

No-one analyses the difficulties in the composition of both *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* more effectively than Jerrold Northrop Moore in his biography of Elgar, demonstrating why Elgar's method of composition led to the episodic nature of both works. It is to Slatkin's credit that his performance hardly falters and his vision of the work kept me on the edge of my seat throughout. Wonderfully clear and incisive choral singing, and glorious orchestral playing from the LPO ensure that details of the score are revealed for the first time. Slatkin's commitment is evident from his scrupulous attention to the score's markings, and this ensures no anti-climax in the fifth and final scene 'The Upper Room.' It is, of course, not possible to eclipse Sir Adrian Boult's unique performance of twenty years ago, but the LPO and above all its choir of today are superior to their predecessors, and Andrew Keener's recording is the equal of *King Olaf* — and that is the highest praise!

One of the great virtues of Sir Adrian's recording was the quality of his soloists. Margaret Price, then beginning her illustrious career, was stunning. Yvonne Kenny has a lighter, smaller voice, and although she appears, perhaps, somewhat detached at times, I enjoyed her singing of 'The Sun Goeth Down' very much — the smaller scale allowing the climax to be even more forceful than usual. In any case Kenny is a fine successor to the many great Australian singers who have preceded her. Alfreda Hodgson impresses me more and more these days, and her singing of the unrewarding part of Mary Magdalene carries great conviction. Unfortunately Christopher Gillett makes little of the part of John, even though it gives only rare opportunities to shine. The one great disappointment for me is, sadly, Benjamin Luxon, who is far from his considerable best; his voice showing a marked 'wobble' and dryness at times. He has a tendency to bluster, which compares unfavourably to the great performance of John Shirley Quirk under Sir Adrian. Having lived with the latter's interpretation for so long this is perhaps a little unfair, and indeed there are some lovely moments with Luxon such as 'Repent, and be baptised' at 111. Slatkin's 'fillers', the Bach and Handel transcriptions, are finely played, even if the Handel does not eclipse the memory of George Weldon's fine recording of 1954. The notes with the set, in English, French, German and Italian — good as they are, by Eric Mason — are of insufficient depth to do justice to this exceptional recording.

And so to Richard Hickox, a conductor I have long admired. A devoted Elgarian and a choral conductor of special insight, his performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* is ironically, and most importantly, led down in this area. The London Symphony Chorus seems too small, and Chandos' recording does not allow the sound to expand beyond the confines of the speakers. This seemed most surprising, and I played the records on other equipment. I remained perplexed and somewhat disturbed at my reaction until I heard the new *Kingdom* recording. I must make it clear that the Chorus sings beautifully though, and nowhere more so than in the opening 'Kyrie eleison', the pitch of the semi-chorus not once in doubt.

Arthur Davies, an operatic tenor of extraordinary versatility and range, is an outstanding Gerontius. I place him as an equal of Richard Lewis and Peter Pears on disc. He gives an emotional, involved interpretation illustrated by moments such as 'Novissima Hora est', 'Take me away' and 'I went to sleep', his entry here creating a sense of movement which had been lacking in the preceding introduction.

Besides my concern over the sound, I am most disturbed by the singing of Felicity Palmer, whose voice, I feel, is just not right for the part of the Angel. She is a singer of great variety, but her voice here has an edge to it which I find off-putting. Listen to her sing 'Praise to His name' at 2 after 116, and you will perhaps detect why she is so fine singing the works of Shostakovich, who seems to have heard her voice in mind, at least more so than Elgar. Gwynne Howell is also a little light weight, not developing the power and authority one expects in The Angel of the Agony. The drama of the intercession is therefore lost, and it is a tribute to Davies at 'I go before my Judge' that he appears dwarfed by not only what is to come, but by what has gone before.

Richard Hickox also conducts the new recording of *The Spirit of England* on EMI, which is coupled with *Give unto the Lord, O Harken Thou, The Snow*, and Arthur Fagge's arrangement of *Land of Hope and Glory*. I loved the two anthems (how good to hear Elgar's orchestra) which are worthy successors to *Great is the Lord* on CDC 7476582. I felt that the Chorus was not that involved in *The Snow*, and on turning back to the Liverpool Philharmonic Choir under Sir Charles Groves (CDC 7475112) I was aware of a greater sense of enjoyment, of something new there. Fagge's arrangement of *Land of Hope & Glory* is, in my view, very ordinary, and I couldn't help wishing that the arrangement which Margaret Balfour used, when recording with Elgar, had been resurrected (RLS 713).

This record though will stand or fall on *The Spirit of England*. Here is Elgar's last great choral work, an angry, disillusioned response to what the war was doing and had done to his world. A work which is yet to be fully appreciated, and is performed all too infrequently. Many will remember though how Sir Alexander Gibson's Scottish forces burst on us in 1977 with an inspired, committed performance, coupled with *The Coronation Ode*, (now on Chandos: CHAN 8430). Hickox's performance is more urgent, recorded in the dryer acoustic of Abbey Road. Paisley Abbey for Gibson does not obscure much detail and the analogue sound is hardly inferior. My dissatisfaction lies, however, with Felicity Lott, which I find almost impossible to admit. One of our leading singers, she has delighted me in so many performances, particularly of Strauss and Schubert. She has been a memorable Octavian as well as Marschallin, a striking Christine in *Intermezzo* and an outstanding Arabella. Here though there is a lack of involvement, the opposite of Teresa Cahill with Gibson, who hits you between the eyes from her opening note and remains compelling to the end. Cahill is the reason why I would choose, in preference, the Scottish *Spirit of England*.

If you can afford both, do so. Hickox reveals more detail and his pulse is the more constant. Both recordings cannot fail to move as Elgar's heartfelt setting of Binyon's prescient words take us over . . . 'to the end, to the end they remain.' Indeed they wept for us all.

A.H.A.N.

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## BRANCH REPORTS

(Several of these are held over from January, as they arrived too late for inclusion in that issue).

NORTH WEST Branch has a new secretary, Pat Hurst, whose address is on the back cover. We wish her and the branch well. Last October the season began with a talk by Dennis Schofield on 'Elgar and Britten Country', a members evening followed in November, and the December AGM included music by student of the Royal Northern College of Music. In January Geoffrey Thomason gave a talk on the musical language of the First Symphony entitled 'Diabolus in Musica'.

On February 4th an 'Open Session' took place. Fifty people attended and the programme consisted of an exhibition of Elgar material housed in the Royal Northern College of Music Library. This was followed by refreshments, a talk on the exhibition, and finally a recital given by two students from the RNCM of the Elgar *Violin Sonata*. The whole event was a great success.

On March 4th we were entertained by the group Cantilena, four singers and two pianists. The programme consisted of works by German and English composers. An excellent finale to our 1988/89 season.

LONDON Branch brought off a coup for its December meeting when Michael Holroyd was persuaded to visit us to speak about Elgar and Shaw, just a few weeks after the launch of the

first volume of his much publicised biography of Shaw. The 'Journal' Editor, himself expert on this topic, could not be contradicted when he observed in his introduction that there is no more qualified speaker on this subject than Mr Holroyd. In January former Society Chairman, Michael Pope, burdened with innumerable volumes and records spoke eloquently and persuasively about Granville Bantock, and had no difficulty in transmitting his own enthusiasm for this important composer. Gareth Lewis, in the following month, gave us an audio treat, unequalled since the Chandos Records visit, by bringing along his own CD equipment. His subject was Hans Richter, not only a "true friend" of Elgar but also a major figure in English and European music, and a remarkable "character" as well. This was a hugely enjoyable meeting. In March Richard Strauss was another German friend whose relations with, and influence on Elgar were examined. Michael Kennedy, author of superb biographies of both, was our speaker. It must be reported that the Imperial College cassette player was in temperamental mood and this detracted from Michael's splendid illustrations. However, a large audience was, as ever, delighted with the talk — a model of its kind.

The Branch AGM will be held in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey on Monday, 5th June at 6 p.m. Agendas and minutes will be available at the meeting. Nominations for officers and committee (in writing signed by two members and countersigned by the nominee) should be sent to the Branch Secretary (address on back cover) to arrive by 3rd June. After the AGM, at 7 p.m., the Purcell Club have organised a musical tour of the Abbey (described in the Branch prospectus). We hope that members and friends will support this unique venture. Tickets £5.50 (receipts to Abbey Choir and other Abbey charities) may be secured in advance from John Greig. (N.B. Entrance via Dean's Yard and Cloisters will be sign-posted).

WEST MIDLANDS members greatly enjoyed the three Autumn meetings, with visits from Ron Taylor, Charles Myers (organ recital at Malvern Priory), and Lyndon Jenkins. The branch was also closely connected with the very enjoyable inaugural triennial Elgar Choral Festival — competitions over two days for 14 different classes of choirs, soloists and composers. We gave an extra prize to the winners of the Children's Choir class — with Margaret Elgar presenting a signed copy of Dr. J. Northrop Moore's book 'Elgar, a Life in Photographs', to the Oldham Girl's Choir.

The Spring programme began with the AGM at the Stables, Albany Terrace, Worcester, in March, complete with tea and music. In April a combined meeting with the Recorded Music Society. At the final meeting on April 22nd Geoffrey Hodgkins spoke on Elgar's Association with the Morecambe Festival and Canon Gorton. At the Branch AGM in March Alan Boon retired as Branch Secretary after 12 years, and was presented with a framed reproduction of the last page of the manuscript of *The Dream of Gerontius*. Jim Holt is the new secretary, with Walter Cullis taking his place as Branch treasurer. Addresses on back cover. Members are especially reminded of the events for the very full weekend of June 3rd/4th.

The first meeting of the autumn season is at 2.30 pm on September 30th at Friends' Meeting House, Worcester, when Dennis Clark will be visiting to talk on 'Elgar's Yorkshire Connection.'

YORKSHIRE are pleased to be involved with the London Branch in a plan to instal a plaque on the wall of the NatWest Bank in Settle (formerly Dr. Charles Buck's surgery) to record the fact that Elgar frequently stayed there during the 1880s and 1890s. Plans are going well, and it is hoped to unveil the plaque in May — very timely, considering that then the Yorkshire Branch will have completed a successful first ten years. Although London took the initiative, following their branch visit to Settle in 1987, the installing also represents the culmination of ten years of research and interest in this aspect of Elgarian history by Yorkshire members. It will be good news indeed when today's citizens of Settle can see a permanent sign of the interest taken in their town, a hundred years ago, by the country's greatest composer.

The intended visit to the Branch of Claud Powell in September had to be cancelled due to

Mrs. Powell suffering a fall. She is now much improved and it is hoped will accompany her husband to Yorkshire on May 8th. The September spot was filled by our Secretary, who spoke on Elgar's recordings with the Gramophone Company. Ian Parrott spoke in October on Elgar's Harmonic Language, to a large audience who much appreciated his erudite yet breezy, witty style. Bill Kinghorn, of Leeds College of Music, gave an interesting talk in November on what makes an 'English' composer, with illustrations from Elgar and others. The colder weather saw us using more 'home-brewed evenings' as a precaution against bad road conditions which might prevent the visit of more distant speakers. Chairman Jim Anderson spoke on March 6th on 'The Edwardian Years'.

YORKSHIRE Branch foregathered at 'the Willows' on Monday evening, April 3rd, to celebrate, not ten years of survival, but ten years of continuous, happy existence within the framework of the Elgar Society, unmarred by any major catastrophe (or minor one, for that matter) and marked by our members' enthusiastic participation in everything that was laid on for them. As a branch we have done everything that we feel a branch should — we have held regular meetings, to which we have invited the top Elgar scholars and personalities to address us, but have also made use of our own talent in evenings which have often attracted high attendances. We have had branch weekends in the Malverns and in Hereford and have descended in force on the birthplace on more than one occasion. We even once descended upon the West Midlands Branch, to the surprise of some of the worthy Midlanders who arrived to find their favourite seats already taken. We have sponsored recitals and are currently involved in the arrangements to instal a plaque in Settle to commemorate Elgar's many visits to Yorkshire.

April 3rd was an extremely happy occasion with forty-five members and guests present to enjoy a hearty buffet meal. An honoured guest was Society Secretary Carol Holt, accompanied by husband Jim Holt, and we were pleased to welcome Dorothy Lawson and Pat Hurst, officers of the NW Branch, with their husbands. Yorkshire chairman Jim Anderson, a Scot, arrived nobly sporting the Anderson kilt and our members equally nobly forebore to seek the answer to an age-old question. Jim proposed a toast to 'the next ten years', secretary Dennis Clark proposed the toast of 'the guests' to which Carol Holt spoke in reply. Photographs were taken, an anniversary cake was cut and a thoroughly good time was had by all.

Our next ten years will commence, following next week's AGM, with a visit from Claud Powell, who will speak on 'Dorabella'.

A long while since we heard from our reconstituted EAST ANGLIAN Branch, where all now seems to be going well. Last summer there was a social in July, the annual strawberries and wine party. In August a programme of records at the home of Bill Holland. In September F. Harrison Oxley gave an illustrated lecture on the *Enigma Variations*, and October saw two of our members, Keith Savory and Tom Pearson, presenting 'Elgar on Compact Disc.' This included *In the South*, and *The Banner of St. George*. In November we had our winter party at the home of our Chairman. Our Christmas party, held at the end of November, marked the end of the Branch Year and activities resumed with the AGM in March 1989.

SOUTH-WEST (another Branch enjoying a revival) report that they have met regularly since September. The Autumn highlight was a lecture/recital by Garry Humphreys, accompanied by Joan Williams, which included Elgar's *Fringes of the Fleet*. In November Alice and Catherine Jones gave glimpses of The Musical League, with which Elgar, Bantock and Delius were involved. A party followed the AGM in January. Later meetings include a performance of *Sea Pictures*, two illustrated talks, and a joint meeting with the Delius Society. The Branch Secretary, address on back cover, will be pleased to supply further details.

SOUTH WALES tell us that whereas, in recent years, meetings of the South Wales Branch have been chiefly in the nature of lectures illustrated by way of recordings, that of 12th



November, in Swansea, provided an occasion for hearing some of Elgar's music in live performance. Diana Walkley (who has lived for some years at Craeg Lea), in offering a selection of the composer's songs, provided members with a welcome chance of hearing a generous amount of music that is largely unfamiliar even to Elgarians, and afforded them an opportunity of assessing Elgar's strengths and weaknesses as a composer of songs for voice and piano. Miss Walkley was partnered by Carol Holt, who not only provided sympathetic piano support, but also spoke briefly but tellingly about the songs and about the words that Elgar had elected to set. A short interval was followed by a performance of *Sea Pictures*. Inevitably, the cycle lost something through being shorn of its orchestral dress, but the artistry of Diana Walkley and Carol Holt ensured that much that was valuable remained.

An all-Elgar concert given at St. David's Hall, Cardiff on 29th October, though not promoted by the South Wales Branch, was a branch event to the extent that members were able to obtain admission on favourable terms. Conducted by Andrew Davis, the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra played the *First Symphony* and the *Introduction and Allegro*, and were joined by Robert Cohen for a performance of the *Cello Concerto*. Kenneth Loveland, who was also responsible for programme notes for this event, delivered an informal but informative pre-concert talk.

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## A NEW ELGAR SOCIETY BRANCH . . . ?

At the time of going to press a meeting of members living in Central Southern England is to be held on 22nd April. This will explore the possibility of setting up a new branch to serve an area which stretches from East Dorset to West Sussex. The convenor of the meeting was Mr. Walter J. Essex, 39 South Road, Hayling Island, Hants, PO11 9AE (tel: 0705 466974). If you were unable to be present at the meeting, but are interested, please contact Mr. Essex.

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## BIRTHPLACE NEWS

The Birthplace was pleased to host a television film crew from Chukyo TV, Nagoya, Japan engaged in making a seven-part serial on British cultural activities, one of which will feature Elgar, Holst and Britten. The programme is designed for transmission on the Japanese national network. A tit-bit of information was provided by one of the crew: Ketelby's music is all the rage in Japan.

Graham Bayley who lives in Darlaston and is a Life Friend of the Birthplace has completed an exquisitely detailed painting of the Halle Orchestra, under the late Sir John Barbirolli, in the moment of performing the last bar of the third movement of Elgar's *First Symphony* in the Royal Albert Hall. The painting has been accepted for hanging in the Royal Albert Hall, where it can be seen in the Elgar Room. A viewing is recommended, and colour prints are available to Society members from the Birthplace. Jim Bennett, the Curator, also informs us of a letter from a Dutch visitor, who has traced six streets named after Elgar in the Netherlands. One each in Amersfoort, Delft, Eindhoven, Tilburg, and Utrecht, and two in Rotterdam. Can any other European mainland country beat that?

## LETTERS

*The collection of MSS, books, and objects at the Elgar Birthplace is obviously of increasing value, both in research and financial terms. As professionals in archives, librarianship, and records management, as well as Elgarians, we have for some time been concerned about the need to ensure that this major British archive is given the care, security and investment which it merits. It is therefore heartening to hear that the Trustees have invited local experts to advise on the efficient preservation and exploitation of the collection. Increasing risks to valuable property are all too frequent, while the wider research use of the Elgar MSS, is also important. This is particularly so in view of the signs of interest in Elgar as a national historic figure, as well as a composer. While the Trustees, and their successive curators, have done a very worthwhile job, for which they deserve all credit, it would be foolish not to recognise that future pressure will demand the highest possible professional standards in all forms of information management, which the Trustees alone cannot be expected to provide for the nationally-significant treasures in their custody.*

CLIVE BOSTLE, DMA, FLA  
ROBERT HELLEN, ALA  
RUTH HELLEN, ALA  
GARRY HUMPHREYS, ALA, FRSA

CARL NEWTON, DAA, M.I. Inf.Sc.  
WILLIAM PARKER, ALA  
ROBERT TUCKER, ALA  
JOHN UNDERWOOD, ALA

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From: DAVID BURY

*My friend, and fellow member of London Branch, Carl Newton, has taken members, and especially London members, to task for failing to turn out in numbers to Professor Ian Parrott's lecture last June at the British Music Information Centre.*

*We are, no doubt, busy people — I, myself, was able to apologise to Professor Parrott in advance, at the Malvern AGM, since I had a long-standing arrangement to be at the English National Opera that night. However, the good news is that Professor Parrott is to repeat the talk "Elgar's Harmonic Language" on December 4th as part of London Branch's 1989/90 season. We shall, of course, be delighted to welcome our distinguished Vice-President and I, Carl Newton and the rest of the Branch Committee look forward to a large turn-out!*

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From: J. R. HAMMOND

*I am sure readers of the Journal will be familiar with the words of the Angel's final aria in "The Dream of Gerontius". The words we know so well begin:—*

*Softly and gently, dearly ransomed soul  
In my most loving arms I now enfold thee.*

*However, what Cardinal Newman's poem actually says is:*

*Softly and gently, dearest, sweetest soul*

*I would be interested to know whether the change was made by Elgar himself. Can any reader throw any light on this?*

## LETTERS (Continued)

From: DR. JERROLD NORTHROP MOORE

*As a faithful reader of The Elgar Society Journal, I am grateful to our editor for his high standards of skill and judgement — a gratitude widely shared. It was therefore with astonishment that my eyes met, in the course of a January Book Review signed by Carl Newton, the following sentence:*

*'He (the author of the book under review) is often interesting, sometimes provocative, occasionally wrong in fact (his sources are Moore, Kennedy, McVeagh, and De la Noy, and he tends to copy their errors) . . .'*

*The implication, whether intended or not, is that these writers are chiefly notable for their errors. For myself, I will cheerfully admit to a few small mistakes. But I cannot stand silent witness to this casual assassination of three respected colleagues. It is the first requirement of a reviewer that he understand the nature of whatever he discusses, and that includes the sort of labour required to produce it. Mr. Newton ought to make two lists: one of the errors he thinks he can prove upon my colleagues, the other of the things they got right. His first list, I suspect, would not fill one page of the Journal's present format. His second will more than fill all the issues of the Journal that have ever been published from its inception. The experience might instruct Mr. Newton in what it is to write careful history.*

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# THE ELGAR SOCIETY

(President: Sir YEHUDI MENUHIN, O.M., K.B.E.)

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: £7. Family membership is available if only one journal is received per family: two members per family £8: three members £9: 4 members £10: student members £5; overseas \$U.S. 15 dollars or sterling equivalent. Branch members pay their branch subscription in addition to the basic amount. Applications for membership should be sent to the Hon. Membership Secretary, J. R. Greig, Orchard Barn, Derringstone Street, Barham, Canterbury, Kent, CT4 6QB. Renewal of subscriptions, due January 1st, should be made to the Hon. Treasurer, David Morris, 2 Marriotts Close, Haddenham, Aylesbury, Bucks. HP17 8BT. The Hon. Secretary is Carol Holt, 20 Geraldine Road, Malvern, Worcs. WR14 3PA.

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