The Elgar Society JOURNAL

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EDITORIAL

A Happy New Year to members and all other readers, and a welcome to the 1990s.

As we enter a new decade I thought I would look back at the issue of the Journal for 1980. There was the usual crop of new recordings, including a reissue of Barenboim's *Second Symphony*, and the Halle Orchestra, under James Loughran, in a performance of the *First Symphony*. There was a impressive list of concerts to come in the Spring, in some ways rather more adventurous than those we are able to quote in this issue. The Elgar Foundation had announced a series of London Choral Concerts, designed to raise funds for their then-modest appeal of £150,000, and an Elgar Festival was announced for Hereford, to be run by Philomusica. The Elgar Statue appeal in Worcester (target £25,000) had reached the half-way mark. How long ago it all seems! When I looked at the branch reports I was struck by the fact that only one branch secretary still occupies the same position, and the South Wales branch did not then exist. Of the Society's Officers only two are still occupying their positions.

The subject of Officers brings me to our Vice-Chairman, Trevor Fenemore-Jones. For some 12 years Trevor has served the Society, active at various times not only on the main committee, but on the International Sub-Committee, and in London branch affairs. In some organisations the post of Vice-Chairman is one in name only, but that has definitely not been the case in The Elgar Society. Trevor Fenemore-Jones has proved an invaluable member of the committee, and his wise counsel has benefited the Society on many occasions. Tribute has been paid to his work by both Michael Pope and his successor Christopher Robinson, but we have to face the fact that he has decided to retire from the committee at the Annual General Meeting in May of this Year. I shall regret this as much as anyone for he has been a good friend to me on the journal, and I have often sought his advice – always to my benefit!

RONALD TAYLOR
Editor

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APOLOGIA

There are times when an editor wishes himself ten thousand miles away from his work. Opening the September issue was, I fear, one of them. We had problems in production it is true, and messages did not always get through. In addition the Post Office took up to nine days to deliver copies, despite the copies having been franked at the proper rate. For the lateness we apologise, but for the errors in printing we can only grovel!

First, let me say that I did read the proofs correctly, and all was well – after that things began to go wrong. To put things right we are providing all readers with a corrected page 12 to be stuck down over the existing page in the September issue. This will make sense of Mr Hall-Mancey's excellent article on Sir Adrian Boult. To Mr. Hodgkins too we offer apologies: on page 16 we managed to muddle the brief paragraphs at the head of the page, and paragraphs 4 and 5 are transposed.

Finally, the correct caption for the photograph on page 7 (and we offer humblest regrets to all concerned) should read :

The wreath-laying ceremony in Worcester Cathedral, June 1989. Left to right : Carol Holt, Christopher Robinson, Dr. Percy Young, Trevor Fenemore-Jones. *Photo : Berrows Newspapers*

THE A. T. SHAW MEMORIAL LECTURE, WORCESTER
June 1989

Newman, Elgar, and 'The Dream of Gerontius'
by Dr. Percy Young

Without question all of us here accept *The Dream of Gerontius* as a 'great work'. But immediately problems that cannot be by-passed arise. What is a great work? In the case of a dual inspiration the difficulty increases.

Do we accept, as I suspect we mostly do in the particular case, that it is the musical content that is of the highest merit, and alone worthy to commit us to the idea of 'greatness'? But may we not, on the other hand, mean that the poem is so compelling – indeed unique (as Newman's work arguably is) – that it draws the music within its own area of superiority? One instance of such justification is, I believe, to be found in the relationship between Milton's *At a Solemn Musick* and Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens*, or perhaps between the same poem and its resonant setting by another Gloucestershire composer, John Stafford Smith. Is it, perhaps, the balance of virtues created by the fusion of two arts. Or, here in *The Dream of Gerontius* in the special case of a religious expression, does a further element extraordinarily impose deeper consideration? Then having maybe discovered apparently satisfactory answers to the question first posed, we must go further, to explore the significance of the factor of time. When was, or when did, the testimonial of greatness become valid? In 1900, after the first performance; a month later, when the Public Orator of the University of Cambridge, presenting Elgar for an honorary Doctorate, with grave eloquence – in classical terms appropriate both to Newman and Elgar – described the work, 'Nuper modorum musicorum arte quali Gerontii animam temporis in puncto minutissimo coeli per spatium infinitum leniter labentem descripsit, arte quali choros caelestes "laudem Deo in excelsis, laudem Deo in profundis" cantantes induxit'; in 1903, when the work was impressively performed in the newly built Westminster Cathedral; in 1932 when I heard it conducted by Elgar here in Worcester, or in 1934, when I again heard it – then a memorial tribute – in Gloucester. And finally, where is the designation of greatness acceptable? In England; in Ireland; in Germany; in the United States?

The answer for which we look does not easily come. The best we can do, probably, is to claim that appreciation of the quality of *The Dream* is related to circumstances. But that does not stop the prick of conscience. And so it is to the general clutch of such questions that I attempt to provide the means whereby they may be tackled – with the help of John Henry Newman.

It was in 1885 that a remarkable priest came to St. George's Church in Worcester. Thomas Milnes Knight, born in 1830, was educated at St. Mary's College, Oscott, after which he spent nearly two years travelling (as some students wisely do today); in his case in India and in America. He came back to employment in Liverpool in the shipping business of Lamport and Holt. After thirteen years he became a member of the Society of Jesus. He was then when he came to Worcester, a man of experience, and described by one of his successors, Father Arthur Kavanagh, as a 'wonderfully kind and sympathetic man'. Knight was one priest – but also, literally, a man of the world – whose friendship Elgar appreciated. Others were Henry Bellasis, a member of a family close to Newman, and the Benedictine Father Dolman, of Hereford.

It was a hundred years ago when Father Knight gave to the newly-married Elgar a copy of *The Dream of Gerontius* (a copy containing General Gordon's marginal comments). Newman then was in the last year of his long life. It was then that Elgar first began to give consideration to the poem that was to be a source of special inspiration.

It seems proper to begin a survey of the whole subject with a consideration of Newman's share, and also, in recognition of his particular love of Birmingham to acknowledge his still vital influence in our region as well in wider reaches. Newman's part in *Gerontius* (which for convenience now denotes the work as treated by Elgar) has previously gone almost totally unnoticed.

In this place it is fitting that we should take note of the elegant tribute paid in 1840 to Selina Countess of Huntingdon in Newman's review of a newly published biography. For our own time there is a sting in the tail.

> She acted as one ought to act *who considered this life a pilgrimage, not a home* [my italics] – like some holy nun, or professed ascetic, who had neither hopes nor fears of anything but what was divine and unseen. And such she was in an age which particularly required a witness that such things could be, or that it was possible to love anything better than the goods of life [1].

'Life as a pilgrimage' is a recurring theme in Newman's teaching, and in 1840 he reached a point of crisis in his progress. It was the year in which he wrote the celebrated, or notorious, Tract 90, in which his claims of compatibility between the Church of England and that of Rome, made it inevitable that in due course he must reluctantly secede from the one and enter the other. It was in general – at the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria – a period of crisis, of which Newman's trial of conscience was not the least important part. In the broad sweep of human adventure the Romantic movement was in late bloom, to which the emancipated – but not widely accepted – Roman Catholic Church contributed to a revival of liturgical ritualism, and of mysticism, which, adding new dimensions to the zone of spiritual sensibility, also affected the High Anglican movement of which Newman was a founder member. Gothic imperatives in architecture (not only ecclesiastical architecture) were enjoined by A.W. Pugin and mediaevalism returned to music through Gregorian chant, the significance of which, of course permeates *The Dream*, as also *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. It was an age of high literary endeavour in which economists, theologians, political thinkers, philosophers and theologians were reaching out to a popular circle of readership in prose of a quality no longer easily achieved or readily understood. In that age the leading poet was elevated to the peerage. Against Tennyson's poetic career that of Newman stands antipathetically and conjointly: the one wrote *In Memoriam*, the other *The Dream of Gerontius*. Each work commemorated the untimely death of a friend.

Newman was no mean musician. His practical musicianship merited a long article by his friend Edward Bellasis, 'Cardinal Newman as Musician' [2]. This is an important essay on Newman's aptitudes in the field contributing much to our knowledge of him, but not to be dwelt on here except to underline the fact of an intense *feeling* for music – developed through the fingers of a violinist.

To this there is a graphic reference in one of Newman's Oxford sermons, preached when he was Vicar of the University Church, concerning the 'Moral Consequences of Single Sins':

> ... there is a fault out of sight. He (the sinner) forgets, that in spite of this harmony between all within and all without for twenty-three hours of the day, there is one subject, now and then recurring, which jars with his mind, – there is just one string out of tune [3].

Newman played the violin throughout his life. He was well acquainted with the classics as well as composers of his own time. He understood the techniques of harmony and counterpoint. It is not surprising that his philosophy was underpinned with the belief that:

> music is the expression of ideas greater and more profound than any in the visible world of ideas which centre, indeed, in Him whom Catholicism manifests, who is the seat of all beauty, order, and perfection whatever [4].

In 1829 Newman was asked to contribute to Joseph Blanco White's newly founded magazine, the *London Review*. Given a free hand at first he intended to write two essays, the one on poetry, the other on music. The first – 'Poetry, with reference to Aristotle's Poetics' – was duly published, but as is often the case in respect of a new journal based on hope rather than market analysis there was no second issue. The nature of the lost essay, however, may be assumed from other writings. In the essay on poetry Newman likens Greek drama

> to the music of the Italian school; in which the wonder is, how much richness of invention in detail can be accommodated in a style so simple and uniform. Each is the development of grace, fancy, pathos, and taste, in the respective media of representation and sound.

Later, about Aeschylus's account of the death of Agamemnon, in the play of that name, Newman writes,

> The death of Agamemnon is intimated at first – it is accomplished at last: throughout we find that the growing in volume and intensity of one and the same note – it is a working up of one musical ground, by fugue and imitation, into the richness of combined harmony.

Such association of music with poetry in the nineteenth century, as its extension and intensification, was not peculiar to Newman. He was in the company, for example, of Coleridge and of Carlyle, whose powerful declaration in *The Hero as Poet* that in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (to which we will return in respect of Newman's concern with this work), 'there is music everywhere' could well have come from Newman himself.

Newman was also inspired from another Italian source. In *The Idea of a University* (1835), in a passage concerning St. Philip Neri he wrote of those,

> who left the law at his bidding, and joined his Congregation, to do its work, to write the annals of the Church, and to die in the odour of sanctity. Palestrina had Father Philip's ministrations in his last moments. (Giovanni) Animuccia hung about him during life, sent him a message after death, and was conducted by him through Purgatory to heaven' [5].

It follows that in fulfilment of the ideals of St. Philip Neri, from whose combined misionary and musical exercises the idea of oratorio developed, and after whose confraternity in Rome the Oratory in Birmingham was established in 1849, Newman – in 1856 – considered the best means of infusing the education of the sons of the Catholic families intended to study in his proposed Oratorium Parvum with those ideals:

> ... on the cultivation of two studies we have lately obtained the direct approbation of the Holy See, which are peculiarly congenial to the spirit of St. Philip and the history of the Oratory, viz. on schools of painting and music. If we succeed in these, we shall be doing a benefit to English Catholicism in general, while we advance the Oratorium Parvum in our own place. These arts are naturally congenial to young minds, and to Birmingham especially. Music is one of the special characteristics of the Oratory, and it is the art for which Birmingham is famous. A school of painting, on the other hand, is a great *desideratum* in England; we have about us various youths who have a talent in that line, and there are various arts in Birmingham, which would naturally group themselves under a school of ecclesiastical painting and decoration [6].

At exactly that time the young, Birmingham-born and -educated, Edward Burne-Jones was at Oxford seeking an answer to the question what to be: a religious or an artist.

Soon after drafting his Paper on the arts Newman wrote a memoir of a member of the Oratory, Father Joseph Gordon, who had died at the age of 42 on 13 February 1853; to him, wrote Newman '... as much as to anyone, under Divine Providence and the patronage of St. Philip, the establishment of our Mission in Alcester Street was owing . . . He has been taken away early, but not his work; his work remains'. It was in a disused gin distillery in Alcester Street in Birmingham that the Oratory was first established. Twelve years passed before Newman's memorial to his friend – *The Dream of Gerontius* – was created. On 11 October 1865 Newman wrote, 'On the 17th of January last it came into my head to write it, I really cannot tell how. And I wrote on till it was finished...'. Some part of the memory of Father Gordon was in a sentence – in his Oratory Papers – which was added by Newman to his previous recollection, '... What vigour he imparted to our Oratory Hymns, the first collection of which in a printed form is due to his zeal.'

The first draft of the poem was contained in 52 scraps of paper, and a fair copy was completed by 7 February 1865. In this the Hymn for the Dead, 'Help, Lord' (1857, published in Newman's *Verses on Various Occasions*) was inserted after Psalm XC, for the Souls in Purgatory. Of the psalm this was a second, original, translation – neither after Douai nor the Authorised Version. A copy of the whole work was sent to Father H.J. Coleridge, editor of *The Month*, where it was published in the May-June issue of 1865.

Of early responses to the poem two are of special significance. In the January 1864 issue of Macmillan's Magazine Charles Kingsley's review of Anthony Froude's *History of England*, in which the notorious phrase, 'Truth for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy' stood close to reference to Father Newman. Newman's response to Kingsley was the *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, published six months later. In 1868 Sir William Cope, Kingsley's neighbour at Eversleigh, country squire, ordained priest in the church of England, and admirer of Newman sent to Kingsley a copy of Newman's collected poems, which stimulated this remarkable response. Kingsley, like Newman, was a poet.

> I read the *Dream* with awe and admiration. However utterly I may differ from the *entourage* in which Dr. Newman's present creed surrounds the central idea, I must feel that that central idea is as true as it is noble, and it, as I suppose, is this: The longing of the soul to behold Deity, converted by the mere act of sight, into a self-abasement and self-annihilation so utter, that the soul is ready, even glad, to be hurtled back to any depth, to endure any pain, from the moment that it becomes aware of God's actual perfection and its own utter impurity and meanness[8].

On 19 May 1879 Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, politician and scholar, wrote in his diary of dining with Gladstone: 'At dinner we talked of Newman, whose *Dream of Gerontius* Gladstone puts very high, so high that he speaks of it in the same breath as the *Divina Commedia*[9].

'Praise to the holiest in the height' (as conceived for Newman's First Choir of Angelicals) was sung at Gladstone's funeral in 1898, to the setting of 1868 by J. B. Dykes.

Newman's poems were spread over many years, and inspired by many circumstances. More than 100 were contributed to the *British Magazine* and collected into the *Lyra Apostolica*, which, edited by Edward Caswell, of the Oratory, was published in 1836. *Verses on Religious Occasions* was published in Dublin in 1852, and *Verses on Various Occasions* followed in 1867. Among the early poems were 'Sleeplessness', the familiar 'the Pillar of the Cloud' ('Lead kindly light') and 'Dreams', written in the late winter and spring of 1832-33 during a holiday in the south of Europe with his Oxford friend Hurrell Froude. Another poem of that time was 'Separation of Friends', to which after the untimely death of Froude, in 1836, twelve final elegaic lines were added. Together with 'Refrigerium' (for 'Saints departed'), written at Oxford in 1835 all these poems were published in *Lyra Apostolica* in 1836. The last is familiar in Elgar's moving four-part setting of 1910.

Imagery and themes occur in these poems which repeat in *The Dream of Gerontius*. In 'Sleeplessness' patterns which are the germ of Elgarian motivs are discernable: 'Unwearied God, before whose face / The night is clear as day, [Judgement] / Whilst we, poor worms, o'er life's scant race / Now creep, and now delay, / We with death's foretaste alternate / Our labour's dint and sorrow's weight [Fear], / Save in that fever-troubled state / Where pain or care has sway [Sleep]. The opening lines of the second verse of Refrigerium accord beautifully with the mood of the opening of Part II of *Gerontius*: They are at rest: / The fire has eaten out all blot and stain, / And, convalescent, they enjoy a blest / Refreshment after pain: a gloss on Bede's 'flowery place... into which the souls of those are received who depart the body in good works, but who are not so perfect as to be immediately admitted into the kingdom of heaven'. (*History V*).

In one way or another all these pieces suggest a visionary instinct which is allowed explicitly in Newman's note in the *Apologia* in respect of the origin of 'Angelic Guidance', a poem written immediately before leaving England in December 1832. The most significant passage in the

context of the present consideration reads, '... or in dreams of night / Figures the scope, in which what is will end? / Were I Christ's own then fitly might I call / That vision real; for to the thoughtful mind / That walks with Him, he half unveils His face.

'At Whitchurch, while waiting for the down mail to Falmouth, I wrote the verses about my Guardian Angel, which begin with these words "the vision" which haunted me : – that vision is more or less brought out in the whole of these compositions'.

It is the visionary nature of *The Dream of Gerontius* that captured the assent of Kingsley and Gladstone. These are two particularly striking, and interrelated, examples of this visionary perceptivity. The first, concerning the relationship between heaven and earth, is taken from a sermon preached on Whitsunday 1841 :

> Again, the view of the heavens, which the telescope opens upon us, fills and possesses the mind, and is called an enlargement, whatever is meant by the term . . .
>
> . . . it is not the mere addition to our knowledge which is the enlargement, but the change of place, the movement onwards, of that moral centre, to which what we know and what we have been acquiring, the whole mass of our knowledge, as it were, gravitates[10].

The second example is from *The Dream of Gerontius,* a Platonic interpretation of the idea;

> For spirits and men by different standards mete / the less and greater in the flow of time. / By sun and moon, primeval ordinances – / By stars which rise and set harmoniously – By the recurring seasons and the swing, / This way and that, of the suspended rod / Precise and punctual, men divide the hours, Equal, continuous, for their common use.

This passage, coming as Gerontius is hurrying to the Judgement, infused with the musical thought that Newman understood to repose in the sight and the sound of words, was omitted by Elgar, who, however, conveyed the meaning in purely musical terms at the beginning of the second part of *Gerontius.*

Gerontius 'in a world of signs and types, ... a disembodied soul ... is wrapp'd and swathed around in dreams, / Dreams that are true, yet enigmatical'. He passes through the gate of Judgement (with memories of Bunyan), and is reminded Shakespearianly, how, whereas on earth / Temples and palaces are firm'd of parts / Costly and rare, but all material, / So in the world of spirits nought is found / To mould withal, and form into a whole, But what is immaterial; / and thus / The smallest portions of this edifice, Cornice, or frieze, or balustrade, or stair, / The very pavement is made up of life – / Of holy, blessed, and immortal beings, Who hymn their Maker's praise continually'.

Gladstone noted in Newman the influence of Dante, The demons of *Gerontius* amid a 'sour and uncouth dissonance' are Dante's 'outcasts of heaven : the arch-heretics' so described by an angel to Dante and Virgil. In Purgatory, spirits there passing on their way in a vessel under angelic conduct, moved to music, singing the psalm 'In exitu Israel'. The passage is recollected in Newman's and Elgar's 'They are at rest':

> And soothing sounds / blend with the neighbouring waters as they glide; / Posted along the haunted garden's bounds / Angelic forms abide, / Echoing, as words of watch, o'er lawn and grove, / The verses of that hymn which seraphs chant above'.

The climax of *Gerontius* is the powerful, all comprehensive, paean [also reduced by Elgar to manageable proportions], 'Praise to the holiest in the height': to recall the Cambridge Public Orator – 'arte quali choros caelestes "Laudem Deo in excelsis, laudem Deo in profundis" cantantes'. The movement of the verses, the intervening commentary of the Soul and the Angel of the Agony, reflect Dante's rise through the several heavens and past the several choirs of angels to the ninth heaven where 'Glory to the Father, to the Son, / And to the Holy Spirit' rang aloud / Throughout all Paradise . . .[11]..

That is the context in which Elgar's climax of praise is to be measured.

It was a universal theme that bound Newman to Dante, and Elgar to both. In his end note to *Cockaigne,* describing himself then as 'meteless and moneless on Malverne hills', Elgar associated himself with Piers Plowman, in one allegory of 'life's pilgrimage' familiar to him. Another such account of the tribulations of the soul is in a poem by the Elizabethan Devonshire poet, Humphrey Gifford – *A Dreame* :

> Layd in my quiet bed to rest, / When sleepe my senses all had drownd, / Such dreames arose within my breast, / As did with feare my minde confound.

Wandering in a wood, the pilgrim meets horrifying beasts of prey, seeks God's help, is taken by 'a wight with winges / Of auncient yeares' by whom he is shown the horrors of hell, reminded of the rampant foe, 'Deadly Sinne'. The winged creature flies away – 'And I thereat was so afrayde, / That drowsie sleepe forsooke mine eyes'. So too is Bunyan's story. *The Dream of Gerontius*' then may be seen not as an Oratory hymn, but as a new version of ancient legend.

Born a century and a half ago in a countryside where folklore was still part of the everyday understanding of life, Elgar was qualified to unite his unspoken knowledge into the stream of his music, so much of which was inspired in particular, and the remote, country retreats. He was also born into the renewed Catholicism of the nineteenth century, and early in life was made aware of 'the suspicion and dislike with which everything Catholic is regarded in this country' remarked on by Newman in *The Grammar of Assent* (1870). Inevitably he experienced a sense of separateness, of which he was conscious during the latter stages of life. *Gerontius* is also a testament to this separateness.

Elgar's musical education was partly controlled by the tenets of Catholicism that permeated the instruction of the Church and the character of its music. Instruction by enthusiatic Jesuits was dogmatic, but – the principles of the Middle Ages persisting in this respect – also iconographic. Catholic church music in Elgar's youth was tilted away from the familiar – too familiar – contents of the part-books in the Cathedral (sung often inaccurately and without inspiration) to the Masses of Mozart and Haydn, of Samuel Webbe the elder, to the miscellany of central European Catholic music made available principally by Vincent Novello, and by Novello's own works. It was from the colours and contours of the music of St. George's Church that Elgar derived the principles of sonoral pigmentation that distinguish at least his 'sacred music'. 'My boy, it stinks of incense!' Stanford was cruelly correct. Today we see this in a different light.

The renascence of Catholicism during the last century was in part encouraged by the general emotional climate of Romanticism. The nature of music altered in response to this climate, so that it is impossible not to be able to attribute an unknown work of that period heard for the first time to the nineteenth and not to the eighteenth century. James Smith, a lay clerk in Worcester Cathedral Choir from 1864, recollected how, 'with the advent of Modern Music the anthems and services by the Old Masters were less often sung and it has been said by musicians that the rendering of them is a lost art' [12] The expressiveness of Romantic music encouraged composers towards semantic conclusions; to absorption of language and literature and painting, to become not only descriptive but definitive. Hence the lure of the Leitmotiv, a neologism chipped out of Greek for the purpose of Wagnerian analysis. The Leitmotiv tended towards the didactic, even towards the dogmatic. (In this case we are returned to the ancient chant of the Church, which was indeed both Leitmotiv and dogma.)

'Can death', wrote Keats, 'be sleep, when life is but a dream, / And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?' In the nineteenth century death was comfortably embraced by virtually every poet : it also invaded the music of virtually every notable composer. The proximity of dream to death, stated so often, is illustrated by many composers of the last century – through Cherubini, Berlioz, Schumann, Brahms, Bruckner, Verdi, Wagner – aided by the powerful forces then increasingly available.

'No thought, of course', wrote Newman, 'is more overpowering than that everyone who lives or has lived is destined to endless bliss or torment. It is too vast for us to realise'[13]. At the Birmingham Festival of 1879 Newman heard Cherubini's first Requiem in C minor, by which he was, it was reported, 'quite overcome'. It was after the performances of his *Stabat Mater* in Worcester and Birmingham in 1884 that a suggestion that Dvorak should set *The Dream of Gerontius* was put about. Nothing came of this, but he became and remained a favourite composer in the West Midlands. The *Spectre's Bride* was a new work at the 1885 Birmingham Festival, at which Newman was in the audience and Elgar in the orchestra. The *Stabat Mater* was performed at Gloucester in 1887. Two years later Alfred Littleton (of Novello) suggested to Dvorak that he should compose a Requiem Mass. This work, gladly undertaken, was completed on 31 October 1890 (a few weeks after Elgar had appeared at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester as composer, with *Froissart*). A year later Dvorak's *Stabat Mater* was given its first performance in Birmingham. It is, perhaps, a mark of the indelibility of the death motiv in the nineteenth century that the solid membership, strongly Protestant, of the Birmingham Festival organising committee could go so far in what should have been an uncongenial theological area.

There is a similarity between Newman's and Elgar's thoughts in respect to their finished parts of *The Dream*.

> You do me too much honour [wrote Newman to Rev. John Telford] if you think I am to see in a dream everything that is to be seen in the subject dreamed about. I have said what I saw . . . I have set down the dream as it came before the sleeper. It is not my fault if the sleeper did not dream more. Perhaps something woke him. Dreams are generally fragmentary[14].

Elgar's inscription on his score is familiar: its plangent and mystical tone is perfectly complementary to Newman:

> This is the best of me: for the rest, I ate and drank and slept, and loved and hated like another: but this I saw and knew; this if anything is worth your memory.

Approaching *Gerontius* from another direction there is a poem by Elgar, written at 'Forli' in the pre-Gerontius years, *The tired Soul*, of which the middle verse moves into the pastoral scenes painted by Bede:

Then our loved ones, hand in hand. / Wander with us in the land, / Where – through golden seas of mist, / Shining woods and fields sunkissed, – / Stream a wider, deeper flow / Of harmony than earth may know; / Tones too deep for us, unwise, / Come with the closing of the eyes.[15].

In 1900 – the second year of the South African War – the progress of *The Dream* was charted in the press. On 1 March the *Birmingham Post* sounded this gloomy note of uncertainty:

> . . . There are many difficulties in [the way of the Festival committee]. At one time the probability of their having Mr. Elgar's work trembled in the balance, and they were very near having to give it up altogether. Difficulties arose which appeared almost insuperable, but now it was settled that Mr. Elgar would produce his work.

On 6 March 1900 the *Daily Telegraph* noted that there was only to be one novelty at the Festival:

> It was understood that two were arranged for, one to be written by Mr. Elgar, the other by Mr. Coleridge Taylor. Unfortunately, the Anglo-African musician has been forced to excuse himself, leaving Mr. Elgar alone in his glory. The Malvern master is, it appears, engaged upon a setting of Cardinal Newman's 'Dream of Gerontius' – a good subject, which some years ago attracted the attention of Sir Frederick Bridge. Whether the organist of Westminster Abbey went beyond the point of admiration and contemplation possibly only he himself can say!

Remarkably, Coleridge Taylor turned down the invitation to write a new work for the Festival. 'I will not compose', he wrote, 'unless I feel that I have got it in me to compose'. To the Committee's great credit, impressed with this honest declaration, Coleridge Taylor's *Song of Hiawatha* was put down for performance on the evening of 3 October. *Gerontius* was to be on the morning of that day.

So far as Bridge was interested in *Gerontius,* fortunately he did say exactly how – after a visit to St. Michael's College, Tenbury, in the early 1870s – he called on an old friend in the neighbourhood: a Roman Catholic priest with whom he had been friendly while he was organist of Rochester Cathedral. The priest showed Bridge, then anxious for a subject on which he could base a Doctoral Exercise, Newman's text. 'Now', said he, 'if you want something to set to music, why not undertake this? the man who sets this worthily will make an undying reputation'. Bridge gave due consideration to the project, took counsel, but, in that

> the imagery of the poem demanded for its musical setting a temperament as distinct as that which had produced the moving verse, so I relinquished the idea of undertaking it. Yet not far away from the house wherein my Roman Catholic friend made his prophetic pronouncement, there was then living the man who before many years would have achieved the distinction foretold – Edward Elgar, whose unsurpassable setting of 'Gerontius' is known and reverenced wherever choral music is practised [16].

On 24 August the *Musical Courier*, as well as some other papers stated that '. . . according to rumour, [Elgar is] writing a symphony, which he will dedicate to the memory of General Gordon'.

The 'Gordon' symphony by this time was becoming somewhat bewhiskered. It had been around in one form or another for almost two years: but speculation seemed to have ended when it missed the previous year's Worcester festival. Back to *Gerontius*, on 13 September the *Speaker* tastelessly dragged in the matter of religion:

> The Roman Catholic machinery on which the story of Gerontius turns as told in Newman's verse has, perhaps, prevented the poem from taking quite the place in English literature to which its peculiar beauty entitles it, but to Mr. Elgar this particular feature of Newman's work must necessarily have made a special appeal.

In New York, the *Musical Courier* of 24 September waxed eloquent on the poem as a 'work of marvellous pathos and subtlety, quite unique in subject. . .', and concluded, 'Mr. Elgar is a bold man to select such a theme'. on the other hand, on 29 September, the *Pall Mall Gazette* admitted:

> It seems to us quite extraordinary that Mr. Elgar should have found so noble an inspiration in what is after all a somewhat inferior literary work; for Newman was really no poet, and the peculiar materialistic moulding of his thought which comes out so strongly, for example, in his sermon on 'The neglect of Divine Calls and warnings', found its full expression in this set of verses. . . . It will be found, however, that precisely this materialistic attitude towards the greatest mystery of life had touched Mr. Elgar's muse with no uncertain sincerity of emotion.

It is, perhaps, not possible to begin to understand the depths of Elgar's disillusionment after the first performance of *Gerontius*. Popular history, popular biography, prefer success to failure. the *Observer* notice, its critic's thoughts recollected in the days intervening between the performance and publication of the notice, put the blame exactly where it lay. The soloists, Edward Lloyd, Plunket Greene, Marie Brema 'deserved all credit' for their performances. So far as the performance was concerned that was the end of credit.

Great though Richter's reputation was across Europe, he was not the man for Elgar. He was, said the *Observer* 'an orchestral conductor *par excellence*, but his ability to direct performance of English oratorio is open to doubt'. The real villain, however, was the chorus:

> The Birmingham choir is no longer a body of vocalists to which an Englishman can point with pride. In 1897 the constant false intonation was attributed to the *diapason normal* and to over zeal in not weeding out choristers whose voices were no longer fresh, but who were excellent readers. These were excuses, however, that only testified to faulty system and imperfect preparation, the results of which this year have been still more painfully apparent . . .
>
> The shortcomings of the choir were specially to be regretted, because Mr. Elgar's sacred cantata *The Dream of Gerontius*, the outcome of eight years' thought, and a choral masterpiece, was presented in so faulty and pointless a manner as to seriously jeopardise its success. I sincerely sympathise with Mr. Elgar for what he must have suffered during its performance. Loftiness of aim and soul-striving earnestness of purpose are reflected from every page of the score, while intimate study of it reveals what a labour of love it must have been. It is such work that enobles art, and it is aggravating and saddening to think that, in these days of progress and advanced ability, such a magnificent contribution to English music should be well-nigh strangled in its birth . . .

The great success of that festival was the *Song of Hiawatha.* On 9 October Elgar wrote the most bitter letter that, perhaps, he ever wrote, ending : 'I have allowed my heart to open once – it is now shut against every religious feeling and every soft, gentle impulse, *for ever.* For Newman the dark night of the soul had been on 20 January 1846 when he cast off one life : 'You may think how lonely I am. "Obliviscere populum tuum et domum patris tui", has been in my ears for the past twelve hours. I realise more and more that we are leaving Littlemore, and it is like going on the open seas'. In 1865 Newman was again in mental agony on account of Kingsley, and at cross purposes with Manning, the new Archbishop of Westminster. Newman at this time would describe himself as an old man: in fact 'Gerontius' the Latinised form from the Greek. Into this title irony is stitched. Elgar would have understood : Gerontius – old man – for New-man.

In 1865 Newman was helped by the support of two of his old Anglican friends from Oxford : Frederick Rogers and R. V. Church (to become Dean of St. Paul's). They raised his spirits greatly, by offering to buy him a new violin. 'I have', he wrote to Rogers on 25 June, 'chosen a violin – and in choosing it, have gone merely by what seemed to be its easiness for my fingers . . . I thank God for it very much'[17].

The beginning of this paper concerned the concept of greatness. The answer to the original questioning lies I think, just short of enigmatically, with Newman. In *The Idea of a University* we read how a great author (which, by Newman's reckoning, must also include the author of music) may not have

> any great depth of thought, or breadth of view, or philosophy, or sagacity, or knowledge of human nature, or experience of human life, though these additional gifts he may have, and the more he has of them the greater he is; but I ascribe to him, as his characteristic gift, in a larger sense the faculty of Expression. He is master of the two-fold Logos, the thought and the word, distinct, but inseparable from each other.

NOTES

1 *Essays Critical and Historical,* 2 vols., 1891, I, no IX, p. 389.

2 *The Month,* LXXIII, September 1891, pp. 1 – 23; reprinted, with additions, 1892.

3 *Parochial and Plain Sermons,* 1887 ed. Vol. IV, p. 47.

4 *The Idea of a University,* 1852, new impression 1910, p.80.

5 ibid. p. 237.

6 *Newman the Oratorian: his unpublished Oratory Papers,* Dublin 1969, p. 301.

7 Charles Stephen Dessain (of the Oratory), *John Henry Newman,* 1966.

8 *The Dream of Gerontius,* Introduction by Gordon Tidy, London 1906, p. 33.

9 Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, *Notes from a Diary, 1873 – 81, 2 vol. London 1898.*

10 *Fifteen Sermons, Preached before the University of Oxford,* 1826 – 1843, new ed. 1884, pp. 283, 287.

11 Dante Alighieri, *The Vision, or Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise,* trans. Henry Francis Cary, London 1844, Oxford Edition 1913; 'Hell' IX, P. 31, 'Purgatory' II, 115, 'Paradise' XXVII, p. 333.

12 James A. Smith (1839 – 1934), Recollections [1920], Worcester Cathedral Library, Add. MS 137.

13 'Individuality of the Soul', *Miscellanies: From the Oxford Sermons and other Writings,* new edition 1897.

14 Tidy, p. 15.

15 Percy M. Young, *Alice Elgar,* 1978, p. 184.

16 Frederick Bridge, *A Westminster Pilgrim* [1918].
ibid 291 – 3.

17 Brian Martin, *John Henry Newman, His Life and Work,* 1982, p. 117.

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A GREAT MASTER ON THE ELGAR VIOLIN CONCERTO

Leopold Auer (1845 - 1930) was one of the great violin masters. Hungarian by birth, he studied in his native country, in Vienna, and in Hanover under Joachim. From 1868 until the Revolution of 1917 he was violin professor at the Imperial Conservatory in St. Petersburg, and enjoyed a great reputation both as teacher and performer. He also toured and appeared as a soloist or chamber music performer in various cities, including London. From 1889 he devoted much time to teaching. Eventually he went to America and from 1918 was an outstanding master teacher. His pupils included Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz, Toscha Seidel, Kathleen Parlow, Isolde Menges, and Efrem Zimbalist. He wrote several books, including a volume of memoirs. In 1925 he published, in New York (and not issued here) "Violin Master Works and their Interpretation." (Carl Fischer, New York). One chapter was devoted to a short analysis of the Elgar Concerto, which, as will be seen, he greatly admired. Since it is unlikely that most readers will have had access to this book, we reprint the chapter here.

EDITOR

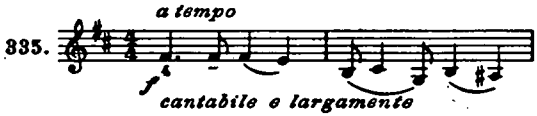
THE ELGAR VIOLIN CONCERTO

The Violin Concerto Op. 61, in B minor, by Edward Elgar, in my opinion is next to Tchaikovsky's, the most important written during the last two decades. For although it may not possess the depth of Brahms' music nor the sheer individuality of theme shown in Tchaikovsky's work, it is a composition of high distinction as regards invention, form and collective development, the work of a master. This being the case it seems natural to ask why the work so seldom is found on the symphony concert programme either in Europe or America? Is it because of the difficulties of the orchestral score or the solo part, or is it because the expenditure of time needed for rehearsals seems too great?

I have only heard this Concerto played in public twice and then by two virtuosos of the first rank: Fritz Kreisler, who performed it in London and Jascha Heifetz, here in New York. In both instances the work scored a great success, one even greater perhaps, than that obtained by the Brahms' Concerto when it first appeared as a novelty on the concert programmes, introduced to the public by a master of Joachim's calibre, in spite of violent attacks by part of the press. It may be that the exceptional length and the weaker third movement of the Elgar work have militated against its popularity.

In any event it presents great technical as well as musical difficulties, both for the interpreting solo artist and the orchestra conductor because of its uninterrupted changes of tempo, often occurring at intervals of three or four measures, or even less. There is also the highly interesting polyphonic development especially in the first and third movements. Its counterpoint and contrapuntal subjects in the orchestra often crush the solo violin, with the result that the untrained ear cannot clearly grasp the melodic development and is dissatisfied. As regards the constant tempo alternation we feel that the composer has striven to express his wishes on paper as clearly as possible. Whether he has succeeded in so doing the future alone can tell.

In the first movement *(Allegro)* after the orchestra has announced the Principal Themes, the solo violin presents the introductory theme on the dominant in a somewhat hesitant, fragmentary manner; and four measures after No. 10, the First Theme :



is introduced. it is succeeded (No. 16) by a highly lyric Second Theme:

336.

which including its second section (No. 17), may be regarded as one of the loveliest episodes the First Movement contains. At No. 20 the music grows more animated; and two measures after No. 21, a brilliant passage:

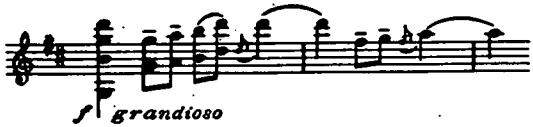
337.

gradually leads up to the great *tutti* at No. 23. Four measures after No. 27 the Second Theme makes its entrance in the orchestra against a contrary movement in triplets:

338.

in the solo violin part, *piu lento.* No sooner has this movement begun, however, than it changes in the next measure to an *animato* and during the measures which immediately follow continues to alternate between *a tempo, animato* and *largamente* up to No. 29 where a *Lento* is indicated. Five measures before No. 35 we find a most dramatic variant of the Second Theme:

339.



which reaches the climax of its subsequent development at No. 41. From this point on the music becomes more and more agitated, increasingly *animato* (No. 42) and not long after *con fuoco,* thence hurrying irresistibly on to the end of the First Movement.

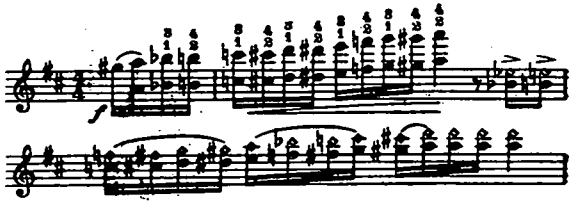
In the Second Movement, the *Andante,* with its beautiful themes, is contained the vital pith and marrow of the entire concerto, one which may be destined to survive many another recent concerto despite the weakness of the last movement.

This *Andante* commences in the solo violin part with a Counter Theme (No. 45); and its Principal Theme is not introduced until two measures before No. 46, and only four measures later the solo violin resigns it to the orchestra. These two themes appear in constant alternation in the orchestra and solo parts on a parity of musical importance and together form a unified whole.

At No. 47 we have a beautiful orchestral episode which returns (No. 53) and gains an enhanced charm from the variant developed by the solo violin. At No. 57 the two themes appear simultaneously, as in the beginning, and in conclusion the composer once more passes in review all the phrases contained in the *Andante* so rich in melodies.

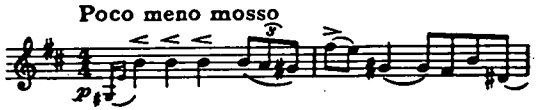
The Third Movement, *Allegro Molto,* opens with a very animated introduction. Its quintuplets crowd almost joyously upward in their ascending flight, and are followed by scales in octaves and chromatic harmonics :

340.



One expects more than the composer offers in his Principal Theme (No. 68). At No. 73 the Second Theme

341.



is introduced, and after ten measures passes over into the orchestra in a varied form. The composer calls for a *Piu lento,* which is well motived in view of the complexity of the variation.

At No. 94 we encounter a beautiful motive from the Second Movement *(Andante)* this time presented as an *allegro :*

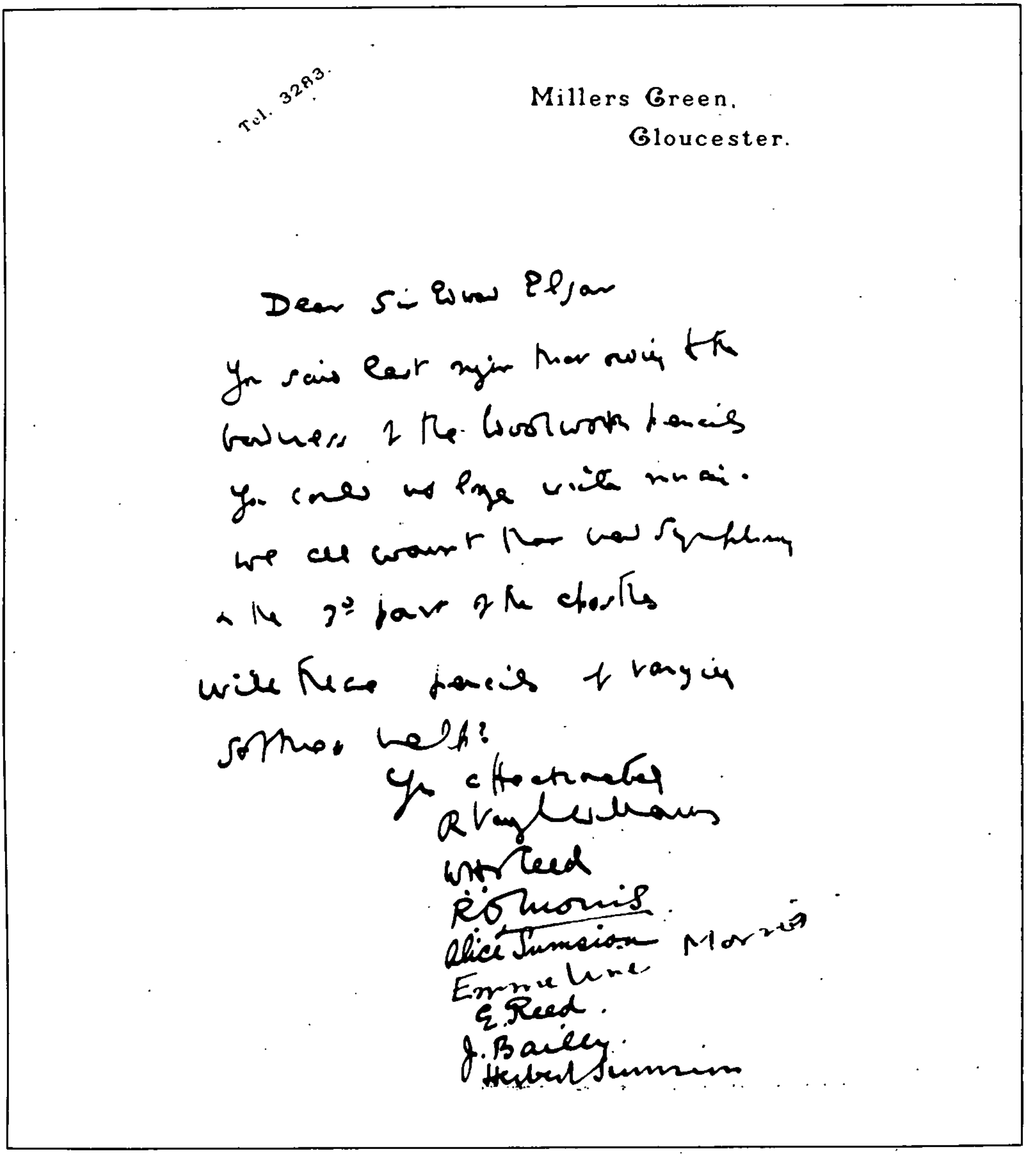
342.

yet grateful after all the preceding passage-work.

The cadenza (No. 101) forms one of the Concerto's most interesting episodes. It is based on two themes from the First Movement, and provided with an incidental orchestral accompaniment which supports the solo vioin in a highly artistic and unobtrusive manner.

This idea is not a novel one. In Joachim's "Concerto in the Hungarian style" which was published over fifty years ago, an incidental orchestral accompaniment is employed in the Cadenza of the initial movement. Whether Joachim was the first to avail himself of this new effect I cannot say positively. In Elgar's case the Cadenza has been shaped by a master hand; and the fact that the harp is the outstanding instrumental support of the solo violin gives the Cadenza an especially rhapsodic quality. And it should be interpreted in that sense, with freedom, independence and even a hint of the fantastic. After the Cadenza the movement swiftly hastens to a colorful close by means of various changes of tempo.

A delightful letter to Sir Edward Elgar, signed by Vaughan Williams, W. H. Reed, Herbert Sumsion and others. This copy was made available to us by Raymond Monk, the original being the property of the Elgar Foundation.



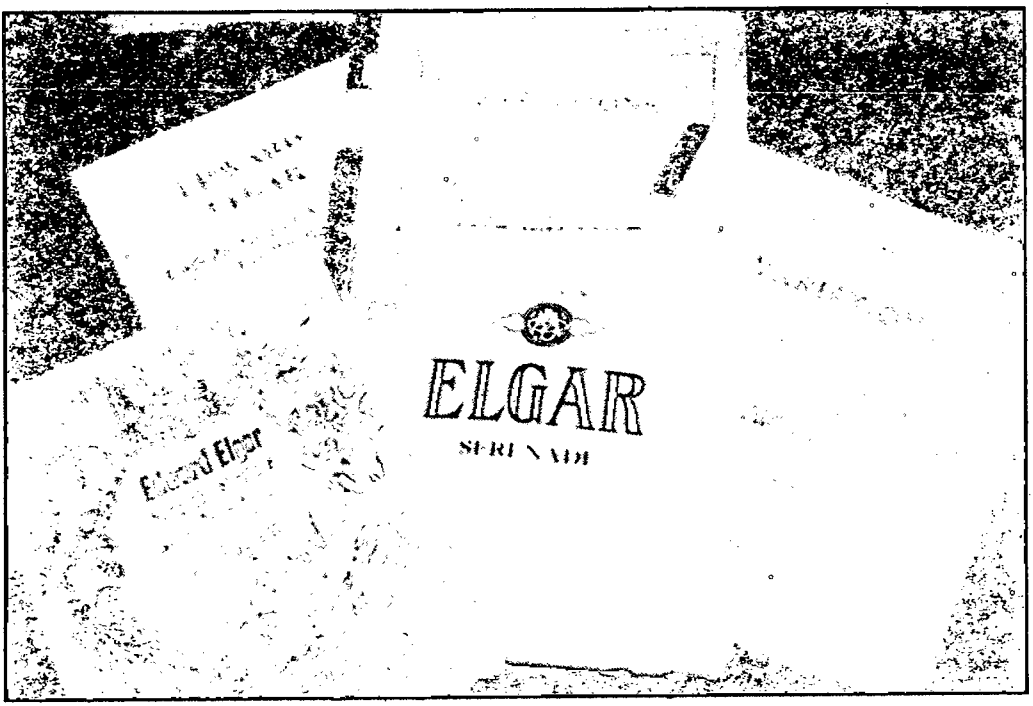
Tel. 3283.

Millers Green,
Gloucester.

Dear Sir Edward Elgar

You said last night that owing to the badness of the Woolworth pencils you could not cope with music. We all want that new Symphony and the 3rd part of the Apostles. Will these pencils of varying softness help?

Yrs affectionately
R Vaughan Williams
W H Reed
R O Morris
Alice Sumsion
Emmeline Morris
E. Reed.
J. Bailey.
Herbert Sumsion



ELGAR IN PHILADELPHIA

Last summer, while on a trip to Philadelphia, I had the good fortune to be the guest of Dr. Edwin Heilakka, who, as well as being the Orchestra Librarian of the Curtis Institute of Music, is also the Curator of the Stokowski Collection. This represents a large amount of the conductor's possessions, including a vast collection of records, unusual musical instruments amassed from his various voyages around the world, and most interesting of all, his extensive library of scores. I was able to spend some time in the Stokowski room and search through much of the memorabilia. Here was the score of NIGHT ON A BARE MOUNTAIN, as used in FANTASIA, many Bach transcriptions, some unpublished, the Tchaikowski Fifth symphony score he'd used at a memorable Albert Hall 'Prom' in 1973, and most interesting of all, several Elgar scores, all of which bore signs of preparation and use. These included SOSPIRI, SERENADE FOR STRINGS, INTRODUCTION AND ALLEGRO, and several copies of the ENIGMA VARIATIONS. This score seems to have been prepared on several occasions in his last years: readers will be familiar with the live recording by the Czech Philharmonic, in 1972, while perhaps, like me, you attended his Albert Hall concert. Sadly, no scores were found of any of his choral music, concertos or symphonies. A Stokowski Elgar symphony sounds fascinating. It was he who gave the American premiere of No. 2 in Cincinatti in 1911, and as a result of meeting Elgar on the latter's tour of the States, was offered his first London concert with the L.S.O., in June 1912. Many will remember the Festival Hall SIXTY YEARS ON celebratory concert, during which the original programme was repeated.

Andrew Youdell

LADY HULL

The Elgar Society has learned with sadness of the death of Mollie, Lady Hull. She was a Vice-President of the Society, and until recent years had been an active member, attending a number of functions. The widow of Sir Percy Hull, organist of Hereford Cathedral, she was one of the few people still living who knew Sir Edward Elgar well. We deeply regret her passing, and offer condolences to her family.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The news that Trevor Fenemore-Jones has decided to retire as Vice-Chairman from the general Committee will be greeted with surprise and sadness. His colleagues on the Committee, and indeed the whole Society, have been extremely fortunate to have had the benefit of his wisdom, foresight and loyalty in the task of honouring Sir Edward Elgar. The Secretary is asking for nominations for a replacement to take office from the Annual General Meeting in May 1990.

Please will you send names to her, as soon as you can, at:

20 Geraldine Road, Malvern, Worcs. WR14 3PA

This is also an appeal for donations for a fitting presentation to be made at the Annual General Meeting, as an expression of our gratitude for his long service to the Society. Donations should be addressed to the Secretary, at the address above.

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW???

Recently the editor was going through some old catalogues of book dealers, and he came across an undated catalogue, but probably late 1950s. Two Elgar autograph letters caught his eye, one priced at 42/- and the other at 49/- ! ! ! The quotations sounded so intriguing and amusing that he felt duty bound to share them with readers. Does anyone know where these letters are today? Alas, the original dealer is dead, so no knowledge to be gained there.... If anyone does recognise them, do please write to us.

"Autograph post card, unsigned. Gloucester, 4th Sept. 1904.

'Just had tea with Ivor Atkins and many others – Albani, Plunkett-Greene, etc. What a service! What a sermon – Dean Spence. A very Architectural - Medieval - Spiritual - Choral - Festival-Practical discourse. 600 people there and me! Hope you are both well. Are you back? Spent yesterday afternoon in Worcester. Hereford tomorrow.' "

Autograph post card signed. Swansea, 15th Sept. 1904

'Just polished off Hereford in great style. It was good – the cider I mean. Have been down the Wye to Chepstow and Tintern. Have also heard sundry notes of music and spent hours with Francgon Davies discussing almost everything under the sun. Holbrooke – Walford Davies, etc were at our hotel so you may imagine we were fairly saturated with matters musical. Yours truly, E. Elgar...' "

Unfortunately the dealer did not record to whom the cards were addressed.

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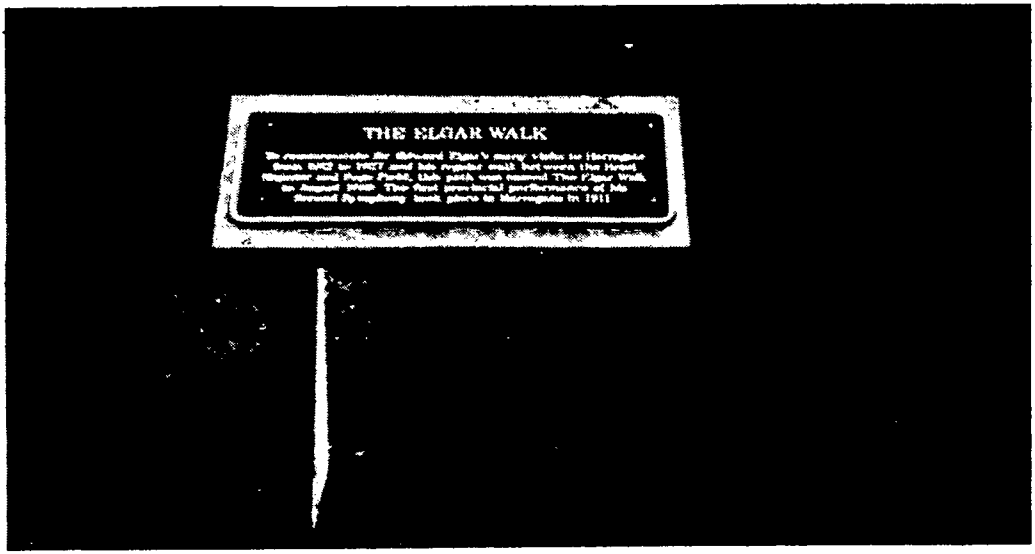

HARROGATE'S ELGAR WALK

by David Fligg

Worcester and its environs is no longer the only town to boast an Elgar Trail. This year's Harrogate International Festival featured "The Elgar Walk", which was enjoyed by twenty Elgarians on 4th August.

It was enthusiastically led by local historian Malcolm Neesam, and it followed the walk which Sir Edward regularly took on his visits to North Yorkshire's spa town. He invariably stayed at the Majestic Hotel, and it was from this opulent establishment that, in Mediterranean-type weather, the walk commenced.

As a young lad, H. H. Walker, later to become a significant figure in Harrogate's musical life, followed Elgar on one of his regular strolls. Many years later, he recounted to Malcolm Neesam the time when he followed the great composer – at a suitable distance! From the hotel, Elgar would walk to Bogs Field Circle in the Valley Gardens, via Crescent Gardens and the Royal Pump Room. A plaque has been erected in the beautiful Valley Gardens commemorating Elgar's trail, and stating that the first provincial performance of the Second Symphony took place in Harrogate in 1911.

The Elgar Walk was one of many events at this year's festival which highlights British music. Sixty years ago, Basil Cameron and Percy Grainger organised a Festival of British Music in Harrogate, and this year, the festival commemorates this 1929 event. The works by Elgar featured this year were the Concert Allegro, played by John McCabe, the Piano Quintet (with McCabe and the Endellion Quartet), and the Severn Suite, performed by the Yorkshire Imperial Brass Band.

One of the Festival's highlights was on 6th August, when Ursula Vaughan Williams gave a talk at the Crown Hotel entitled "Working with composers". She took an often wry and amusing look at her collaborations as a lyricist and librettist with some of the great figures in 20th century music including, of course, her late husband.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1990

The Annual General Meeting will take place at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday, 26th May 1990 in the Hall, Lawnside, Malvern. This will be followed by tea.

In the evening there will be a concert in the Great Hall, Winter Gardens, Malvern, given by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jeri Kout. It will include :—

Symphony no. 96 in D (The Miracle)	*Haydn*
Symphony no. 8 in G	*Dvorak*
Cello Concerto (Soloist : Moray Welsh)	*Elgar*

A limited number of £9 tickets, at the concessionary price of £8, will be available.

FOLLOWING THE CONCERT ALL MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY ARE INVITED TO A CIVIC RECEPTION GIVEN BY MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT COUNCIL IN THE PUMP ROOM, WINTER GARDENS, MALVERN.

This is a generous invitation, for which we are most grateful; there will be no charge for the reception. Please write for tickets to either or both events to the Secretary, 20 Geraldine Road, Malvern, Worcs, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope, by the 30th April.

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On Sunday, 27th May, all are invited by the Rev. and Mrs. Michael Vockins to Birchwood for coffee, from 10.30 a.m. At 12.30 there will be a talk by a Trustee of the Birthplace, followed by a Ploughman's Lunch, and at 2.30 p.m. a recital, given by the Chairman and friends. At 4.30 all are invited to the Birthplace for Tea and Birthday Cake.

The following weekend there will be a concert on Saturday, 2nd June, in Worcester Cathedral given by the Cathedral Choir and Orchestra. The programme includes "The Banner of St. George". Ticket prices are £6 for reserved, and £4 and £2 for unreserved seats. Please write for tickets for this concert to Mrs. D. Hunt at 13 College Green, Worcester.

There will also be a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* on the same day in the Great Hall, Winter Gardens, Malvern, by Malvern Festival Chorus and the Orchestra for Europe, conducted by Rory Boyle. The soloists on this occasion will be John Mitchinson (tenor), Barbara Robotham (contralto) and Arwel Huw Morgan (bass). Tickets from the Box Office, Malvern Festival Theatre, Malvern. Telephone : 0684 892277.

On Sunday, 3rd June, there will be an Elgar Evensong at 4 p.m. in Worcester Cathedral, followed by the customary Wreath-laying Ceremony at the Elgar Memorial Window. In the absence of the Chairman the wreath will be laid by Trevor Fenemore-Jones, the retiring Vice-Chairman.

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ELGAR SOCIETY TIES AND BADGES . . .

Now available from the Society's Secretary : Ties £5; Badges £3. Please remember to send payment with order.

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ELGAR STUDIES . . . Edited by Raymond Monk. *Scolar Press, 1990*

This long-awaited volume, containing 11 original essays on aspects of Elgar's Life and Work, plus a selective discography, will be appearing in February. Sir Yehudi Menuhin, President of the Society, contributes a foreword.

The publication of this book, originally the idea of Raymond Monk and to whom all thanks are due, marks a further stage in the development of the Elgar Society. The volume has been compiled as a tribute to the work which the Society has done, and will continue to do. We believe that this important and substantial work will achieve wide sales, and add to our knowledge and appreciation of Elgar. A special order form will be included with this issue giving reduced terms of £29.25 for each member to purchase a copy. Members will receive their copies in advance of the public.

A review will follow in due course – by an impartial hand! Meanwhile, do not delay! Get your order off now. . . .

Sir Yehudi Menuhin discussing a point with Raymond Monk, editor of the forthcoming volume "Elgar Studies".

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

January 10	Introduction & Allegro for Strings *CBSO/Peter Thomas*	Birmingham Town Hall 7.30 pm
January 11	repeat of above concert	as above
January 31	Introduction & Allegro for Strings *Halle Orch/S. Skrowaczewski*	St David's Hall, Cardiff 7.30 pm
February 8	Piano Quartet *Allegri Quartet/Rian de Waal (piano)*	Leeds Grammar School, 7.45 pm Tel: Leeds 433417
February 9	String Quartet *Allegri Quartet*	BBC Studio 7, Oxford Road, Manchester, 1.05 pm (Applications to BBC, Manchester)
February 10	Introduction & Allegro for Strings *Halle Orchestra/S. Skrowaczewski*	Fairfield Hall, Croydon, 8.00 pm
February 16	Piano Quintet *Allegri Quartet*	BBC Studio 7, Oxford Road Manchester, 1.05 pm (Applications to BBC, Manchester)
February 17	Romance for Bassoon & Orchestra 3 Bavarian Dances *Beauchamp Orch/Williams*	Benn Hall, Rugby
February 18	Romance for Bassoon & Orchestra 3 Bavarian Dances *Beauchamp Orch/Williams*	Town Hall, Leamington
February 23	Cello Concerto *RPO/J. Mester/P. Tortelier*	Barbican Concert Hall London
March 4	In the South *Bournemouth SO/Litton*	Wessex Hall, Poole Arts Centre, 7.30 pm
March 11	In the South Overture *Purcell School Orchestra*	Queen Elizabeth Hall
March 12	Introduction & Allegro; Cello Concerto; Symphony no. 1 *Philharmonia Orch/Sinopoli/ M. Maisky (cello)*	Royal Festival Hall 7.30 pm

A Gala Concert to launch the Birthplace Development Appeal

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY *Continued*

March 16	Second Symphony *BBCSO/Andrew Davis*	Royal Festival Hall
March 16/17	Enigma Variations *Berlin PO/Slatkin*	Philharmonie, BERLIN 8.00 pm
March 24	The Dream of Gerontius. *English Northern Philharmonia/Groves/ Alfreda Hodgson/A. Rolfe-Johnson/ R. Macann*	Leeds Town Hall
March 24	Overture in D minor (Handel/Elgar) *Croydon SO/Davison*	Fairfield Hall,Croydon 11.00 am
March 25	The Apostles (Pre-recording concert) *LSO & Chorus/Hickox/M. McLaughlin A. Hodgson/A. Davies/S. Roberts/ D. Wilson-Johnson/R. Lloyd*	Barbican Hall, London 7.30 pm
March 28	Symphony no. 2 *RPO/Menuhin*	Fairfield Hall, Croydon 8.00 pm
March 29	Introduction & Allegro (arr. Mowat) *London Brass Ensemble*	Queen Elizabeth Hall
March 31	Symphony no. 2 *LSO/J. Tate*	Fairfield Hall, Croydon 7.45 pm
April 1	King Olaf *Good Shepherd Chor/Orch/ Seaman/U. Barry/J. Treleaven/ P. Morrison*	Henry Wood Hall, Claremont Street, Glasgow
April 12	Symphony no. 2 *RPO/Menuhin*	St. David's Hall, Cardiff 7.30 pm
April 25	Violin Concerto *LPO/Mehta/Perlman*	Royal Festival Hall
April 28	Cockaigne Overture (in concert with Walton's *Belshazzer's Feast)* *St. Edmundsbury Bach Choir & Orch/ Oxley/John Noble (bar)*	The Cathedral, Bury St. Edmunds 7.30 pm (Tel: 0284-753145)
April 29	Symphony no.2 *Kent Co. Youth Orchestra*	Royal Festival Hall

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY *Continued*

May 5	The Kingdom *Stamford Choral Soc/East of England Orch/professional soloists*	Stamford (No other details available)
May 12	King Olaf *Festival Choir/Manchester Bach Orch/ J. Coope/D. Johnston/other soloists not yet settled*	Bollington Parish Church, Nr. Macclesfield, Ches. 8.00 pm
May 19	Violin Concerto *Rutland Sinfonia/Collett/I. Flory (Violin)*	Corby Festival Hall 7.30 pm
May 30	Introduction & Allegro *Polish Chamber Orchestra*	Queen Elizabeth Hall

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BOOK REVIEW

NEW PENGUIN GUIDE to Compact Discs and Cassettes YEARBOOK 1989. Compiled by Edward Greenfield, Robert Layton and Ivan March.

Penguin Books, 1989, £9.99

Following the successful 1988 New Penguin Guide the substantial 1989 'Yearbook' lists all those recordings on CD or cassette which have appeared since Summer 1988. It is quite remarkable how much new material has appeared in this relatively short time, and a significant portion of it is devoted to CDs which are reissuing early material. In some cases *very* early ! There are those of us reluctant to relinquish our LPs and indeed our 78s, but even we must be impressed by the quality and number of recordings now being issued. Prices are tending to come down for many issues, and this is to be welcomed.

As usual we are in good editorial hands, each of the compilers being widely experienced in critical assessment. There is much to read and enjoy, even if one's pocket dictates that only a small number of the items described can actually be purchased ! Looking at the entries from the Elgarian point of view can only be satisfying, for no less than 11½ pages are needed to describe new Elgar recordings, compared with one and a half for Delius (a great shame this), and seven pages for Mendelssohn ! Who would have believed *that* twenty years ago ?

Ten pounds (all but a penny) may seem a lot for a limp-cover reference work, but it does contain just short of 500 pages, and will be a constant point of reference.

NEMO

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

EAST ANGLIA Summer activities have included a visit by a fair proportion of the membership to an all Elgar Concert as part of the King's Lynn Festival. Works performed were the Bach *Fantasia and Fugue* transcription, the *Violin Concerto* (Ernst Kovacic) and *Sea Pictures* (Teresa Cahill), with the Halle Orchestra conducted by Richard Armstrong. Unfortunately the marvellous East Anglian weather broke during the concert in the shape of a violent thunderstorm, which dampened the proceedings somewhat.

August was the occasion of our second much appreciated visit to the home of Sir George and Lady Burton, near Hadleigh, where we were entertained with more vintage Elgar recordings. More recently we have been visited by our old friends Barry and Pauline Collett when Barry gave an illustrated lecture on his recently recorded War Music. It is indeed fortunate for all lovers of Elgar that Barry champions the cause of the lesser-known works which are neglected by the large recording companies.

Our last lecture/recital was given by Diana Walkley and Carol Holt, who were prepared to make the arduous trek from Malvern to Norwich to regale us with live music. The recital included a selection of Elgar songs and, in the second half, *Sea Pictures.*

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SOUTH WALES. The Autumn meeting of the Branch – held at Friendship House, Swansea on 14th October – took the form of a lecture/recital by Leonard James and Ian Parrott devoted chiefly to Elgar's music for violin and piano. An introductory observation by the Branch Chairman, to the effect that Elgar had not written a very great deal for the violinist was soon challenged by Leonard James: "All Elgar's music is for violin" he claimed – the point being that orchestral violinists invariably derive considerable pleasure from the way in which the composer wrote for their instrument, and from taking part in performances of his symphonies and choral works. This friendly altercation at once created an atmosphere of informality that did much to establish an uncommon degree of *rapport* between performers and audience. Maintained throughout, it added much to the enjoyment of the occasion, and even brought about some modifications of the performers' original plans. *La Capricieuse*, which was to have formed part of the programme, was never played but, had room been found for it, we might have been denied the opportunity of hearing the early *Pastourelle* from Opus 4, the general unfamiliarity of which was brought home to us when no takers were found for Mr James's offer to "stand a pint" for anyone who could claim to have heard it before! The afternoon had, of course, its more serious side. A certain amount of background information was provided in respect of everything that was played and, from time to time, our attention was drawn by means of succinct comment to some particularly felicitous feature or other of Elgar's art. Playing upon an instrument of recent facture –one made at Aberystwyth within the last few years but sounding, nevertheless, remarkably mature – Leonard James, partnered by Ian Parrott, contributed to the programme, as well as the *Pastourelle*, the *Allegretto on G.E.D.G.E.*, arrangements of *Sospiri, Adieu*, and the *Mazurka* from Opus 10, and finally, the opening movement of the E minor Sonata. Elgar's music for piano solo was represented by *In Smyrna*, what time *Salut d'Amour* served as a fitting encore.

The 1990 Spring meeting of the Branch, at which members will be addressed by Miss Margaret Elgar, will take place in Swansea on 21st April (not 28th as previously advised).

By the time this appears in print the WEST MIDLANDS Branch will have completed its Autumn programme, successfully organised by Ann Roadknight, and will be looking forward to 1990. The events planned for the first few months of the year are quite varied and include such items as a Buffet Supper, the Branch AGM, and a musical evening with the Worcester Recorded Music Society. The latter will be in the capable hands of our Treasurer, Walter Cullis. Members have been notified of all these and also of the final lecture for Spring 1990. On Saturday, 28th April at 2.30 p.m. in the Friends' Meeting House, Worcester, Prof. Ian Parrott will address the Branch and his chosen subject will be 'Elgar's Musical Language.'

May I, on behalf of the West Midlands Branch (where it all started) wish all members of the Society a very happy and prosperous New Year.

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The LONDON Branch season opened on 2nd October in very special fashion, with Barry Collett conducting a section of the Rutland Sinfonia in the complete Powick Asylum Music. London seasons very often open with live music, but certainly we have never assembled so many players at one time. This was only the second performance ever of the complete Powick music and we enjoyed an exhilarating evening for which we are enormously grateful to our Rutland friends. The Royal College of Music proved a congenial venue for both concert and post-concert socialising. Lest the succession of Polkas and Quadrilles prove too much of a good thing, Barry Collett interspersed groups of Elgar songs in the programme, delightfully sung by Judy Dodds (soprano) and Marguerite Beatson (alto).

In November we returned to Imperial College to hear another speaker who had travelled a good distance to be with us – Simon Halsey from Birmingham. His talk – or was it a lecture recital? – on "Elgar's Understanding of a Choir" was quite outstanding. Mr Halsey, and indeed the London Branch Secretary, arrived with piles of scores ranging from early part songs to "Gerontius", through which our guest proceeded to take us with boundless energy, enthusiasm, humour and scholarship. Mr Halsey is a born teacher and, surely, no choir could resist him. At any moment one felt that the London Branch members present would find themselves coaxed into impromptu performance! Elgar's advance from the naive to the complex – even at one point the avant-garde – was charted. His genius shone from the scores, and Mr Halsey made it plain that none of those copious markings were there by accident. To end Mr Halsey took us through the great "Praise to the Holiest" passage from "Gerontius", illustrated by the magnificent recording by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, in which Simon Halsey collaborated with Simon Rattle.

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YORKSHIRE Branch received a severe shock on October 7th at the sudden death, at the early age of fifty-one, of member Roger Marsh. Roger was the most devoted of Elgarians, who brought an almost boyish enthusiasm to his chosen interest of Elgar research, hunting out difficult-to-obtain books, concert programmes, etc., carefully logging, cross-referencing and storing the information so yielded. In all that he did – Elgarian or otherwise – Roger had the loyal support of a devoted family, to whom we send our sincere condolences on their, and our, sad loss,

The 1989/90 season began in fine style for Yorkshire on September, 25th with a talk on 'Sir Henry Wood and Elgar', by our own member Millicent Albrow, who is always sure of a goodly audience. On October 9th Yorkshire conductor/composer, Arthur Butterworth, spoke on 'The English Muse'. (Mr. Butterworth conducted the Settle Orchestra in May at the unveiling of the Settle plaque). November 7th saw the long-awaited – and twice postponed – visit of Claud Powell to speak on the subject of 'Dorabella'. This was an intriguing evening, made particularly interesting by Mr. Powell's use of old photographs and his own memories of his mother and of her step-mother, who had introduced her to the Elgars in the 1890s.

We foregather on December 11th for our Annual Christmas Social, when our members will sate their healthy Yorkshire appetites from the usual well-stocked table. The New Year sees a continuation of regular monthly meetings, commencing with our 'Chairman's Evening' on January 8th.

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The SOUTHERN Branch officially came into being on 7th October! This follows several months of hard work by a steering committee which, for the time being, assumes the mantle of the Committee of the new branch. Further committee members will be sought at our inaugural meeting in January. The initial programme of events is:

January	11	Havant Arts Centre, 2.00 p.m. Illustrated talk on 'Elgar and the Orchestra' by Terry Barfoot.
March	24	Peter Symonds College, Winchester. Illustrated talk on 'Elgar in the Recording Studio' by Ronald Taylor.
May	5	Central Library, Portsmouth. Recital by Diana Walkley (contralto) and Carol Holt: 'Elgar in Words and Pictures.'

It is hoped that ventures of a less formal nature may be organised before any summer recess, and it is intended to move meetings round the area to give all members a fair opportunity of attending meetings. We are in need of information concerning possible venues, especially in the west of the area (Bournemouth/Dorchester). All suggestions welcome. Many existing members have pledged support, and several new members recruited. Further information from Walter J. Essex. (Address on back cover).

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IT TOOK A LONG TIME . . .

In "The Musical Mirror", for June 1927, the record reviewer for the magazine, Alec Rowley, noticed a number of records issued that month. Among them was the Hamilton Harty version of the sequence 'By the Wayside' from Elgar's "The Apostles". He classed it as 'noble and dignified' and drew attention to the fine diction of the bass Robert Easton. He then went on to say: 'What about "the Dream", complete in the future?' He could not have known how far into the future a complete recording of "Gerontius" was to be. In fact it was a further *eighteen years* before the Malcolm Sargent set was recorded.

How fortunate we are today, almost an embarrassment of riches.

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NATIONAL EVENT

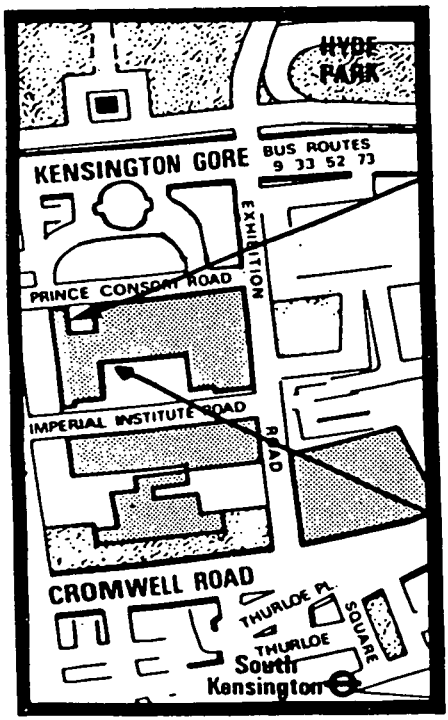
This year it is the turn of London Branch to host a National Event, following the precedent set by North-West Branch last February.

Plans are taking shape and we can report that the event will take place in the Sherfield Building, Imperial College (South Kensington, off Exhibition Road) from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday 10th February.

The principal guest will be Dame Joan Hammond, whose international career encompassed not only operatic and recording acclaim but also a deep love of Elgar (see her autobiography "A Voice A Life"). Dame Joan will speak of her memories of singing Elgar with Sir Malcolm Sargent, her recollections of Elgar performances in wartime, etc.

We shall also have live Elgar performed by young musicians from the Royal College of Music; and Dame Joan, who is now Head of Vocal Studies at the Victoria College of Arts in Melbourne, will advise and comment on the performance of Elgar song.

London Branch asks that Society members and guests attending pay a charge of £3 to help cover costs (any profit to "King Olaf" fund!). Tea and biscuits will be served in the College's Senior Common Room.



Royal College of Music

Entrance to Sherfield Building

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RECORD REVIEWS

Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), Op 36; Imperial March (1987), op 32 Coronation March (1911), op 65; Pomp & Circumstances Marches, nos 1-5, Op 39

London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Barry Tuckwell
Pickwick-IMP PCD 913

Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), Op 36; Serenade for Strings, op 20; Chanson de Nuit and Chanson de Matin, Op 15 nos 1 & 2

London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton
Collins Classics EC1003-2

Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), op 36; Froissart op 19; Cockaigne (In London Town), Op 40

London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin
RCA Victor RD 600073

Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), op 36; The Sanguine Fan op 81; Incidental Music and Funeral March from 'Grania and Diarmid', op 42

Jenny Miller, soprano
London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Bryden Thomson
Chandos CHAN 8610

Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), op 36; Cockaigne ('In London Town'), op 40; Froissart, op 19

English Symphony Orchestra, conducted by William Boughton
Nimbus NI 5206

Do we *really* need five new versions of the 'Enigma' Variations – with at least two further new recordings (not to mention several reissues) due to appear by the time you read this? Obviously the record company marketing men think so – but it makes the life of the reviewer extremely difficult: it is certainly not going to be possible to offer more than a few generalisations on each individual performance to guide the potential purchaser.

The first thing to say is that the version I enjoyed most on first hearing was the cheapest – on Pickwick-IMP, conducted by Barry Tuckwell. There is nothing cut-price about the performance, the recorded sound or the presentation. This may not be the most subtle of performances, but it is a good honest interpretation, well characterised, with generally brisk tempi, and alert, enthusiastic orchestral playing, marred only by an occasional slight lapse in ensemble, perhaps indicative of limited rehearsal time. The recorded sound is bright and forward, with exceptional clarity of detail. The marches are played with spirit, and the inclusion of the Imperial and Coronation Marches, along with the five P&Cs, makes this a generously filled disc. Robert Dearling's notes, concise yet informative, are a model of how to make the best use of the limited space on Pickwick's simple fold-over insert sheet.

The CDs on the new Collins Classics label are also being sold at less than top price, but are more expensive than the Pickwick issues. Their Elgar recording appeared amongst their first releases, but, frankly, it is just not good enough to be considered seriously in such a competitive field. Hilary Davan Wetton is a talented young conductor, but the 'Variations' is a work which is not yet fully in his bones. Tempi are generally well chosen, but phrasing is 'square' and lacking in spon-

taneity. Often the orchestral playing sounds rather cautious and uninvolved. The recorded sound is pleasing and clear in detail, but a little constricted. The other pieces on this popular Elgar programme need a much lighter touch.

For me the big disappointment is Leonard Slatkin's recording of the Variations, particularly when considered alongside the success of his recent recording of the 2nd Symphony. The theme and earlier variations are taken very slowly indeed, and fail to settle into a steady rhythm. Although there are some spirited moments later, Slatkin's interpretation is finally sunk by an impossibly slow 'Nimrod', seriously distorting the balance of the work as a whole. In places the orchestral players themselves seem somewhat perplexed and uncertain as to what is required of them and there are several instances of uncertain ensemble. Apparently Slatkin feels that, for a man of Elgar's hypersensitive and essentially solitary nature, there is a darker side to his relationships with his friends which conventional interpretations miss. Perhaps so – but by overemphasising this, Slatkin has, I feel, thrown out the baby with the bathwater.

Nor is the recorded sound as good as can be achieved at Abbey Road Studios. The string tone is rather dry and the orchestral balance seems to lack depth. I found Slatkin's 'Cockaigne' slightly brash and similarly undistinguised, but 'Froissart', which opens the programme, goes with more of a swing – a favourable impression enhanced, perhaps, by rather more spacious recorded sound.

When Bryden Thomson's Chandos recordings of the Elgar symphonies were first released, I was less than enthusiastic – but I have subsequently found myself playing (and enjoying) his 1st symphony more often than any other modern version (I am still not fully reconciled to his 2nd symphony). His 'Variations' has similar characteristics: some of the movements are taken quite slowly – but the pulse and phrasing are beautifully controlled, so that it never *feels* slow. Thomson (presumably in conjunction with his tape editor) has clearly insisted on the shortest possible gaps between the movements that are not directly linked (shorter, in fact, than would ever be possible in the concert hall), thus giving the work an unprecedented unity.

The LPO here redeems itself for its unconvincing playing under the direction of Wetton and Slatkin. Aided by typically warm, rather recessed Chandos recording, the orchestral sound is exceptionally beautiful, with rich, glowing string tone and some superb wind playing – although the resonant hall, (All Saint's, Tooting), does lead to some masking of the detail in Elgar's wonderful scoring.

The Thomson recording would be a strong recommendation under any circumstances, but the imaginatively chosen couplings make this a record of exceptional interest to Elgarians. 'The Sanguine Fan' gains, I think, from a slightly slower tempo than Boult chose for his pioneering 1973 recording, and both Boult and Groves, in the 'Grania and Diarmid' march, sound matter-of-fact alongside Thomson's passionate handling. The rather slight remnant of orchestral incidental music, as recorded by Boult, is here enhanced by the inclusion of the song 'There are seven that pull the thread' – thus bringing together for the first time all that remains of the music written in 1901 for the Moore and Yeats play.

William Boughton has already conducted several excellent recordings of British music for Nimbus, including a fine disc of Elgar music for strings (NIM 5008). His English String Orchestra has now been expanded into a full symphony orchestra to record these larger scale Elgar works, in a recording which is sponsored by Legal & General Insurance, with profits being donated to the National AIDS Trust. Boughton conducts a most attractive, direct performance of the 'Variations', in which nothing is underlined, and the music is allowed to unfold in an exceptionally natural and unassuming manner. His gentle, understated 'Nimrod', for example, moving steadily forwards at a beautifully controlled and not too slow a tempo, is far more touching than many more overtly emotional versions. The orchestral playing is generally good, with fine brass playing, although some of the wind solos, so important in this work, lack individuality.

I have reservations, however, about the sound quality. Nimbus like using the 'Ambisonic' recording technique, which involves simple microphone settings and natural balance and perspectives. This has already produced good results in the same warm acoustic (the Great Hall of Birmingham University). This time, however, something is not quite right. The strings are given a rather thin, dry, recessed sound with little tonal depth, and there is a general lack of weight and detailed clarity. Only the brass seem to catch the generous acoustic of the large hall.

In 'Cockaigne' and 'Froissart', both being given similarly attractive, straightforward performances, the string tone is slightly richer, but again there are peculiarities of balance: the timpanist, for example, adequately audible in the 'Variations' can be barely heard at all in his important contribution to the final bars of 'Cockaigne'. Incidentally, I tried listening to these recordings through headphones, and was interested to find that, although the string tone was still less than ideal, perspectives and stereo imaging were far more natural than through my loudspeakers.

Do not let my doubts about the recorded sound act as a complete deterrent, however. I enjoyed these attractive performances very much, and purchasers will be making a small but important contribution to relieving the distress of AIDS victims and their families.

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Symphony No 2 in E flat major, opus 63
Serenade for Strings, opus 20

London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Leonard Slatkin
RCA Victor 'Red Seal' RD60072

This is yet another outstanding Elgar performance from a non-British conductor – and a considerably more 'orthodox' and generally acceptable interpretation of the 2nd symphony than the controversial Sinopoli recording on Deutsche Grammophon, which I reviewed in the September 1989 Journal.

At the start of the first movement, Slatkin, like Sinopoli, ignores Elgar's request for a gradual increase in speed between the third and ninth bars, which, when observed, (as by Handley and Boult amongst rival CD versions) immediately introduces a feeling of tension and urgency. Slatkin, however, soon settles into quite a brisk main tempo for the movement, and he is particularly successful in conveying a mood of nervous edginess. He also keeps things moving forward, avoiding lingering over the more contemplative moments (he does not, for instance, oversentimentalise the second subject – a trap into which non-British conductors often fall) thus giving this long and rather sectional movement a fine sense of unity.

Slatkin's handling of the other movements is equally impressive. His *larghetto* is on the slow side, but again he avoids any emotional underlining, and, by easing the movement gently forward at a rock-steady tempo, we are reminded that this music, proclaimed as an expression of public mourning, had, for Elgar, a far more intimate meaning.

Slatkin gives us perhaps the quickest and most fiery *scherzo* on record, building up to a climax of terrifying intensity, and, like Boult and Handley, he sees the fourth movement as being not a melancholy, autumnal farewell, anticipating Elgar's post-war music, but a summing up of the moods of the other three movements, and an expression of optimism and hope. Slatkin, like Handley, introduces an organ pedal at the climax of the movement, but brings it in eight bars earlier. This, I think, is a slight miscalculation, but it is a minor problem, as Slatkin's, presumably electronic, instrument makes little impact – I suspect that a genuine 64ft stop was dubbed on to the Handley recording.

Slatkin has, I think, given us a very great interpretation of the 2nd symphony – and his straightforward, unexaggerated account of the Serenade is also amongst the most enjoyable versions I know. My only slight reservation concerns the sound quality. The LPO is given a rather recessed balance, with some loss of internal clarity in louder passages and the string tone in the symphony lacks weight (the Serenade sounds warm and spacious). Nevertheless the dynamic range is wide, and there is certainly no lack of impact: the climax of the *scherzo* has never been more vividly caught on record.

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Cello Concerto in E minor, opus 85 (with TCHAIKOVSKY: Variations on a Rococo Theme, & DVORAK: Rondo)

Paul Tortelier, cello
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Sir Charles Groves
RPO Records: RPO 8012 (LP); ZCRPO 8012 (cassette); CDRPO 8012 (CD)

Cello Concerto in E minor, opus 85 (with BLOCH : Schelomo)

Steven Isserlis, cello
London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Richard Hickox
Virgin Classics : VC7 90735-2 (CD)

Cello Concerto in E minor, opus 85 (with VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, and Fantasia on 'Greensleeves')

Felix Schmidt, cello
London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos
Pickwick IMP PCD 930 (CD)

Cello Concerto in E minor, opus 85 (arranged by Lionel Tertis)
Three Characteristic Pieces opus 10
(with BAX: Phantasy for Viola and Orchestra

Rivka Golani, viola
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Vernon Handley
Conifer Records: CFC 171 (LP); MCFC 171 (cassette); CDCF 171 (CD)

Tortelier's love for, and understanding of, the Elgar Cello Concerto came across very clearly in his BBC Masterclass on the work, a few years ago. He has recorded it twice before. The earlier, with Sargent conducting, was issued as long ago as 1954, but it is his second version (with Boult, recorded in 1972) which has become a classic of the Elgar discography. It was reissued on compact disc last year in EMI's mid-price 'Studio' series. It still sounds well (better, in fact, than on the original LPs, where the orchestral sound was a bit diffuse) and is an excellent bargain for Elgar collectors, especially as the coupling brings together contemporary Boult recordings of 'In the South', 'Froissart' and 'Introduction and Allegro'.

This new recording, made in the summer of 1988, was issued to mark Tortelier's 75th birthday. The years have dealt kindly with the master cellist's technique: there are one or two minor lapses in intonation and the fingering and bowing may not be quite so fleet as they used to be (the *scherzo* is taken a little more slowly this time, but is still a miracle of crispness and clarity). But from the opening cello chords one immediately senses the presence of one of the great interpretative artists of our time – with the sure expectation that this is going to be a very special recording of the concerto.

Nor is one disappointed. Tortelier's interpretation has developed in subtle ways since 1972, and one constantly catches one's breath in wonderment at some extra little detail in phrasing or change in dynamic. In general Tortelier's approach is slightly more restrained, less overtly emotional than some of his rivals, but it all sounds so spontaneous, without any trace of calculation, as if Tortelier, despite forty years or so of frequent performances of the work, is still discovering its delights afresh.

Great as was the 1972 recording, I think this is even finer, new musical insights more than compensating for any slight lessening in technical command. What is more, the sound quality is magnificent. I have always felt that the EMI engineers balanced the solo instrument a little too prominently in 1972. Here the balance is just about perfect, the sound of the solo instrument emerging naturally from within the framework of the spacious but well detailed orchestral sound. The resonant acoustic of the recording location (St Peter's Church, Morden, London) adds a rich glow to Tortelier's tone – which can sometimes (on record and in the concert hall) sound a trifle dry.

A leading solo instrumentalist once told me that he considered Charles Groves to be the supreme concerto accompanist. Here he and the orchestra are totally at one with their distinguished soloist. Tortelier and Groves give an equally enjoyable performance of the ever-popular Tchaikovsky 'Rococo Variations', and the little Dvorak Rondo (originally written, with piano accompaniment, three years before the composer embarked on his own cello concerto) is a gem.

As far as balance and warm sound quality is concerned, the Isserlis/Hickox recording of the Cello Concerto is as satisfying as the Tortelier/Groves version. I have, however, some misgivings about the performance as a whole. On the positive side, Isserlis's technical security and light touch has resulted in a particularly attractive performance of the *scherzo* (taken exactly at Elgar's formidable tempo marking of crochet=160). The *adagio*, too, is played most beautifully, with steady tempo and an air of gentle reticence.

Elsewhere, however, Isserlis often chooses tempi which are too slow. The opening cello chords immediately set a speed which is below Elgar's tempo marking and establishes a pattern from which the first movement never quite recovers. The fragmentary second subject, introduced by the woodwinds at bar 47, and marked simply *a tempo*, needs to sound rhythmically crisp and perhaps a little quicker in tempo, in order to offer a contrast in mood from the meandering first theme. This is precisely what Groves and Tortelier achieve, but which is not possible at the initial slow tempo set by Isserlis and Hickox. This lack of contrast, together with Isserlis's occasional tendency to underline the emotions in the music by slightly distorting the rhythm of Elgar's longer phrases, has resulted in an interpretation of unrelieved and exaggerated melancholy.

Isserlis, on the other hand, gives a masterly performance of the Bloch 'Schelomo' – and it was an imaginative choice to couple these two works for solo cello, which both draw their inspiration from an overwhelming sadness. Elgar's melancholy, however, is very English and contained, in marked contrast to the more overtly emotional Jewish (or Russian) expression of feeling. Overplayed, it is devalued. This is what Tortelier, the old master, understands perfectly – but it is a subtlety which, as yet, eludes Isserlis, for all his wonderful technical and musical accomplishments.

There is a distinct lack of good CD versions of the cello concerto selling at less than full price. I have never shared the general enthusiasm for the Robert Cohen/Norman Del Mar version on Classics for Pleasure, which I find rather superficial – which leaves the field wide open to the Tortelier/Boult recording on EMI (the well planned, full programme making it an exceptional bargain). The recorded sound however, as I have already implied, is not quite up to the best modern standard. Felix Schmidt's new recording on the enterprising Pickwick label, must

therefore be warmly welcomed, especially as it is a performance which would be highly competitive even at full price, and which is, for me, far preferable to the Isserlis/Hickox recording.

Felix Schmidt, who comes from near Stuttgart, but is a former pupil of the Menhuin School, is the possessor of an exceptionally warm, resonant tone. After a slightly ponderous start, he settles into a commendably straightforward account of the first movement, never lingering over the more reflective moments. His *scherzo* is played with a technical assurance and lightness of touch equal to the best on record and in the *adagio*, although his rich warm tone is given its head (he ignores the initial *piano* marking, but the recording may be partly to blame), there is an attractive directness and unsentimentality. the positive sense of direction throughout this fine interpretation of the concerto helps guide the finale forward to a very satisfactory conclusion.

A great deal of the credit for the excellence of this performance must lie with the conducting of Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos. Not having previously heard him in British music, I was most impressed by his sympathetic understanding of Elgar's personal orchestral textures, which come over with great clarity. The bright and vivid record sound helps here: the soloist is placed a little more forward than I personally like – but the orchestral sound is spacious, yet clear, and individual instrumental groups have been carefully balanced against the solo cello.

Fruhbeck de Burgos's brisk, passionate Vaughan Williams 'Tallis Fantasia' (with the LSO strings on superb form) makes up in Mediterranean warmth for any lack of English mysticism (an interpretation which comes off well in the slightly dry Walthamstow acoustic) and the Greensleeves fantasia is a well played bonus. Nevertheless the CD is hardly well filled at only 48 minutes total playing time. One cannot really complain, given Pickwick's modest prices (although their CDs are usually very well filled). On the other hand Fruhbeck and the LSO strings might have given us a splendid performance of 'Introduction and Allegro'.

Before discussing Rivka Golani's recording of Lionel Tertis's viola transcription of the cello concerto, I must declare an interest, having played a minor part in planning this recording. Tertis made his arrangement, with Elgar's blessing, in 1929, and the composer was sufficiently pleased with the result to have agreed to conduct the first performance at Queen's Hall in March 1930. Tertis subsequently played it several more times, but since his retirement it has rarely been heard.

Inevitably one's ear is conditioned to hearing his music presented by the darker tones of the cello. The ear adjusts quickly, however, especially with the help of Rivka Golani's big tone and passionate projection of the concerto's darker undercurrents. Indeed it is surprising how well, for most of the work, the viola transcription works. Of course there are changes in the solo part to accommodate both the range and tonal characteristics of the solo instrument: *pizzicato* chords near the start of the *scherzo* are replaced by *arpeggios*, and it is sometimes disconcerting when, for a few bars, the familiar melodic line jumps up an octave. On the other hand, in Rivka Golani's hands, the *scherzo* acquires a lightness and grace only occasionally achieved by cellists, and the glorious slow movement can happily be played 'straight' on the viola, even including a lone low B flat, just outside the normal viola range, made possible, as Tertis himself discovered, by retuning the C string down a semitone! Only in the last movement did I really feel that the lighter viola tone somewhat diminished Elgar's conception.

Elgar felt that Tertis's arrangement and personal tonal qualities required no adjustments to the orchestration, contenting himself with only a few minor changes in dynamics. In this recording there is ample confirmation of this in that there are only a few places (again mainly in the fourth movement), where the solo instrument is 'covered' by the orchestra sound. Conifer's production team has chosen a satisfactory, natural balance between soloist and orchestra, in the warm acoustic of All Saint's, Tooting. On the other hand, the resonant location, to my ears, makes the slight 'Three Characteristic Pieces', in their full orchestral form, sound a bit 'overblown'.

For the collector of rarely heard British music, the third work on the disc, Bax's 'Phantasy for Viola and Orchestra', written in 1920 in his characteristic style (full of references to celtic traditional music), will in itself make the disc worth the purchase price. It is a major rediscovery, too short, perhaps (at sixteen minutes) for convenient concert programming, and therefore dependent on a sympathetic and enterprising record company. It is played with obvious conviction and commitment by Golani and Handley. It is another example of Tertis's enterprise in finding new music for his instrument. Perhaps an opportunity was missed for devoting the whole disc to Tertis commissions – and perhaps one day Rivka Golani will record the Holst 'Lyric Movement' (the only completed part of a concerto for Tertis) and the Vaughan Williams 'Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra'. Both have been recorded before, but this young Israeli-born violist would make something special of them.

G.H.L.

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Powick Asylum Music; Fugue in D minor for oboe & violin; Duett for trombone & double bass

Rutland Sinfonia, conducted by Barry Collett
Whitetower Records ENS 161
Available from 44 Challacombe, Furzton, Milton Keynes MK4 1DP

Immediately prior to writing this notice I was listening to a radio review of some of Elgar's orchestral works, including 'In the South' and the Second Symphony. It seemed less than sublime then to turn to this new recording, until I remembered Michael Kennedy's words: "It is certain that (Elgar's) genius as an orchestrator, his absolute certainty of effect... were due to the lessons learnt in the multitude of activities which he undertook as a local jack-of-all-trades musician in his early twenties". Of these activities surely the most important was the position of bandmaster at the Powick Asylum: his first opportunity to compose and conduct on a regular basis, as Jerrold Moore has pointed out.

The music has often been bracketed with the wind quintet music of the same period, but it is more limited rhythmically because of the dance metre. It allows for interesting experimentation in orchestral colour within the confines of the motley assortment of instruments Elgar had at his disposal, but the composer doesn't attempt too much: he knew the limitations of his players. There is an interesting string counterpoint in the coda of 'La Blonde', but generally Elgar 'keeps it simple'. As in the composition of the quintets, there is a remarkable assurance and confidence, and some really good tunes. A hint of Sullivan, of Strauss, a phrase from 'Cherry Ripe' – but few signs of the mature Elgar. The finest music is in the quadrilles, especially 'L'Assommoir' and 'Paris'. (Elgar transcribed for piano the opening of 'L'Assommoir', and under the title 'Quadrille for an Eccentric Orchestra' it appeared in a profile of him in 'Musical Times' for October 1900). The second piece contains the germs of the fifth 'Pomp & Circumstance' March which Elgar wrote over fifty years later, and the final quadrille became 'The Wild Bears' in the 'Wand of Youth' suite (played much more slowly here than in its later manifestation). There is a hint in 'L'Hippodrome' (the second 'Paris' quadrille) of the trio section of the 'Wand of Youth' march.

One of the abiding visual impressions of Ken Russell's 'Elgar' film is the Powick band playing 'Nelly': moustachioed men in uniform, all sweat and spit. Something of the same spirit can be discerned in the Rutland Sinfonia. They play with great gusto in a totally convincing manner. It needs to be said that their exuberance often exceeds their expertise but in a way this adds charm and, indeed, authenticity to the performance. As Barry Collett's notes point out, some of the parts are very taxing for the players; and the Powick residents surely never heard this music played so well. The string writing in the polkas brutally exposes the limitations of the Rutland violinists,

especially in 'La Blonde' and 'Helcia', but then again it would probably tax the precision of any professionals. The only really painful moment comes in the central section of 'Helcia', where the tuning of the brass and lower strings is horribly awry. However, there is some excellent playing, notably the piccolo in the third 'Paris' quadrille. The recording also contains as a makeweight two short duets: the one for oboe and violin, though barely a minute long, is beautifully played.

Barry Collett conducts with his customary panache, and once again Elgarians have reason to be grateful to him for filling one of the remaining gaps in the discography. Within its frame of reference, I enjoyed this music immensely – as did my daughters, who do not always share their father's enthusiasm for things Elgarian! Let Barry Collett have the last word: "Lost masterpieces, no . . . but surely works to be enjoyed and treasured alongside the great masterworks".

G.H.

Organ Sonata in G, Orchestrated by Gordon Jacob
Wand of Youth Suites 1 and 2

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley
CD – EMX 2148

Violin Concerto in B minor

Yehudi Menuhin/London Symphony Orchestra/Sir Edward Elgar

Cello Concerto in E minor

Beatrice Harrison/New Symphony Orchestra/Sir Edward Elgar
CDH 7 69786 2

Violin Concerto in B minor

Albert Sammons/New Queen's Hall Orchestra/Sir Henry Wood

Cello Concerto in E minor

W. H. Squire/Halle Orchestra/Sir Hamilton Harty
NVLCD 901

I was privileged to attend a day of sessions which went towards making this stunning recording of Gordon Jacob's orchestration of Elgar's *Sonata.* Everyone involved in recording this 'new work' was thrilled by the opportunity to do something completely original. The RLPO was clearly inspired to give of its exceptional best, as is obvious from the result, not only in the *Sonata* but in *The Wand of Youth Suites* as well. Vernon Handley, to whom we owe so much for this and other recordings (and who seems to get more out of the orchestra than any other conductor), clearly loved Jacob's work as well. But, he rightly pointed out that it was a tragedy that Jacob had not lived to hear his extraordinary achievement played once again.

Andrew Burn's first class notes tell you all there is to know about Jacob's score, but I would like to point out that Michael Pope was long a champion of this realisation, and I know he was unstinting in his efforts to locate the score whilst he was at the BBC. He naturally remembered Sir Adrian Boult's one and only performance in 1947.

Jacob's achievement is considerable : simulating Elgar's orchestrating ability with great fidelity. He brings vividly to life a score, which, except for the first movement, can become lost within the acoustic of a large cathedral. It is almost as if Elgar's melodies come to life for the first time. A great painting has been cleaned, but not only can we enjoy what has been revealed we can also retain that with which we have become familiar.

Handley makes the first movement (Allegro maestoso) an orchestral showpiece. It is inappropriate to criticise Jacob's orchestration, but I do wonder at the use of the side-drum from fig. 92. It seems to have too great a prominence, but that might be as much a result of the mixing as anything else. having said that the movement ends in a completely convincing way, i.e., 'Elgarian'. The excitement created by a large orchestra can eclipse an organist in this most vivid of movements,

for the soloist requires to be more sedate if Elgar's effects are to be heard, but really both versions are completely individual.

The second movement (Allegretto) is a revelation, with Jacob subtly anticipating both *Falstaff* and the *Second Symphony.* The character of the piece is completely changed without affecting the melodic line in any way. As Andrew Burn says, this movement has the character of an intermezzo, but always an Elgarian one. Elgar remains at the helm in the lovely andante espressivo despite the extraordinary sound world into which Jacob's orchestra takes us. Gounod intrudes –in a most welcome way, as does Bruckner, somewhat perversely. Here Jacob pins his colours to the mast and points to Elgar's apprenticeship for the great slow movements of five or more years away. Considering the short time in which the work was written, Elgar's ability to sustain a melody served a fine apprenticeship indeed.

At five minutes, the presto is a great romp, played at a speed which would defy most virtuoso organists. By comparison, Sumsion (CSD 1595) and our Chairman (LRL 25120) take seven minutes 43 seconds and seven minutes 24 seconds respectively on their instruments. Forget whether this could ever be an organ work and you will enter a world of something new. It is so gratifying to hear – at last – a work one knew existed for so long and not be remotely disappointed. Vernon Handley, the RLPO, and the Eminence team deserve our gratitude.

Recent recordings of both *Wand of Youth Suites* are few and far between. Sir Adrian recorded them in 1954 and 1968, and only Bryden Thomson's record has appeared since then. This latter recording (CHAN 8318), made by the exemplary Chandos team, has never appealed to me. I always felt Thomson's tempi were too slow, and the fantastic nature of the pieces became lost as a consequence. Sir Adrian's 1968 recording (CDM 7692072) now shows its age a little, but also serves to remind us what a wonderfully natural acoustic could be made of Abbey Road. Despite Sir Adrian's authority in this music, Vernon Handley is more than his match, and indeed has as much claim to authority as Sir Adrian. His tempi are often slightly slower, but his ability to enter Elgar's world of remembered childhood is unequalled. Listen, in particular, to Fairy Pipers, The Little Bells and Moths and Butterflies. No wonder Handley's *Starlight Express* is still available. These pieces show us not only his understanding and good taste, but the essential qualities of the RLPO. This is a wonderful record and should not be missed.

Three of the greatest Elgar recordings also appear on CD for the first time. It is curious how more recent interpretations of the *Cello Concerto* have obscured Beatrice Harrison's recording of 1928. Not only does it have Elgar conducting, but her experience and knowledge of the work shines through to make her performance my first choice from the many recordings of this *now* over-recorded work. The transfer is tremendous, retaining the warmth of its LP issue (RLS 708) whilst revealing more of the performance.

I have two regrets about the Menuhin recording. Whilst improving the orchestral sound over its LP issue (HLM 7107) the acoustic has been brightened without retaining its essential warmth. This is a great shame, for a false edge is added to the sound which was never there before. EMI have also perpetuated Sir Yehudi's account of the making of the original records. The story is, I believe, more accurately laid out in Jerrold Northrop Moore's book: 'Elgar on Record'.

Albert Sammons and Sir Henry Wood made, in 1929, what for many has been the supreme recording of this greatest of violin concertos. It now appears for the first time on CD in a dim, disappointing, transfer. Those who have the LP versions (HLM 7011 or SH288) should wait and see if EMI provide their own version. A direct comparison leaves 'no contest'. Despite Sir Hamilton Harty conducting the Halle' Orchestra I have never enjoyed, or even liked, W. H. Squire's uninspired performance of the *Cello Concerto.* Stick to the Harrison, not only for its artistry, but for the quality of the remastered sound, which again is superior to this Novello record.

A.H.A.N.

LETTERS

From Richard Turbet

Could I add a supplementary request to Mr. Churcher's letter in the September issue, concerning unrecorded Elgar? Elgar provided orchestral accompaniments for three of the great anthems of the Anglican repertory: S. S. Wesley's Let us lift up our hearts, *Batishill's* O Lord look down, *and Purcell's* Jehove quam multi sunt hostes mei. *These were arranged for the Worcester Three Choirs Festivals of 1923 and 1929 (details in Kennedy's "Portrait"), but seem to remain unpublished.*

If these arrangements survive could they be recorded by Donald Hunt and his Worcester forces, who issued an excellent recording of music by Boyce some ten years ago, some of it accompanied by orchestra? The contents of the remainder of such a recording should not cause too much pondering.

From Andrew Youdell

G.H.L.'s review of the new Sinopoli recording of Elgar's 2nd Symphony contains the passage: "probably the first Elgar recording by a native-born Italian conductor since Sabajno's extract from "In the South", etc. I am certain that by now he must have realised his most obvious error, in that he has forgotten to mention Elgar performances by the greatest of the Italian conductors! Arturo Toscanini gave the Italian premiere of "Enigma", and played it extensively as a young man.

He performed the work twelve times with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, including a London performance in 1930 which Elgar did not attend, but Harriet Cohen and Dr. Sargent did, *and were duly bowled over. In 1935, he gave a performance with the BBC Orchestra in Queen's Hall which has recently been released as an EMI LP. Later, he gave five performances (from 1939–1952) with his N.B.C. Orchestra, and commercially recorded the work for RCA on December 10th 1951.*

As far as I know, Toscanini only played one other Elgar work during his American career, the "Introduction and Allegro", which received four performances in March 1931 with the New York Philharmonic, and one solitary revival with the N.B.C. Orchestra on April 20th 1940, which was preserved by transcription disc, and later issued privately to members of the Arturo Toscanini Society.

From David Bury

In a recent presentation at London Branch, Simon Halsey, Chorus Master of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Chorus, mentioned in passing his role in the performing of "The Dream of Gerontius" in Dusseldorf some two or three years ago. I understood Mr Halsey to say that the Choir consisted of British singers as well as a Dusseldorf contingent, and that this was the first performance of the work in Dusseldorf since the two great performances of 1901 and 1902 which did so much to establish both "Gerontius" and Elgar's international reputation.

Now this was the first I had heard – in retrospect, let alone advance – of this important event. Inquiry among well-versed members of London Branch has elicited similar ignorance. Quite obviously neither the Editor of "The Journal" nor the International Sub-Committee of the Society can publicise matters about which they are not informed. My question is – did not some member of the Society somewhere know of this project? My plea is that, in future, such information may be shared with the rest of us.

LETTERS

From Mike Richards

Encouraged by a visit made to the Ivor Gurney exhibition in Gloucester City Library during the recent Three Choirs Festival, I have just read a selection of his War Letters published by the Hogarth Press. Included are a few references to Elgar's works.

In June 1916, in a letter to Herbert Howells, written just after Gurney had first gone into the trenches, he wrote "By the way, have you heard or seen anything of Elgars setting of Binyons 'To the Fallen', that noble poem? How has he done it? Dont forget to reply to this. I envy any man who can set that properly

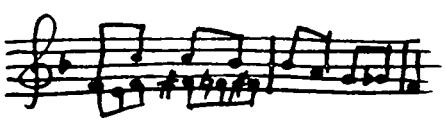
> *"They went with songs to the battle, they were young*
> *As the Stars, as the Stars they remain*
> *Age shall not weary them, nor Time condemn*
> *We will remember them".*

These little scraps stick in my mind and thrill me. It is a great poem." And in July, to his friend Marion Scott "But have you heard Elgars setting of 'To the Fallen'? Is it anyway worthy of the poem? I would like to set that! One of the best things I know 'in memoriam'."

Gurney refers to the poem in later letters but gradually gave up ideas of setting it.

At the end of June 1916 in a previous letter to Marion Scott, written after some fierce action, he said "Gerontius has run very strong in my mind of late – the solemn and noble priests music especially (here he wrote out the lines for 'in the name of Christ who died' and 'that shall be poured on thee') very beautiful that part. There is a bunch of glorious poppies perched as if they meant to astonish and delight one . . .".

The final reference written at the end of October 1916, in another letter to Howells ('My dear Howler'), "It is a surprise to hear that Elgars symphony is to be done. It has all the faults you mention. And all the good points, too. Yet



is a phrase of joy (from the lst movement) which often recurs to me."

One wonders what faults Howells had mentioned in his letter!

[The editor of "War Letters", R.K.R. Thornton printed Gurney's spelling, grammar and punctuation verbatim.]

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