

# The Elgar Society

# JOURNAL



**January**  
**1992**

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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## EDITORIAL

Vol. 7, No.4  
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Elgarians can always take pride in the fact that Elgar was the first major composer to commit himself to making gramophone records of his music, at a time when many people still regarded the gramophone as little more than a toy, and when the acoustic process gave a very imperfect reproduction of orchestral sound. Nowadays of course recording is not only big business but can be very influential in establishing a composer's reputation – or re-establishing it, as in the case of Parry for example. The triumphant progress of the Compact Disc over the last few years has had some interesting spin-offs so far as the repertoire is concerned. Whereas in the days of LP an average disc would last 40-50 minutes, the CD can take much more, and the record-buying public feel hard done by if they get less than an hour! So for the Elgar symphonies (average playing time about 50-55 minutes) there now has to be a 'fill-up', and several of Elgar's shorter works have received a number of recordings recently. For instance, the overture *In the South*, which was recorded twice during the 1970s and six times in the 80s, has already appeared on five new discs in the 1990s!

Judged by the number of new recordings issued, Elgar's popularity must be very high at the moment, and so it is good that the Society has had the opportunity to take part in a thrilling and ambitious project – the transfer of all Elgar's electrical recordings on to Compact Disc. Members may recall that these were issued in two boxed sets of LPs during the 1970s, but have been unavailable – indeed collectors' items – for many years now. Since then other music conducted by Elgar has become available; for instance the Prelude to *The Dream of Gerontius* from the 1927 Albert Hall performance, which was issued by Pearl, and of course all this will be included in the new set. The recordings will be issued in three sets of three discs during 1992-3. Obviously such a venture will be costly and the Society and the Elgar Foundation are both sponsoring it, to the tune of £10,000 and £5,000 respectively. Not only will the project bring a good deal of publicity to the Society, but will make this unique listening experience available again to record buyers. The Society owes a considerable debt to its Vice-Chairman, Andrew Neill, for his initiative and enthusiastic perseverance are really responsible for getting the project off the ground. The first set will be launched by the Society's President, Sir Yehudi Menuhin, next spring, an auspicious time, close to the sixtieth anniversary of his recording of the *Violin Concerto* with Elgar. And to make Elgarians joy complete, in the new year Pearl will be bringing out on CD the complete acoustic recordings.

GEOFFREY HODGKINS

# ELGAR AND PROGRAMME MUSIC

by Sir J. A. Westrup

## Part 1

[Sir Jack Westrup (1904 – 1975) was one of the most eminent musicologists of the century. He was educated at Oxford, and during the 1930s was a music critic on the staff of *The Daily Telegraph*. After the war he became Professor of Music first at Birmingham, and then at Oxford University. For most of the war he was a lecturer at King's College, Newcastle, and while he was there he wrote the following article for the *Durham University Journal* (vol. xxv, no. 3, June 1943). Much of the basic information it contains will be familiar to Elgarians, yet it is a first-rate example of Sir Jack's keen mind (as is his paper 'Elgar's Enigma' given to the Royal Musical Association in 1960) and few people will have had the opportunity of reading it, if indeed they knew of its existence. I am grateful to the authorities at Durham University for permission to reproduce it here.]

Asked to explain two of his piano sonatas (Op. 31, No. 2 and Op. 57), Beethoven replied: 'Read Shakespeare's *Tempest*'. It was a precise answer but it left a good deal unexplained. What exactly is the connection between the play and the music? Arnold Schering, the author of 'Beethoven in neuer Deutung,' is in no doubt. He disposes of Op. 57 (the *Sonata Appassionata*) by assigning it, on his own authority, to *Macbeth*, and having thus cleared the ground, outlines a *Tempest* programme for the earlier work. The temptation to do so is obvious – particularly in the first movement. Here there are snatches of recitative; and recitative, even if it is instrumental, must have its origin in words. Schering has no hesitation in telling us what they are, but to anyone less confident the answer is anything but certain. The same is true of his interpretation in general; and it is refreshing to turn to Tovey, who will allow us to think of Prospero and Miranda, if we must, but protests that –

people who want to identify Ariel and Caliban and the castaways, good and villainous, may as well confine their attention to the exploits of the Scarlet Pimpernel when the 'Eroica' or the C minor symphony is being played.

We have another piece of information about this D minor sonata. Czerny says that the last movement, with its insistent rhythm, was suggested to Beethoven by the sight of a horseman galloping past the window. Schering, intent on his programme, pooh-poohs this evidence. The movement, he says, is a representation of Ariel. There seems to be a contradiction here – and not merely between Czerny and his critic. How can Beethoven and Czerny both be right? If the sonata was inspired by *The Tempest*, what has the last movement to do with a galloping horse? The answer is that they are both involved, that Shakespeare and the horse are both, in a sense, the source of Beethoven's inspiration. Our contradiction vanishes and we are left with an amalgam of two sources, both typical of the material that sets a composer's mind working. The layman will find the first easier to understand than the second, since nothing is commoner than an approach to the appreciation of music by way of poetry. But to the composer the second will seem the most natural thing in the world. Music is the product of emotion, and it is the experience of composers that emotion may be stimulated or released in a variety of ways. A simple phenomenon, of no emotional force in itself, may be sufficient to produce this effect. Or the solution of an absorbing technical problem may lead to a similar result. The student is on the way to becoming a composer when he finds that the working of an exercise arouses in him something more than curiosity. The choice between a dozen technical expedients is not simply a matter of taste. Emotion inevitably controls the machinery of invention.

For the purposes of analysis it may be convenient to distinguish between the mood aroused by fine literature and the impulse to invention given by a phenomenon – in this case the galloping horse. But since the effect is the same it is clear that the two are closely allied. In fact, to insist on a distinction is dangerous, since it may lead us to regard the origins of inspiration as more important than the result. Beethoven declared that he generally had some picture in his mind when composing. In the D minor sonata and one or two other works we have some clue to the picture. But these are exceptional cases; in general we have no idea at all what it was. Nor do we lose anything by our ignorance. We may be thankful that he never carried out his expressed intention of publishing an edition of his sonatas with commentaries. We should have been spared some of the nonsensical interpretations produced by modern writers, but we should have been no nearer appreciating the music as music. Only an unmusical person would appreciate the first movement of the C minor symphony more for being told that 'thus Fate knocks at the door.' So with other composers. The imagery which Bach lavished on his music does not make his music any more precious; and all the labour which Schweitzer has expended on elucidating it is wasted if it persuades us that such interpretation is vital for our understanding. The fallacy of Schweitzer's position, which would make the value of music depend upon its adherence to a programme, has been brilliantly exposed by Gordon Sutherland in a recent article in *Music and Letters*.

It is a serious but not uncommon error to suppose that there is such a thing as 'pure music' to which 'programme music' is opposed. Pure music would properly be something produced without the agency of man. Music as we know it is the product of human impulses. A composition is born in a mood of serenity or despair, confidence or passion. It makes no difference whether this mood is accompanied by, or the product of, concrete images. Its existence means that the music is not a mere juggling with symbols; it is, in the widest sense, 'about something,' whether that something remains unidentified, as in a fugue by Bach, or whether it is made public, as in a symphonic poem by Strauss. It is a condition of complete appreciation that a composition should arouse in us emotions similar to those in which it was conceived. But there is no reason at all why we should discover the circumstances or considerations which helped to arouse those emotions in the composer. Beethoven was careful to explain that the *Pastoral Symphony* was mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei' (more the expression of emotion than painting), and Mendelssohn took the same line. He quoted the opening of the *Hebrides overture* to show what an extra-ordinary impression the scene had made upon him ('wie seltsam mir auf den Hebriden zu Muthe geworden ist'), not as evidence of successful representation. A title or an expressed programme may be a matter of interest but can hardly affect our judgment of the music. The intermezzo of Schumann's third Novellette for piano was originally published separately with the quotation:—

When shall we three meet again, In thunder, lightning or in rain?

Are we to believe that a knowledge of this quotation is essential for the interpretation or appreciation of the music? The composer's direction 'Rasch und wild' is there for all to see. It is for the performer to get inside the skin of the music and to make it intelligible to us as music. The same clearly applies to the whole of the 'Novelletten' which the composer summarized as 'jests, Egmont stories, family scenes with fathers, a wedding; in short, charming things.' It would be a waste of time to identify Egmont or the wedding.

This intelligibility of music as music is the crux of the matter. All composers of so-called 'programme music' have found that unless they cast their ideas in musical shape their composi-

tion foundered. And since the shapes of music differ from those of narrative or poetry, it follows that music must take charge and, if necessary, let the programme go hang. Realism, which is something quite different from a mere response to external suggestions, will be tolerable only if the result is music. Strauss's *Don Quixote* is cast in the form of variations; and the one weak spot in the work is the section describing the combat with the sheep. The bleating of the wind instruments is meaningless as music.

This brings us to Elgar. His major works include some with titles and expressed programmes, others without any such indication of content. But any attempt to place them in two categories or to value the 'abstract' works above those with programmes is doomed to failure. The composer himself thought *Falstaff* his finest orchestral work – an opinion with which many musicians would agree – and it is significant that he described it as a 'symphonic study.' If a knowledge of a programme is essential to a good performance it follows that a conductor who could give a successful interpretation of '*Falstaff*' would fail with the second symphony, since there the clue is slender and lacking in detail. Elgar's own views on this subject have sometimes been attacked as inconsistent with his practice. In the course of his brief tenure of the Chair of Music at Birmingham he expressed particular admiration for Brahms's third symphony on the ground that there was no clue to what it meant:

It was simply... a piece of music which called up a certain set of emotions in each individual hearer. That, to his mind, was the height of music. When music was simply a description of something else it was carrying a large art somewhat further than he cared for. He thought music, as a simple art, was at its best when it was simple, as in this case.

He might have added that interpretations of this symphony had been attempted – that Joachim saw the story of Hero and Leander in the finale and that Clara Schumann thought she could overhear in the Andante 'the prayers of the worshippers about the little woodland shrine, the purling of the brook, the sport of beetles and gnats.' But clearly such interpretations are individual, not proper to the music; the beetles are Clara's, not Brahms's. What is more to the point is the significance in this symphony of the notes F Ab F – a figure that occurs more than once in Brahms's work in one form or another and represents his motto: 'Frei aber froh.' The whole course of the symphony confirms the suggestion of the motto-phrase; it is – perhaps more than any other work that Brahms wrote – a self-portrait, and it is not surprising that its influence is to be seen in so intensely personal a work as Elgar's second symphony.

Ernest Newman criticized Elgar on the ground that he was attempting 'to belittle poetic music as compared with absolute music.' The distinction is invalid; and even if it were not, there is nothing in Elgar's words to justify the criticism. What he said was that 'when music was *simply* a description of something else it was carrying a large art somewhat further than he cared for.' He knew as well as anyone how many and varied are the external suggestions which influence a composer. What he was attacking was music that was description and nothing else. Hence his insistence that music should be simple – that is, complete in itself and not dependent on its programme. Hence his admiration for Brahms's third symphony. It is valuable, not as a self-portrait (though that may be interesting enough) but simply for what it says and does in terms of music. It would have been a good thing if Elgar had left it at that. But he felt compelled to reply to his critics, all the more as they cited his own works (*Froissart*, *Cockaigne*, *In the South*, and so on) as refutations of his supposed doctrine; and in replying he let slip the fallacy with which he had already been credited. 'He still looked,' he said, 'upon music which existed without any poetic or literary basis as the true

foundation of the art.' There can be no grounds for so radical an opinion. The existence of a poetic or literary basis, or of any other basis, is, as I have already argued, immaterial to the value of the music; and Elgar's own practice proves it. All the same, it is easy to see what he meant, and he did good service by claiming for musicians a peculiar gift – 'the musical ear, the love of music for its own sake.'

Nothing could better illustrate the soundness of Elgar's views than the *Enigma Variations*. Of these he wrote:—

It was my wish that each variation should illustrate some little characteristic of a friend; so the various numbers of the work are labelled with either initials or pseudonyms. In the course of time some of these references have been indentified, but there is nothing to be gained in an artistic or musical sense by solving the enigma of any of the personalities; the listener should hear the music as music, and not trouble himself with any intricacies of 'programme'.

This satisfactorily refutes any charge of inconsistency; and the very nature of the work confirms that refutation. The persons after whom the variations are named were for the most part known only to a narrow circle. The ordinary listener was therefore quite unable to know how far the portraits were accurate and was compelled to do exactly what Elgar meant him to do – that is, listen to the music as music. Mrs. Powell, who was the subject of the intermezzo 'Dorabella,' has told how she heard Elgar play over the work in its rough state and how she exclaimed in delight: 'But you've made it *like* them! How on earth have you done it?' Yet no one can believe that because of these associations she gets more musical enjoyment out of the work than the listener to whom all the characters are strangers. The very title of the work indicates a reluctance on the part of the composer to make his private affairs public. So does the use of pseudonyms. No one who was not intimate with the Elgar family could have had any idea who Dorabella was; and the three asterisks above variation XIII, now known to stand for Lady Mary Trefusis, must have left even intimate friends in the dark. Even more striking is the finale, which is a self-portrait. 'E.D.U.' stands for 'Edu,' which was Lady Elgar's pet abbreviation of her husband's Christian name. But Mrs. Powell says that at the time she was the only person who knew this, and that when she solved the riddle Elgar said: 'That's a secret. Will you remember?' We find exactly the same secrecy in the words prefixed to the violin concerto: 'Aqui esta encerrada el alma de . . .' (here is enshrined the soul of . . .). Of whom? There have been several interpretations. Elgar told Basil Maine that the soul was feminine, and Ernest Newman has asserted that the five dots stand for the letters of a woman's name.

Elgar was always interested in cryptograms and ciphers, and this may be held to explain the use of private titles for the *Enigma variations* as well as the alleged enigma of the theme itself. But this is not a sufficient explanation. A composer does not show such reticence merely for the fun of keeping the public guessing. The titles have a double purpose. While they effectively prevent the listener who lacks the clue from paying attention to anything but the music, they also reveal, with a sort of shy hesitation the depth of the composer's affection for his friends and, in the finale, his confidence in his own powers. The device is typical of a sensitive nature which is deeply conscious of its emotions but at the same time reluctant fully to reveal their origin. It does nothing to make the music more or less intelligible but it tells us a good deal about the composer. The reluctance to reveal the enigma of the theme itself is part of the same attitude. We are told that another 'larger theme' which is never heard, 'goes with' the theme and with every variation. All the attempts to solve this riddle have proved unsatisfactory. Elgar refused to give any hints. Mrs. Powell tackled him point-blank—

"I asked about the 'Enigma' and what *was* the tune that 'goes and is not played.'  
'Oh, I shan't tell you that, you must find it out for yourself.'  
'But I've thought and racked my brains over and over again.'  
'Well, I'm surprised. I thought that you, of all people, would guess it.'  
'Why "me of all people"?'  
'That's asking questions!'"

A baffling reply! We may well echo Mrs. Powell's query. Why her of all people? If she failed to understand that, is it likely that anyone else would? Her own variation – the intermezzo 'Dorabella' – is wrapped in further mystery. 'E.E. said there was only a trace of the 'Enigma' theme in the 'Intermezzo' which no one would be likely to find unless he knew where to look for it.' How should anyone *know* where to look for it?

Elgar said that he wished each variation to 'illustrate some little characteristic of a friend.' In a letter to Jaeger, written in the autumn of 1898, when the work was still incomplete, he had given a slightly different account:-

Since I've been back I have sketched a set of Variations on an original theme: the Variations have amused me because I've labelled 'em with the nicknames of my particular friends – *You* are Nimrod. That is to say I've written the Variations each one to represent the mood of the 'party.' I've liked to imagine the 'party' writing the var. him (or her) self and have written what I think *they* would have written – if they were asses enough to compose. It's a quaint idea and the result is amusing to those behind the scenes and won't affect the hearers who 'nose nuffin'.

'Mood' is not quite the same thing as 'some little characteristic.' As for imagining what the characters might have written if they had been composers, that is merely a pleasant fancy, since no understanding of another person's personality can be so complete as to tell us how that personality might have revealed itself in music. All music, however fanciful and however austere in construction, reveals in some measure the personality of its author. Thomas Dunhill, whose book on Elgar, though small, is the best yet written, has an acute observation on these variations. He says:-

They are always so characteristic of Elgar that they become not so much delineations of the personalities of the friends depicted as a revelation of Elgar's own personality as it reacted to their influence.

And he quotes a remark of Sybil Thorndike's that:-

every event and every other person has an answering chord in our being, and the more highly developed we are the more do we discover this in ourselves.

Elgar's capacity for friendship and his reaction to the qualities of individual friends constitute, therefore, the soil in which this work grew. Details in it were suggested by phenomena, exactly as the galloping horse suggested to Beethoven the finale of Op. 31, No.2. Thus the eleventh variation, dedicated to George Sinclair, organist of Hereford Cathedral, commemorates a very humdrum episode. Elgar says:-

The first few bars were suggested by Dr. Sinclair's great bull-dog (Dan, a well-known character) falling down a steep bank into the river Wye (first bar), his paddling up stream to find a landing place (second and third bars) and his rejoicing bark on landing (the second half of the fifth bar). G.R.S. said 'Set that to music!' I did; here it is.



This seems like a confession of the frankest realism, of the kind which the composer himself condemned. But the difference between this variation and Strauss's sheep is profound. We have only to remember Elgar's injunction to listen to the music as music. However much he may quote chapter and verse it is quite obvious to any musical ear that his variation proceeds on purely musical lines and is, to use Elgar's word, as 'simple' as anything can be. And although we have here an incidental expression of his lifelong affection for dogs, it is quite beside the point to argue that this is more a portrait of Dan than of his master. It is equally pointless to poke fun at commentators who thought they had found in this variation a representation of Sinclair playing rapid pedal passages on the organ. Organ or dog, it makes no difference. Suggestion of a different kind is found in the sixth variation ('Ysobel'). The subject of it was an amateur viola-player. Hence the viola solo and the use of a phrase which is in effect an exercise for crossing the strings. But neither device dictates the unfolding of the music, and the phrase across the strings is a perfectly natural adaptation of the opening notes of the theme.

*(To be concluded)*

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# WHERE CORALS LIE ON A SLEEPY LAGOON?

## Elgar's music on 'Desert Island Discs' 1942-1986

Since its first broadcast almost half a century ago, 'Desert Island Discs' has become (to use that rather overworked term) a national institution. Like its younger brother from television, 'This is Your Life', the programme derives its popularity mainly from the voyeuristic desire of the general public to pry into the lives of the rich and famous. From its earliest days, music by Elgar has appeared regularly in the castaway's choice of eight favourite records. On only the third programme, broadcast on 12 February 1942, the sailor, explorer, and 'Brains Trust' member Commander Campbell chose Elgar's own recording of *Cockaigne*.

In 1984 the programme's deviser and presenter Roy Plomley brought out a book entitled 'Desert Island Lists' from which most of the following material is taken. In 1986 I wrote to the then producer who kindly brought me up to date. (Unfortunately due to recent cuts in staff the BBC are no longer able to supply information of this kind).

I have listed the choices chronologically by work, but without the date of the broadcast or the description of the castaways, most of whom are well-known names anyway. An italicised name indicates that the Elgar was the favourite one of the eight chosen (this feature did not appear until the late 1950s). Figures in brackets relate to castaways who have appeared more than once. Perhaps it was predictable that 'Nimrod' and 'Land of Hope and Glory' should dominate, but it is interesting that the former should have been chosen by three of the 'Monty Python' team, those scourges of the establishment.

The two *concerti* come next in popularity, with Menuhin/Elgar dominating the violin choices, the only other versions requested being Heifetz/Sargent and Sammons/Wood. (I have no information since 1986 so Kennedy/Handley may have joined them now). du Pre/Barbirolli is well ahead of Casals/Boult in the *Cello Concerto*; other choices include Tortelier (with both Sargent and Boult), Navarra/Barbirolli, du Pre/Barenboim, and Harrison/Elgar (chosen by Julian Lloyd Webber). The *First Symphony* is clearly more popular than the *Second*, and not suprisingly *The Dream of Gerontius* is the only choral work to feature prominently.

Those who might have been expected to choose Elgar but didn't include del Mar, Gibson and Groves among the conductors (Barbirolli was never a castaway for some reason); Campoli, Harriet Cohen, du Pre and Tertis among the performers; Bliss and Walton among the composers; and Neville Cardus and David Franklin. And last but not least – the Society's two Presidents! Both were 'cast away' twice; Boult in 1960 and 1979, and Menuhin in 1955 and 1977. Sir Adrian's choices in his second appearance were very interesting however; six English composers – Rubbra, Bliss, Finzi, Simpson, Howells and Parry – plus King George V's Silver Jubilee message to the Empire, and Mozart's G minor *Symphony*. Six people – Sir Malcolm Sargent, John Mills, Godfrey Winn, Steve Race, Sir Arthur Bryant and Susan Hill – have all selected two pieces by Elgar.

### SALUT D'AMOUR

Ginger Rogers, Catherine Cookson.

### CHANSON DE MATIN

Stanley Holloway (3), Rod Hull, Charlotte Lamb.

## LA CAPRICIEUSE

Henryk Szeryng

## SERENADE FOR STRINGS

Val Gielgud, Wendy Craig, Malcolm Muggeridge.

ENIGMA VARIATIONS ('Nimrod' unless otherwise stated. NS = not specified).

Eva Turner (2), Beverley Baxter, Sonia Dresdel, Richard Hearne, Ellaline Terriss, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Rawicz & Landauer, Agnes Nicholls, Eric Robinson, Robert Farnon, John Snagge, *Eric Hosking*, Dr Robert Stopford, Raymond Baxter (NS), Admiral Sir Michael Maynard Denny, Lavinia Young, Christopher Hopper, Wilfrid Andrews, Derek Nimmo (NS), Jeremy Thorpe MP (NS), Doris Arnold, Sir Hugh Casson, Lt. Col. C H Jaeger, Hermione Gingold (Troyte), Sir John Wolfenden, Anthony Grey, Sir Louis Gluckstein, Reginald Foort, John Cleese, *Julia Trevelyan Oman*, Earl Wild (B.G.N), John Mills, Brian Johnston, Leslie Mitchell, Helen Bradley, Anthony Dowell (NS), Paul Jennings (NS), Eric Idle, *Michael Palin*, Sir Frederick Ashton, Thomas Keneally, David Lodge.

## SEA PICTURES

Margaret Rutherford (iv), Raymond Leppard (iv), Susan Hill (iv), Tom Conti (i), Roy Hattersley (iv).

DREAM OF GERONTIUS (NS = not specified. (i) Prelude. (ii) Jesus, Maria. (iii) Sanctus fortis. (iv) Proficiscere. (v) Praise to the Holiest. (vi) Take me away. (vii) Angel's Farewell).

Sir Malcolm Sargent (iii), Isabel Baillie (2) (vi), Dennis Noble (v), Ernest Thesiger (i), Prof. A C B Lovell (iii), *Commander Sir Stephen King-Hall* (ii), *Richard Lewis* (iii), *Dorian Williams* (v), Owen Brannigan (iii), *George Baker* (v), David Ward (NS), *Doris Arnold* (v), Dame Janet Baker (v), *Lt. Col. Sir Vivian Dunn* (v), *Geoffrey Parsons* (vii), *Patricia Routledge* (iv), Sir Norman St. John Stevas (v), Sir William Gladstone (iii), *Benjamin Luxon* (iv), *Julia McKenzie* (vi), Thomas Allen (NS), P D James (NS), *A N Wilson* (iv).

## POMP & CIRCUMSTANCE 1/LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY

Cicely Courtneidge (2), George Robey, Godfrey Winn, Fred Perry, Sonnie Hale, Margaret Leighton, Bobby Howes, Eileen Joyce, Robert Atkins, Ralph Wightman, Bransby Williams, Lupino Lane, Robertson Hare, Barrington Dalby, Russ Conway, *The Beverley Sisters*, Finlay Currie, Gordon Pirie, Robin Knox-Johnston, Joan Hammond, Harry Carpenter, Joan Whittington, John Braine, Graham Kerr, *Jackie Charlton*, Dennis Wheatley, *Mike Yarwood*, Baroness Summerskill, Arnold Ridley, *John Mills*, *Graham Hill*, Betty Kenward, Frank Muir, *Lt. Col. John Blashford-Snell*, *Oliver Ford*, *Norris McWhirter*, Norman Mailer, Rt. Hon. Lord Denning, Alan Minter, Jimmy Savile.

## COCKAIGNE

Commander Campbell, Celia Johnson, Eric Coates, Trevor Howard, Alfred Hitchcock, Steve Race (2), Dr Reginald Jacques, Mrs Sylva Stuart Watson, Arthur Marshall.

## DREAM CHILDREN

Peter Fettes.

## INTRODUCTION & ALLEGRO

Athene Seyler, Alec Robertson (2), Malcolm Arnold, Moira Anderson, Edith Coates, *Joyce Carey*, Philip Jones, *Penelope Keith*, Shirley Williams.

THE KINGDOM (The Sun goeth down)

James Lockhart

POMP & CIRCUMSTANCE 4/SONG OF LIBERTY

A P Herbert, Herbert Wilcox, Millicent Martin.

WAND OF YOUTH: Suite 2. (March).

Stephen Potter (March).

PLEADING

Lucia Popp.

SYMPHONY No.1

Valentine Britten, Richard Attenborough, *Anthony Burgess*, John Ogdon, Joseph Cooper, *James Prior*, Philip Larkin, *Rt Rev. & Rt. Hon. Gerald Ellison*, Sir Arthur Bryant, *Peter Barkworth*.

VIOLIN CONCERTO

Jonah Barrington, Eileen Joyce, Godfrey Winn, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Beverley Nichols, Rex Palmer, Ivor Newton, Anthony Hopkins, Leslie Baily, George Malcolm, Dan Maskell, Stanley Rubinstein, Isidore Godfrey, Alan Keith, Steve Race, Richard Ingrams, Wendy Hiller, Edward Robey, *James Herriott*, *Rt Hon The Lord Carrington*, *Arthur C Clarke*, Joan Fontaine, Donald Pleasance, Neville Marriner.

SYMPHONY No. 2

*Stan Barstow*, Leonard Cottrell, Alec McCowen.

FALSTAFF (i) Dream Interlude

Frank Phillips (i), Denis Matthews, David Munrow, David Lloyd Jones.

THE MUSIC MAKERS

David Davis, *John Laurie*.

THE STARLIGHT EXPRESS (Organ-Grinder's Song)

Sir Paul Dukes

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET (The Sweepers)

Emily MacManus

CELLO CONCERTO

Geraldine McEwan, George Thalben-Ball, Sir Arthur Bryant, C Day Lewis, Paul Rogers, Julian Herbage, Andrew Cruickshank, Gerald Moore, Alvar Lidell, John Lill, Ian McKellen, *Judi Dench*, Roy Boulting, Susan Hill, Valerie Singleton, Bernard Hailstone, George Guest, A L Rowse, Itzhak Perlman, Alec Clifton-Taylor, Josephine Barstow, Jacquetta Hawkes, *Julian Lloyd Webber*, Terry Hands, Paul Eddington, Sir Christopher Leaver, John Osborne, John Mortimer, Beryl Reid, Kenneth MacMillan, Paul Tortelier, David Puttnam.

## Elgar in USA

A Malvern family visiting their daughter in Massachusetts in August called at the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood. Colin and Margaret Roy and their other daughter Alison were thrilled when, soon after their arrival, the orchestra started to assemble for their afternoon rehearsal in "the shed" but were amazed and moved when the first item was *Enigma Variations*.

Grant Llewellyn was conducting and the concert took place three days later on 3 August. The programme also included Haydn's *Cello Concerto No. 2 in D* and the world premiere of Judith Weir's commissioned work, *Music Untangled*. In the very full programme notes, Worcester was described as "a sleepy cathedral town in western England" and Elgar's five years as conductor of the Powick asylum orchestra were mentioned. The writer went on to suggest that the Enigma theme fits well in rhythm and pitch to "Edward Elgar", called the work a "masterpiece" and concluded with Arthur Johnstone's remarks in the Manchester Guardian of 1900, "The audience seemed rather astonished that a work by a British composer should have other than a petrifying effect upon them."

Elgar is not a household name in the States but it is good to know that his music is being played and loved.

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## ELGAR CHORAL FESTIVAL

### 1st and 2nd May 1992 at Worcester

Following the success of the first Festival in October 1988 (reviewed in the JOURNAL for May 1989) the Elgar Foundation is organising another one next spring. As before, in each class the music to be sung will be a piece by Elgar (specified by the Festival promoters) and a piece of the choir's own choice, which however, must be by another British composer. Only half of the sixteen classes are choral; the others are vocal, organ, and compositional. At the final concert on the Saturday evening three choirs each from the Male Voice, Female Voice, and the two Mixed Voice classes will be asked to take part. The adjudicators will include the composer Dr. Havelock Nelson and Dr. John Sanders, organist of Gloucester Cathedral. Over 2000 performers took part last time, and it is to be hoped that this number will be exceeded in 1992. There are cash prizes for the first three in each class; and in addition a special prize of £300.00 and the Elgar Trophy will be awarded to the Choir giving the outstanding performance of the Festival. (The first winners in 1988 were the Nelson Arion Glee Union Male Choir). The Elgar Society will be awarding a cup and a cash prize of £100.00 to the Choir adjudged to have shown the most promise.

Such an event is not only a musical experience in itself, but a wonderful opportunity to acquaint people with Elgar's music. It is to be hoped that Society members will not only support it, but inform their local choirs of its existence and encourage them to take part (there is a class for church choirs also). Further details can be obtained from the Festival Administrator, Alan Stacey, Esq., Far Netherbury, Old Road, Lower Wick, Worcester WR2 4BU (tel: 0905 426304). The closing date for entries is 31st January 1992.



The conductor Leonard Slatkin, who along with Jerrold Northrop Moore is the first recipient of the Elgar Medal. His performances and recordings, particularly of *The Kingdom* and the *First Symphony*, have received acclaim from many quarters. He has written to Andrew Neill, the Society's Vice-Chairman: "It is with the greatest pride that I accept The Elgar Medal. It has been my great fortune to perform and promote this music as often as possible. Truly Elgar speaks to the world music community and, although the soul of England is contained in his music, the spirit of all humanity is communicated."

## THE ORIGINAL MUSICAL WALLPAPER

The historian David Howarth is perhaps best known for his book 'The Shetland Bus', an account of his wartime experience of landing agents in occupied Norway. In 1986 he published his autobiography 'Pursued by a Bear', and London Branch member Sandy Morrison has pointed out that it contains an interesting minor detail relating to Elgar. As a child Howarth lived with his family in the Kensington area, and nearby lived an eccentric and totally blind great aunt, Miss Mary Maud Paget, who gave help to various destitute people. Once she invited a group of young artists to redecorate her house. "As she could not see what they were doing, they painted every banister on the stairs a different colour, which delighted her when she was told, and for the hall they chose a wallpaper with lines on it. The lines were supposed to be vertical, but they stuck it on sideways, so that it made a vast sheet of musical manuscript paper. Her guests were firmly invited to compose a few bars, inscribe them on the wall and sign them, and enshrined in one corner was the contribution of Sir Edward Elgar". David Howarth has since died, but can any member add to the story?

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## BIRTHPLACE NEWS

At the time these notes are being prepared we are approaching the winter season yet some roses are still stubbornly in bud and some in full bloom. Some bulbs are shooting up in search of spring days but we shall doubtless have to batten down the hatches ere that season arrives.

Visitor numbers are now down to winter levels but if present trends are sustained our numbers will be up on last year and some satisfaction can be taken in this since we have come to expect a three-yearly cycle with the number of visitors peaking when the Three Choirs Festival takes place in Worcester and falling away a little bit in the two intervening years.

We are glad that this year, with the co-operation of your Editor, it has been possible to distribute our mail order catalogue with the JOURNAL. We hope that this will be found informative and useful and that increased sales will result.

Notice will be found elsewhere in the JOURNAL of the second Elgar Choral Festival to be held in May next year. We are in a position to supply choirs with the sheet music and in fact are the recommended supplier for the Elgar pieces.

We have recently had some invaluable voluntary assistance with the programme for cataloguing and storing our collection of manuscript material and letters to improved archival standards. We are most grateful for this help and for the skills that are thereby made available to us. We shall be very pleased to discuss further projects as part of this programme with members who are interested in contributing in this way to the work of the museum.

**ELGAR'S**  
GENUINE  
**WORCESTER SAUCE**

MADE IN  
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**SOOTHING.**

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GOOD FOR  
TIME-KEEPERS,  
ACTORS,  
AND  
BRAINLESS SINGERS.

~~~~~  
**PRICE 1/- PER BOTTLE.**

The above 'advertisement' was kindly passed on by a London Branch member. It was found in a copy of 'Elgar' by Ernest Newman which belonged to the celebrated choral conductor, Arthur Fagge, and bears the comment "Issued after a speech made at Birmingham". The 'speech' referred to was of course one of Elgar's lectures at Birmingham University entitled "English Executants", and given on 29 November 1905. It is typical of much of the public reaction to Elgar's lectures. But where precisely was it 'issued'? Can any member help to identify it?



## RANDOM RAMBLINGS OF AN ELGARIAN EDITOR

On 19 August in Bishop's Meadow in Hereford, Dr Roy Massey, the cathedral organist, unveiled a plaque at the supposed spot from where the bulldog Dan began his famous descent into the Wye, and so inspired the GRS Variation. The event followed 'detective work' by a member of the city council environment department (with help from the self-styled 'Elgar Association') to find the exact place. No doubt Hereford is not unaware of the possibilities for tourism, but I must express some misgivings about the venture. I do not subscribe to the notion that any publicity must be beneficial, but actually believe that we are in danger of holding up Elgar to ridicule.

The 'Association' is "concerned with places in Hereford and Worcester especially cherished by Edward Elgar" – a worthy aim indeed. It has given evidence to the public enquiry into the proposed Hereford by-pass, and the vigorous opposition to change at 20 Church Street has been well covered in recent Journals. Yet much as we might like to we cannot freeze the English landscape as it was around 1900; and the Society is not the musical arm of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. Like everyone else, Elgarians must live in the real world, and opposition to all change will not only brand us as troglodytes, but will weaken our case when something really important comes up. I feel we should identify the most important sites and concentrate our attention there. My list (excluding the Birthplace which is of course a special case) would contain Forli, Birchwood, Craeg Lea, Plas Gwyn, and Brinkwells. All are in private hands, but I believe that the present owners are sympathetic to the Elgar cause. It may be sad that 20 Church Street has been altered, but it is not a national tragedy.

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On 25 September the General Purposes Committee of the Hereford and Worcester County Council accepted a recommendation from the County Secretary and Solicitor acknowledging Raymond Monk's right to the Elgar diaries. They are now being valued for purposes of probate, but will remain in Worcester eventually, almost certainly at the new Elgar Centre next to the Birthplace. It is good to be able to report the help and support Mr Monk has received from the Elgar Foundation during this trying time. Meanwhile Dr Percy Young's painstaking work on the *Spanish Lady* sketches for the Elgar Complete Edition is now at an end and, in accordance with Carice Elgar-Blake's wishes in her will, they have been deposited in the British Library.

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Michael Kennedy in *Portrait of Elgar* draws attention to the similarity between the 'New Faith' theme from *The Kingdom* and the passage for ladies' voices in *The Light of Life* at the words "Thou hast borne the sinner's sentence". It struck me that many of Elgar's most memorable themes begin, as these do, with two notes followed by a triplet. A brief exploration came up with several more; "He that walketh upon the wings of the wind" from the former work, and the "big" tune in Jesus's final solo in the latter (no. 15, letter G). Then there is the opening of *The Black Knight*; "O my warriors" from *Caractacus*; 'Christ's Peace' from *The Dream of Gerontius*, repeated at the end of *The Apostles* to the words "in His love and in His pity"; the opening of the *Introduction & Allegro* for strings; the 'Church' theme from *Cockaigne*; the opening of the 'Gudrun' scene in *King Olaf*; and from the same work, "This is my hammer" (no. 2, letter C); and "I accept thy challenge, Thor" (no. 3, four before E). One might also add the development of the

second subject at fig. 17 of the first movement of the *Violin Concerto*; and two places where the second note is tied to the triplet – three before 70 in the Larghetto of the *Second Symphony*; and the Tranquillo in the third movement of the first *Organ Sonata*. I know other themes have one note or three or more before the triplet, but it's always fun identifying Elgarian fingerprints!

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Southampton University is holding a one-day course entitled 'Elgar and his Age' on 25 January from 10.00 am- 5.00 pm in the Adult Education Centre. The course is being led by Cecilia Gordon Clark and Sheila Haines, and the cost is £10.00 (£5.00 for concessions). Further information can be obtained from the Department of Adult Education, University of Southampton, SO9 5NH (telephone: 0703 593460).

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New members may be interested to know that back numbers of the JOURNAL may be purchased. Most issues are available, and even some numbers of the *Newsletter* (1973-8)! Please send a s.a.e. for a detailed list of contents and prices.

Then again the two records issued by the Society in the early '80s are still available from the Birthplace. ELG 001 is a fascinating compilation of early recordings of Elgar transferred to LP, and includes such artists as Andrew Black, John Coates, Tudor Davies, and some real rarities such as an excerpt from *In the South* recorded by the Orchestra of La Scala, Milan in 1909!

ELGS 002 has Sir Adrian Boult conducting the BBC Singers in Elgar's choral songs, Opp. 53, 57, 71, 72 and 73, some of the finest part-songs ever written, and Sir Adrian's only recording with an unaccompanied choir. It also contains a talk by Sir Adrian, and a conversation between him and the composer's daughter, Carice.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have just finished reading James Hamilton-Paterson's novel *Gerontius* (reviewed in the JOURNAL in May '89). Though not a great reader of fiction, I enjoyed it very much. (Was it a coincidence that one of the minor characters was called Dora Bellamy?) During the autumn the BBC repeated the author's adaptation for radio, with Sir Michael Hordern as Elgar. It would be interesting to know how many times Elgar (or his music) has played an important part in a work of fiction. There was of course the 1979 novel by Keith Alldritt, *Elgar on the Journey to Hanley*. Then in J. B. Priestley's 1947 play *The Linden Tree* one of the characters practises the *Cello Concerto*, and Casals's recording is played and referred to. Last year Channel 4 screened one of the BBC's 'Plays for Today' from 1975 – David Rose's production of David Rudkin's *Penda's Fen*, a strange and disturbing tale of the teenage son of the vicar of Pinvin, a village in Worcestershire (the play's title gives the Saxon derivation of the place-name). He is absorbed by Elgar – especially *The Dream of Gerontius* – and while sheltering from a storm in a ruined building sees Elgar (his ghost?) sitting in a wheelchair. In the course of the conversation Elgar whispers to the boy the secret of the Enigma!

There must be other literary references, so please let me know of any I have missed.

Elgarians will have noted with sadness the death from cancer of the conductor Bryden Thomson on 14 November. Although far from being a well-known 'name' – outside of musical circles – his ability was undoubted and his advocacy of British music second to none (with the possible exception of Vernon Handley). Most significant of all was his complete recording of the Bax symphonies; he also recorded the cycles of symphonies by Vaughan Williams, Nielsen, and Martinu. The two Elgar symphonies came out together on Chandos in 1986, and GHL like other reviewers found them a little too slow overall; yet I heard him give a performance of the *Second* at the Three Choirs' Festival at Worcester in 1978 which was one of the finest live performances of Elgar's music I have ever heard. I described it then in the *Newsletter* as 'glorious', and thirteen years on I still remember the impact it made on me. The orchestra was the BBC Northern (now the Philharmonic) and the work Thomson did with them, and later with the Ulster Orchestra, is possibly his greatest monument. His other Elgar recordings are the *Wand of Youth* and *Nursery Suites*; and the *Enigma Variations*, plus *The Sanguine Fan*, and the complete *Grania & Diarmid* music.

Another sad loss, through a car accident at the early age of 36, is the pianist Alan Gravill, whose record of music by Gurney and Elgar was enthusiastically reviewed by GHL in last January's JOURNAL .

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'Enigma Solved' screamed the headline in *The Daily Telegraph* for 2 November, advertising an article in its sister paper the following day. I approached the piece warily and wearily, and was astounded to find that it was by none other than Jerrold Northrop Moore, a self-confessed sceptic on the subject. As he says, "I never thought that I would have written an article such as this". What changed his mind was a suggestion by the pianist Joseph Cooper, of 'Face the Music' fame, that the hidden theme was a passage from the slow movement of Mozart's *Prague Symphony* (no. 38). The influence of Mozart on Elgar is well-documented, especially the composition of a symphony along the same lines as Mozart's *G minor Symphony* in 1878. Other circumstantial evidence lies in the fact that Elgar heard the *Prague* at the Leeds Festival in October 1898 just before the conception of the *Enigma Variations*; and at the premiere on 19 June 1899 the Mozart work concluded the concert.

There is no doubt that the Mozart passage bears a distinct resemblance to the *Enigma* theme, and that taken with the other evidence, I would agree with JNM that "this is the only solution . . . that seems to ring all the right bells". I just have two reservations: one is Elgar's remark that "the principal Theme never appears", which has led several generations of would-be *Enigma*-solvers to assume, not unreasonably, that the 'Theme' – if indeed it is a tune and not an abstract concept such as friendship – is related contrapuntally to the opening melody. The other problem is Elgar's remark to Dora Powell that "it is so well-known that it is extraordinary that no-one has spotted it". Mozart's *Prague Symphony* is hardly his best known work, and as JNM points out, the passage suggested by Cooper is not even one of the principal subjects of the movement. Would Elgar then be justified in describing it thus, when I doubt that it would be "well known" even to most musicians?

Another problem is that much of the source material comes from Dora Powell, for whom *Enigma*-solving was almost a lifelong quest. We know that she kept a diary. Yet there are many factual errors in her book, which was written in the mid-1930s, many years after the events she describes. Can the conversations she records be subjected to the minute scrutiny they are often given? If we accept that they are not the exact words Elgar spoke, but something in the nature of a paraphrase, then we must beware of placing too great an emphasis on them.

No doubt we shall hear more of this whole business in due course. And no doubt new "solutions" will appear in the future. I suppose for many the interest is in *not* finding the solution; as Stevenson wrote: "To travel hopefully is . . . better . . . than to arrive".

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The argument over the correct pronunciation of 'Elgar' evoked some response. There are those who support the stressed first syllable, but it has been pointed out that proper names (whether of places or people) often disregard rules of pronunciation anyway; for example Worcester, Cholmondeley. The Elgar family are apparently in no doubt – it is 'Elgar' as in 'bell-jar'.

\* \* \* \* \*

A retired clergyman and his wife living in our parish have just celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary. The reason I mention this is that at the time of their marriage he was receptionist at the Langham Hotel, and therefore in touch with those who stayed there because of its proximity to the Queen's Hall. One of his jobs in 1929 was to wheel Delius along the corridors when the badly crippled composer came to this country from his home at Grez for the Delius Festival that Beecham arranged that year. Naturally he met Elgar on many occasions, but unfortunately can remember nothing of anecdotal interest; I suppose desk-clerks are not likely candidates for in-depth conversations! All he can remember was that Elgar was "a very great man".

\* \* \* \* \*

This year sees important anniversaries of two musicians on the fringe of the Elgar story: the Howells' centenary, and the 150th anniversary of Sullivan's birth. What a pity that 1991 was allowed to pass with little if any mention being made of the 50th anniversary of Walford Davies's death in March. The BBC particularly should be hanging their heads in shame, considering the influence HWD had on my parents' generation through his broadcasts on music. I suppose that, with the possible exception of Bantock, Elgar was closer to Walford Davies than any other contemporary composer. Couldn't *Everyman* or one of his compositions for the Three Choirs (the *Five Sayings of Jesus*, for example) be given a hearing?

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One of the great Elgar occasions this year will be the performance at the Three Choirs' Festival at Gloucester of Sir Herbert Brewer's cantata *Emmaus*. As most members will know, Elgar orchestrated the piece to help his friend Brewer so that the work could be completed in time for the Gloucester Festival in 1901. So far as is known, the work only received three performances, the latest in 1907, and the orchestral parts were missing for years and were eventually re-discovered a year or so ago. The work is to be given on Friday 28 August. Other Elgar works at Gloucester this year include *In the South* on the 26th, and *Gerontius* on the 29th. Full details can be obtained from the Festival Box Office, Community House, College Green, Gloucester GL1 2LX.

Members will probably have realised that two branches, East Midlands and South West, have ceased to operate through lack of support, and their affairs and finances are currently the responsibility of the General Committee of the Society. It is always sad when branches have to close, but of course this does not preclude them from being re-formed at a future date. What is needed for the successful running of a branch is a committed nucleus of people who are prepared to take on the responsibility and give time to the job. It is very demanding, as anyone who has been an office holder will know, and we should be grateful to those who are presently responsible for keeping our branches going.

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An item of interest in the performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* at St. Edmundsbury in March (see 'Dates for your Diary') is that the title role will be sung by James Oxley, whose father Harrison (formerly organist at St. Edmundsbury Cathedral, and a well-known Elgarian) is conducting the concert. Has the work ever been performed by a father-and-son partnership?

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A correction to the notice in the September JOURNAL: the set of three cards depicting Elgar houses painted by Bridget Duckenfield should have read £1.75 (25p to the Elgar Society). A further set will be available in April – portraying the Birthplace, Birchwood Lodge, and Craeg Lea – at the same price from Miss Duckenfield at 94 Station Avenue, West Ewell, Epsom, Surrey KT19 9UG.

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**As reported in the last JOURNAL, Christopher Robinson has been forced to relinquish the Chairmanship of the Society since his appointment as Director of Music at St. John's College, Cambridge. Nominations for his successor should be sent to the Secretary, Carol Holt, whose address appears on the back cover. There are also two vacancies for the General Committee, and nominations for these places, complete with names of proposer and seconder, should be sent to the Secretary.**

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

|             |                                                                                                                          |                                                               |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 February | Introduction & Allegro<br><i>London Chamber O/Warren-Green</i>                                                           | Royal Festival Hall<br>South Bank                             |
| 22 February | Ov. Froissart, Cello Concerto,<br>Enigma Variations. <i>Cohen/RPO/<br/>Mackerras</i>                                     | Royal Festival Hall<br>South Bank                             |
| 6 March     | Symphony no. 1<br><i>Bournemouth SO/Litton</i>                                                                           | Royal Festival Hall<br>South Bank                             |
| 7 March     | Enigma Variations<br><i>BBC Welsh SO/Otaka</i>                                                                           | St. David's Hall<br>Cardiff                                   |
| 14 March    | The Dream of Gerontius<br><i>Soloist/St. Edmundsbury Bach Choir<br/>&amp; O/Oxley</i><br>Tickets: (0284) 769505          | St. Mary's Church,<br>Bury St. Edmunds<br>7.30 pm             |
| 14 March    | The Apostles<br><i>Soloists/Cantorion Padarn<br/>University Choir &amp; O. Harper</i><br>Tickets: (0248) 351151 ext.2181 | Prichard Jones Hall<br>University of Wales, Bangor<br>8.00 pm |
| 19 March    | Falstaff<br><i>CBSO/Rattle</i>                                                                                           | St. David's Hall<br>Cardiff                                   |
| 25 March    | Falstaff<br><i>CBSO/Rattle</i>                                                                                           | Royal Festival Hall<br>South Bank                             |
| 11 April    | Serenade for Strings<br><i>London Chamber O/Warren-Green</i>                                                             | Queen Elizabeth Hall<br>South Bank                            |
| 25 April    | The Kingdom<br><i>Soloists/Leith Hill Festival<br/>Choirs/Llewellyn</i><br>Enquiries to LHMF Box Office (0737) 243931    | Dorking Halls<br>7.30 pm                                      |
| 27 April    | Sea Pictures<br><i>Soloist unannounced/RPO/Menuhin</i>                                                                   | Royal Festival Hall<br>South Bank                             |

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- |          |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                   |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 29 April | Imperial March, Cello Concerto,<br>Symphony no. 1. <i>Cohen/BBC</i><br><i>Philharmonic /Hunt</i><br>(Gala Concert in aid of Birthplace Appeal)<br>Tickets: Mrs Diana Quinney (0993) 850956 | Worcester Cathedral<br>7.30 pm    |
| 2 May    | Cello Concerto<br>(& Vaughan Williams: Sea Symphony)<br><i>Schmidt/Guildford PO/Groves</i><br>(There will be a pre-concert talk by Sir Charles<br>at 6.15)                                 | Civic Hall, Guildford<br>7.30 pm  |
| 9 May    | Gala Opera Evening (to include<br>excerpts from Caractacus)<br><i>Soloists/Rutland Sinf/Collett</i>                                                                                        | Festival Hall, Corby<br>7.30 pm   |
| 20 May   | Cello Concerto<br><i>Starker/Philh/Y. P. Tortelier</i>                                                                                                                                     | Royal Festival Hall<br>South Bank |
| 21 May   | The Kingdom (to be confirmed)                                                                                                                                                              | Royal Festival Hall               |
| 25 May   | In the South<br><i>Philadelphia O/Muti</i>                                                                                                                                                 | Royal Festival Hall               |

## MUSIC REVIEW

Serenade for Strings

Arranged for piano solo by Malcolm Kenzie  
Thames Publishing

This is the first of "a series of transcriptions for solo piano, piano duet or two pianos of English music in a pastoral vein". It is very attractively produced on good paper with clear printing, but the purpose of publishing it as a piano solo is less clear.

The introductory note in the score says "... there must inevitably be compromises, but a resourceful pianist will be able to realise almost all of the work's poignancy and grace". The compromises in fact are relatively few. The piano score is essentially the orchestral score set out on two staves and those compromises are not always in the most necessary places. In the second movement, for instance, the big repeat of the second theme is marked *ppp* yet has almost all the notes of the accompaniment figuration, and in the melody and often in the bass there are the octaves of the string parts. This would need playing of virtuoso standard to make it effective, yet in other places a few chords are carefully marked to show how to split them.

It might have been of more interest to transcribe all the string notes literally on to the two staves so that the resourceful pianist could see all of Elgar's score (without the C clefs) and make his own practical decisions.

A version for piano duet would be far more realistic for amateurs. Elgar made such a version for his wife and this was published a long time ago. What a pity not to have re-issued that instead.

Donald Ray





## BOOK REVIEW

O LOVELY KNIGHT, a biography of Sir Landon Ronald, by Bridget Duckenfield

Thames Publishing, £14.95

If, sixty years ago, the question had been asked "Name the three most important British conductors?" the answer would almost certainly have been "Beecham, Wood, and Landon Ronald" (and not necessarily in that order). Today Beecham is enshrined as one of the all time great conductors, Henry Wood has as his enduring monument the Promenade Concerts, but Sir Landon Ronald's name would scarcely be thought of, especially by the young. How strange that this should be, as his range of activity and experience was, in many ways, greater than the other two. He was composer, accompanist (especially of Melba), conductor of Grand Opera, Musical Comedy, Comic Opera, founder of orchestras, journalist and critic, Principal of the Guildhall School of Music during its finest years, music adviser and later director of The Gramophone Company, and music adviser to the BBC. He was known to an international circle of musicians, including Rachmaninov, Kreisler, Cortot, and Menuhin. In Britain he was one of the doughtiest champions of British composers and artists, and his friendship and admiration for Elgar in particular profound.

Why, then, has our knowledge of the man – until now – been confined to short entries in music encyclopaedias, and second hand copies of two infuriatingly discursive books of 'memories'? It is hard to say. To the Elgarian Ronald's name is an important one, recognised by the early biographers of the composer, but neglected today. In an age when we tend to reach for a recording to refresh our memories of the technique of a musician, it is sad that such a distinguished conductor (perhaps the most distinguished of Elgar's contemporaries when it came to performing his music) has only left us one recording of an Elgar piece – the *Coronation March*. Even that is a fairly scarce record today.

We must therefore welcome Bridget Duckenfield's volume, even if the punning title is a little wince-making. She is obviously deeply involved with her subject (and is related to Ronald on her mother's side). We learn much of Ronald's family, his early rise to success, his amours, his passion for music and hard work, and his patronage of many a rising artist. There are many Elgar references in the book, and although we have heard many of them before it is worth having them set, for the first time, in their proper context. However, deeply involved as the author is, I found a lack of critical assessment of Ronald, whether as composer or conductor. An intriguing reference to his abilities in the latter role is cited on p. 57, when the author quotes from a German critic writing in 1907; '... the first Englishman to direct the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, scored a notable success at his second concert ... when he conducted Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. ... The musical critic ... says that the symphony has never been better rendered here, even under the leadership of Nikisch.' Now that is praise indeed, especially from a German writer. One would have liked to explore Ronald's skills in greater depth, and perhaps the publication of this book will restore Ronald to his proper place in 20th century British music. We can hope too that it may stimulate deeper research.

Welcome as this book is, it needed a firm editorial hand, and this has obviously not been available. There are too many annoying misprints, and minor errors. There are too, a number of inconsistencies and duplications which a good editorial adviser should have eradicated, long before publication stage. But the Elgarian will love the references – and learn from them. Sidonie Goossens is quoted as remarking that she found Sir Landon "the greatest interpreter she had encountered of Sir Edward Elgar's music". Ernest Newman wrote: "he was to be the most thoughtful interpreter of the most thoughtful of all English composers. He has done more for the greater Elgar – the Elgar of the two symphonies, the Violin Concerto, and *Falstaff* – than any other British conductor ..."

Ronald Taylor

## CONCERT REVIEW

### “MASTERS OF THE KING’S MUSICK”

The Bach Choir and its conductor Sir David Willcocks chose the above title for their concert at the Festival Hall on 9 November. Each of the four composers whose work was performed has held that title, including the present incumbent Malcolm Williamson who was present to hear his overture *Santiago de Espada* open the proceedings. It is a delightful piece, full of joyful exuberance, with echoes of Shostakovitch and Walton. The main theme of the lyrical central section sounds a little facile at first hearing but skilful orchestration in its recapitulation leads to a triumphant finale.

The choir and soloists were first in action during a neglected work by Bliss, *The Beatitudes*, written for the dedication of Coventry Cathedral in 1962 but never performed there due to congestion in the schedule of events. The words are from a variety of authors (not just biblical) and represent not only peace and joy but violence and hatred; the opposing forces, as it were. It was given a persuasive performance by Sir David and his singers (including solos for soprano and tenor) and one can only hope that it will now be recorded and so made available to a wider public, as its high points seemed to me to be Bliss at his best.

Bliss’s predecessor, Sir Arnold Bax, was represented by his most popular work, the tone poem *Tintagel*, and the concert concluded with Elgar’s *Coronation Ode*, written in 1902 for Edward VII to words by A. C. Benson. After years in the wilderness due to the unfashionable nature of some of its sentiments we can now see the Ode for what it is – an ambitious piece of considerable proportions dating from a particularly fertile period of Elgar’s creative life, roughly mid-way between *Gerontius* and *The Apostles*. The Duet fifth movement, ‘Hark, upon the hallowed air’, for soprano and tenor soloists, in particular is redolent of the opening of Part Two of *Gerontius*, especially at the Andantino at fig. 42. Here, on the ‘hallowed air’ the tenor senses the blessing of “spirits pure of sight and sense” rather than “some bodily form of ill” which “taints” the air in the earlier work. (Interestingly Elgar set the words ‘hallowed air’ to the same notes in the two works).

Sir David began the work crisply, taking the opening choral movement ‘Crown the King with life’ at a faster lick than is often the case, and resisting any hint of bombast. I am sure this is the right approach, as too much wallowing early on just leads to patriotic indigestion by the end.

The whole of the four soloists was probably greater than the sum of the parts. They sang very sensitively and impressively in ‘Only let the heart be pure’, the voices blending beautifully, but individually the impact was slightly diminished. The soprano Amanda Roocroft, deputising at the last minute for Lesley Garrett, had a sweet voice and performed with great conviction, though I felt she lacked power in the louder passages. Catherine Wyn-Rogers also acquitted herself admirably, but she is more of a mezzo and I feel ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ really needs a true contralto. Philip Langridge is an experienced and intelligent singer but seemed strangely ill at ease towards the top of his range. And Stephen Roberts’s light baritone was overpowered by the orchestra and men’s voices in ‘Britain, ask of thyself’.

In the Bach Choir the four voices are much more evenly balanced than in most orchestral choruses and there was perhaps a need for a few more sopranos in the tuttis, from where I was sitting. But they were on top form. The expression and diction in the quieter numbers, especially ‘Daughter of ancient kings’, were exemplary; and the note of confident exultation which characterised their singing in the two outer movements must surely have convinced all but the most stubborn republicans. The ‘King’ was well and truly crowned; and so was Elgar.

## BRANCH REPORTS

WEST MIDLANDS Branch 1991/92 season started on 5 October with a fascinating talk by Dr. Melville Cook. He recalled for us his early memories of the Three Choirs Festival which resulted in an immediate request for a return when he will be able to continue his Festival experiences.

The autumn programme continued on 16 November with a lecture by Jim Bennett the Birthplace Curator. His account of the varied duties required in his job was most illuminating.

The next Branch event will be on 14 February when we will hold our annual Supper Party at the Stables, by kind permission of Bridget Monahan. Tickets, £3.00 each, from the Secretary. There is limited accommodation so please book early. This will be followed on 7 March with the Branch AGM and on 2 May with a talk to be given by Margaret Elgar. Both these at 2.30 pm at The Stables.

David Hughes, Branch Member and General Committee Member has individually hand-coloured prints of 'The Birthplace in Snow'. They measure approximately 12in x 10in and the cost is:-

Mounted and framed  
Mounted only

£20.00 plus £2.50 postage  
£10 plus £1.50 postage

Orders to him at 4, Forge Close, Caerleon, Newport, Gwent NP6 1PU.

Finally, news of our Chairman, John Warren. He and his family were involved in a car crash in early August shortly before they were due to move house. The latest report (mid-November) is most encouraging and John hopes to be back in harness by the time this issue is published.

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SOUTH WALES. On 16 November at Friendship House Swansea members were addressed by Ian Parrott, who took as his topic "Elgar and Cyril Scott". Although, as the speaker admitted, the two composers in question did not share a great deal of common ground, there were nevertheless certain aspects of their work and personalities that provided bases for comparison. Both composers, for instance, had found inspiration in the poetry of Keats - Elgar for *Froissart* and Scott for the cantata *La belle dame sans merci* - and we were reminded, too, of Elgar's response to George Bernard Shaw's observation anent the "modern" harmonies occurring in his second Symphony: "It was Cyril Scott who started all that."

There were, too, relationships of a more extrinsic nature, and the speaker disclosed the curious fact that one of Scott's early piano pieces - *An English Dance* - was originally published at A. J. Jaeger's expense. (Parenthetically, it was noted that *Salut d'amour* and *Bergerette* (the piece later known as *Water-Wagtail*) respectively bore witness to Elgar's and Scott's deference to publishers' liking for foreign-language titles.)

A further link was provided by Algernon Blackwood, whose story *A Prisoner in Fairyland* served as the starting-point for Elgar's *Starlight Express* score. Blackwood shared Scott's interest in the occult and had at one time worked as secretary to James Speyer, with whose family Elgar was on friendly terms. *The Starlight Express* pointed, as did a number of Cyril Scott's works, to their respective composers' longing to recapture the joys of childhood during their adult years.

Amongst a number of recordings heard during the course of the talk was one of a performance by Percy Grainger of Scott's *Paradise Birds*. Other pieces by Scott were played at the piano by the speaker; these included *Sea-Marge* (wherein is quoted the traditional tune *The girl I left behind me*), *Bells* and the well-known *Lotus Land*.

It is hoped that during the coming year, the South Wales Branch will be addressed, at different times, by Ronald Taylor, Christopher Robinson and Andrew Neill. Specific dates, however, are not yet available.

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EAST ANGLIAN Branch have had a variety of meetings since our last report. Our summer party was held in July which as usual helped us to bring in some welcome funds as well as being enjoyed by all. Our Chairman, Alan and Sarah got married in August and invited members to their home for refreshments with entertainment!! A happy occasion. September saw the welcome return of our friends the Colletts: Barry speaking on "Elgar's Musical Style", extremely illuminating, and October and November were meetings consisting of recorded music presented by two members of the Branch. We are all looking forward to a slightly different venue for our Christmas function, i.e. Sunday lunch at a local Hotel.

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Whilst we are still small, the SOUTHERN BRANCH continues to make headway. 1991 has seen some enjoyable meetings and, as I write, we look forward to welcoming Wulstan Atkins to the Branch on 16th November. This visit is eagerly anticipated and we expect a large turnout.

The Branch Chairman's talk in May, "Gerontius on Record" has provided much lively argument (albeit friendly!) since. Walter Essex admitted that he changed his mind constantly about which of the complete recordings he would take to his mythical 'desert island', his ideal being to have ALL of them! The talk was copiously illustrated from all the recordings.

In October we were hugely entertained by Claud Powell who brought many insights to "Dorabella". (This talk provided a neat balance to the fictionalised Dorabella, introduced to us by Branch member Kevin Allen in his 'Elgar and Fiction' talk in January.) Mr & Mrs Powell proved to be delightful company and their visit was much appreciated by all.

Plans for 1992 include talks by Branch members Stuart Freed ('The Lighter Elgar') and Nigel Riches ('Elgar's Contemporaries'), and David Bury will be coming from the London Branch to give us his talk on 'Elgar and the Awful Female'. We look forward to hearing just who this 'female' is!

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NORTH WEST Branch season opened in October in fine style with a talk by Professor Ian Parrott on "Elgar and Wagner". Our November meeting was a Quiz excellently prepared by our Vice-Chairman, John Mawbey. The December meeting will be our AGM and Christmas Social when we shall have music performed by students of RNCM. The first meeting in the New Year will be on 11th January when one of our members, John Weir, will give a talk on Parry entitled 'Not just Jerusalem'. On 15th February we look forward to a visit from Geoffrey Hodgkins who will give a talk entitled 'Elgar, Canon Gorton and the Morecambe Festival'. Our season will close on 29th February with a recital of music performed by a local group Cantilena.

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LONDON Branch season opened with a turning to local talent! In October retiring "Journal" editor Ronald Taylor and his successor Geoffrey Hodgkins chatted with Andrew Neill about Elgar in general and the "Journal" in particular. An excellent evening of memories and anecdotes was punctuated by their choice of music; – mainly Elgar, though not entirely. Indeed Puccini opera was heard for the first time at Imperial College meetings – or was there some during the Quiz back in June? There was time, too, for an enjoyable social get-together to round off the evening.

In November London Secretary, David Bury, revealed the identity of the lady whom Elgar described as "that awful female" and, in so doing, contrived to talk about *Falstaff* and an improbable project to reduce the great Symphonic Study to incidental music.

In December we revert to distinguished visiting speakers, and look forward to Graham Melville Mason's talk on "Elgar and Dvorak".

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YORKSHIRE Branch. The most significant thing to happen since our last report has been a change in our place of meeting. Leeds City Council, in their wisdom (or, much more likely, in their lack of it) decided a few months ago to increase our rent from the ridiculously small sum of £2.50 per meeting to the ridiculously high one of £36. Naturally, this was quite out of our reach and we have moved to Woodside Methodist Church Hall, about a mile from our old place and where we now pay £15 per meeting. Although this is much more than we paid at 'The Willows' we have to admit that it is still a reasonable price by today's standards.

Fortunately, this emergency arose during our summer recess, giving us time to take the necessary action, and we commenced our 1991/92 season at Woodside on 23rd September with an illustrated talk by our Vice-Chairman, Millicent Albrow, on 'Elgar and Edward VII' – a well-researched presentation, featuring the appropriate music, including the *Coronation Ode*.

On October 7th, we welcomed (for the second time since our inauguration) Mr E Wulstan Atkins, to give his 'Reminiscences of Elgar'. Mr Atkins said that at the age of eighty-six he now preferred to sit to give his talk and from what we hope was a comfortable armchair gave a most relaxed and very enjoyable account of his time spent in Elgar's company, with many anecdotes. We learned that at a very tender age he had once asked his mother to take him out of the cathedral as he could not stand the noise! Clearly, he very quickly came to appreciate the splendid and often moving performances given at Worcester, particularly with his father at the organ, but the story of his juvenile aversion to the music caused much amusement. The talk was accompanied by a show of slides of photographs revealing Elgar in many informal situations, often in leg-pulling mood.

Our own member, Tony Rawnsley, will entertain us on November 11th with a talk on 'Sullivan without Gilbert', one of our occasional diversions from Elgar, but with – we feel sure – the odd reference to him. A full programme of events in the New Year will include a talk by our Chairman, Robert Seager, in January, on the Plas Gwyn years and in May the Society Vice Chairman, Andrew Neill, will be with us to talk about Elgar and the Great War.



## RECORD REVIEWS

Symphony No 1 in A flat, opus 55  
'Pomp & Circumstance' Marches, nos 1, 3 and 4

*BBC Symphony Orchestra*  
conducted by *Andrew Davis*  
Teldec 9031-73278-2

Symphony No 1 in A flat, opus 55  
Concert Overture *In the South* opus 50

*Academy of St Martin in the Fields*  
conducted by *Sir Neville Marriner*  
Collins Classics 12692

Symphony No 1 in A flat, opus 55

*Halle Orchestra*, conducted by *James Judd*  
Pickwick-IMP PCD 956

Is there no end to the number of recordings of the Elgar symphonies that the market will stand? In the September 1991 Journal I reviewed two excellent new versions of the 1st Symphony, conducted by Leonard Slatkin (on RCA) and Sir Charles Mackerras (on Decca's recently revived Argo label). Here are three more. Two are amongst the best available recordings, and, like the Slatkin and Mackerras interpretations, they are very different. The Pickwick recording is not in the same class.

The Andrew Davis recording is part of a new series, called *The British Line*, from the German-based (but now American owned) Teldec company. It is one of two Elgar discs issued simultaneously: I will be writing about the second, containing *Cockaigne*, *Introduction and Allegro*, *Serenade for Strings* and Davis's third recording of the *Variations*, in the next issue of the Journal. The first characteristic which distinguishes his A flat symphony is the superb orchestral playing. It is good that the BBC Symphony Orchestra is at last being asked to make more recordings: for years their broadcasts have made it quite clear that they are amongst the finest of European orchestras, and here their polish, commitment and unanimity of style and ensemble, more than confirms this impression.

Davis's tempi, throughout the symphony, are a little on the slow side. However Elgar's tempo markings in this work are sometimes rather brisk, and Davis by careful control of the speeds and rhythm never feels too slow. But although his handling of the first movement maintains a satisfying sense of forward progression, some of the more lyrical passages sound a trifle ponderous compared with some other recent versions.

Davis's *scherzo* is a fraction too slow, so that the gentle central section is a little lacking in lightness of touch – but nobody can match the astonishing rhythmic drive of Slatkin in this movement (although Marriner comes close). Davis's *adagio* is also a little slower than some rival versions, but the BBC string playing is exceptionally beautiful, and the little wind solos are played with great sensitivity.

This very fine recording of the First Symphony deserves a rather more substantial fill-up than three of the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. They are, however, well played although rather lacking the extrovert flamboyance of Del Mar or Handley.

Both the Davis and Marriner versions are extremely well recorded. Davis and the BBC orchestra were recorded in the slightly dry acoustic of Barking Town Hall, but there is fine clarity of detail perfect balance and satisfactory depth to the sound picture.

Collins Classics have started using the UHJ/Ambisonic system, from which surround sound can be obtained with a suitable decoder. Nimbus have been using this system for several years, often with less than satisfactory results. I therefore approached the Marriner recording with misgivings, particularly as the back of the box contains a warning that the wide dynamic range might damage certain equipment! In the event I was quite won over by the sound quality. The dynamic range is by no means exceptional, and the overall sound has a most attractive sweetness, warmth and depth (Henry Wood Hall does not usually sound as resonant as this) and there is satisfactory clarity of internal detail.

The orchestral playing is also very fine. The Academy of St Martin in the Fields varies in composition depending on the music being programmed. The core of the players do, however, play together frequently, and there is greater unanimity of style and better blend than one usually expects from what is essentially a 'pick up' group. Marriner's performance of the symphony is very good indeed, standing high, if not quite at the top of the long list of fine recordings of the First Symphony currently available on record. He directs a brisk performance of the first movement with exceptional energy and vitality. Indeed, at times I found myself remembering that Elgar and Sibelius were close contemporaries! Ultimately, however, I felt that the unrelenting power of Marriner's interpretation results in some lack of sustained impact through insufficient relaxation and warmth in the contrasting quieter moments.

Marriner conducts a spirited, crisp *scherzo*, but in contrast the *adagio* is very slow indeed – much slower than Davis, and slower even than Slatkin, and lacking the American conductor's sure control of rhythm and tempo. As a result this lovely movement seems to lose direction. On the other hand Marriner handles the sudden contrasts in mood in the last movement most successfully, bringing the symphony to a convincingly triumphant close. As might be expected, Marriner's *In the South* is excellent – lively, exciting and, at times appropriately a trifle brash.



Any recording of the First Symphony featuring the Halle Orchestra must have a special interest, but I wonder how often the symphony has been programmed in Manchester in recent years. On the new Pickwick recording the playing disappointed me, but it is not easy to say why. Somehow the orchestra, accomplished enough, seems to lack a real feel for the Elgar idiom. There is little to fault in James Judd's overall concept of the symphony, and tempi are well judged. Occasionally, however, the playing struck me as slightly tentative, and the wind players in particular play their solo passages stiffly and without the spontaneity which comes with total familiarity. Perhaps a lack of inspiration from the conductor is partly to blame – and there are certainly some moments of suspect ensemble, when a change of tempo catches the players unawares.

Nor does the sound quality help: the recording was made in the Albert Hall, Bolton, which seems a pleasantly warm acoustic. The orchestra is given a rather recessed sound, with a good sense of depth, but with insufficient clarity of internal detail, and the string tone lacks blend and weight. Not, I'm afraid, a performance I can really recommend, even at Pickwick's very reasonable prices. The comparably priced Classics for Pleasure recording by the LPO under Vernon Handley, CD-CFP 9018, a remastered analogue recording, has much greater sonic impact – and is, incidentally, one of the finest recorded performances of this wonderful symphony.

By the way it is Pickwick not Collins who, for the cover, have chosen a Victorian painting (by William Logsdail), featuring the portico of St Martin in the Fields – a picture already used by EMI for the earlier issues of Boult's recording of this symphony. However, the original seems to have been cleaned in the intervening years . . .

Gareth H. Lewis



Cello Concerto in E minor, opus 85

with Schumann: Cello Concerto in A minor, opus 129

*Truls Mork, cello, with Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra,  
conducted by Michel Tabachnik  
Lyrinx Lyr-CD 100*

Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma') opus 36

*Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Andrew Litton*

Cello Concerto in E minor, opus 85, arranged Tertis

*Mark Braunstein, viola, with Academy of London,  
conducted by Richard Stamp  
Virgin 'Virgo' VJ 91455-2*

The recording of the *Cello Concerto* from the French Lyrinx company features a young Norwegian cellist and a Swiss-born conductor – thus providing further evidence of the widening appeal of Elgar's music. It is a very fine performance indeed. Inevitably the immediate comparison is with the recent Mischa Maisky/Sinopoli recording which I reviewed in the September 1991 issue of the *JOURNAL* (Deutsche Grammophon 431 685-2). Mork produces a less voluptuous sound than Maisky, but plays with an undemonstrative, aristocratic dignity reminiscent of Tortelier. Technically he is at least the equal of his Russian contemporary, and, indeed, in the *scherzo* shows himself to be capable of sustaining an even faster tempo for the rapid, repeated semiquavers, with even greater precision and security of intonation. There are also similarities in the sound quality; both recordings place the soloist a little too forward for my taste. The acoustics of the Auditorium of the Centre de Congres, Monte Carlo, is, however, drier than DG's Watford Town Hall, allowing greater clarity of orchestral detail.

One or two interpretative details near the start of the concerto bothered me slightly: the rapid collapse of the confidently defiant opening chords need not be underlined by an unmarked *rallentando* – the descent from *fortissimo* to *piano* in four bars is sufficient – and in the short *ad lib* passage which follows, which does indeed have a *ritardando* marked, Mork slows a little too much too early so that the semiquavers are as long as the following quavers. When the orchestra takes over with the main theme, however, Tabachnik sets a sensible, steady speed, which keeps things moving. He also, I was glad to note, allows himself a very slight increase in tempo for the woodwind entry at figure seven, this providing a slight contrast in mood for the second subject.

This most attractive performance will now stand very near the top of my list of recommendations of recordings of the *Cello Concerto*. The coupling, the lovely Schumann concerto is equally well played, although the prominent balance of the soloist is a little more distracting here. Anyone wanting a CD coupling of these two concerti will not, however, be disappointed.

I did not expect that we would ever find ourselves in the position of having to choose between two rival recordings of the Tertis viola arrangement of the Cello Concerto. The Braunstein version, made in June 1987, has the distinction of having been the first (recorded over a year before Conifer's Rivka Golani performance), but has not been released before. It has now finally been released amongst the first batch of CDs in Virgin's new bargain price Virgo series. Even at rock bottom price (under £5) it can hardly be recommended. It strikes me as being not much more than a reasonably competent play-through of the work: Braunstein does not seem to be very much under the skin of the music, and except in the slow movement, there is little attempt at phrasing or even reasonably close observation of the composer's dynamic markings.

Of course the lighter toned solo instrument poses more balance problems for soloist and conductor than the original cello version. However, they are handled much more successfully by Golani and her conductor Vernon Handley. There is also much more fire, imagination and insight in Golani's playing, even if her emotional involvement occasionally leads to momentary loss of tonal beauty and purity of intonation. Compared with Golani, Braunstein's tone sounds dry and limited in dynamic range.

Rivka Golani is also more the master of the work's technical difficulties. Braunstein's *scherzo* is reasonably brisk – almost up to Elgar's tempo marking – but sounds laboured and effortful, and the lengthy semiquaver passages in the fourth movement are rhythmically unsteady. Golani sails through these sections with an air of ease and security.

The recorded sound is good and well balanced (Andrew Keener was producer of both the Braunstein and Golani recordings). The orchestra, presumably a pick-up group, plays well, providing solid, if hardly imaginative support. Incidentally, Virgin's skimpy and superficial notes tell us nothing about either Braunstein or Stamp, both of whom are unknown to me.

I wrote favourably about Andrew Litton's *Variations* when it first appeared on a top price Virgin Classics release in 1987 (coupled with *In the South* and the *Serenade for Strings*). It is still one of the best versions currently available, warm and affectionate, carefully prepared, although not, perhaps, quite as strongly characterised as some rival versions. By regarding this exceptional performance as the main work, and the concerto as a makeweight curiosity, this Virgo CD is an outstanding bargain. However, any Elgar enthusiast seriously interested in the Tertis arrangement of the Cello Concerto would be well advised to go for Conifer's full price Golani version.

Gareth H. Lewis

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Speak Music: a recital of Romantic Song

*Judy Dodd (soprano), Barry Collett (piano)*  
*Ensemble ENS 169 (Cassette only)*  
*Available from Whitetower Records*  
*44 Challacombe, Furzton, Milton Keynes MK4*  
*1DP*

Barry Collett needs no introduction to members of the Elgar Society. Judy Dodd is not only founder and musical director of the Tudor Choir of Leicester (their recording of the *Bavarian Highlands* and other English part-songs was reviewed in the Journal for September 1990), but a professional singer with considerable experience of opera, oratorio, and lieder. On a generously-filled cassette (over an hour's music) she sings twenty-nine songs by Elgar, Brahms, Greig, Faure, Mendelssohn, Richard Strauss, Rachmaninov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Chopin, Berg, and Verdi. Her voice is very pleasant, with something of the sweetness of Isobel Baillie, which obviously suits some songs more than others. I felt that some of the songs needed a 'bigger' voice, and could have been sung with greater abandon (they are romantic after all!), but generally she copes with the differing emotional atmospheres very well, and her lightness of touch is particularly effective in Mendelssohn's *Neue Liebe* and the Verdi songs. The Elgar items are the title song, plus *Rondel* and *In the Dawn*. Barry Collett is an accomplished and versatile accompanist. A very pleasant record.

The Editor

Cockaigne Overture Op 40  
Symphony No. 2 in E flat Op 63

*London Philharmonic Orchestra*  
*Sir Adrian Boult*  
*EMI CDM 7 64014 2*

Symphony No. 2 in E flat Op 63  
Sospiri Op 70

*London Symphony Orchestra*  
*Jeffrey Tate*  
*EMI CDC 7 54192 2*

The Dream of Gerontius Op 38

*Jon Vickers, Constance Shacklock*  
*Marian Nowkowski*  
*Orchestra Sinfonia e coro di Roma della RAI*  
*Recorded 1967*

Mozart: Symphony No. 34 in D Major K338 – recorded 1960

“Enigma” Variations Op 36 – recorded 1957

*Orchestra Sinfonica di Torino della RAI*  
*Sir John Barbirolli*  
*Arkadia 2 CDHP 584*

What is the role of a critic? Or perhaps, more importantly, what is the role of an amateur critic? This question has been on my mind as I considered these recordings and realised that with the flourish of a pen my opinion of the work of a distinguished musician is recorded for posterity. This has been brought home to me when I looked up my comments on the last recording of Elgar's *Second Symphony* by Sir Adrian Boult when it was first issued in 1976. In the January 1977 edition of the *Newsletter* I am relieved to read that I warmly welcomed the recording, summing it up by stating that this is “a recording for all time, which will remain the one by which all others are judged for years to come.”

Much has occurred since then, in particular the issue of numerous recordings, including those by Handley, Slatkin and Sinopoli and the wider availability of Barbirolli's interpretations. Sadly the composer's own performance is not currently available, but Sir Adrian's 1944 performance is (CDH7 63134-2), and for many this is the recording “by which all others are judged”. When I referred to it in 1976 I was restricted to listening on 78s only, and I now realise when I stated that Sir Adrian's interpretation had changed little over the years I was wrong, for his view mellowed even if the integrity of his conception remained true. His final recording of the symphony remains as vivid and warm as it did when it first appeared fifteen years ago.

So EMI, which is making a bid to regain its reputation as the leading label for British music, has produced two recordings of this remarkable symphony within a couple of months of each other. Jeffrey Tate's record is of particular interest for it was the first recording of an Elgar symphony made by the LSO since it recorded the A flat in 1930 under the composer's direction. Now it has recorded that work again under Sir Charles Mackerras (September 1991 *JOURNAL*). Tate's is a fine digital recording perhaps catching more orchestral detail than the Boult record, but I don't feel it has as warm a sound as the older recording, which really is in a class of its own.

Turning to the performance, I have to ask one fundamental question: why are the strings not divided? Indeed why do so few conductors insist on having the treble strings to the left and the bass to the left? In countless works the scoring cries out for it, and why not here? Vernon Handley, in his espousal of divided strings seems to be the last representative of a former age. But is he not right? Just listen to these two recordings and I think the point is obvious.

I have stated that Sir Adrian mellowed over the years. However, he is quicker in every movement than Tate, to the advantage of the music. I feel Tate is still picking his way through the score, which had become second nature to Sir Adrian. The result is a stodginess which is made worse by a lack of diligence in attention to the markings, those first eleven bars in particular. My notes, made whilst listening to the recording suggest this: *rallentando – accelerando – rall – ridden over – lack of bite in the scherzo*. Tate is nearly as quick as Sir Adrian in this movement, but it seems much slower. However, the LSO play magnificently, and the brass in particular is outstanding. A lovely performance of *Sospiri* – direct and simple – completes the Tate recording, whilst Sir Adrian's superb *Cockaigne* of 1972 rounds off his disc.

Now to a recording which should be on the shelves of all Elgarians. Jon Vickers is, quite simply, the finest Gerontius I have heard. It is a beautiful voice, used intelligently to produce a performance of unique authority. It is shaded in fearful anticipation the one moment, then open and direct in acceptance of its fate the next. How the experience of opera can be indispensable in a work such as this! The many years of singing Wagner bears fruit in Vickers' whole approach to the role: the sustaining of a line and emotional consistency. His red-bloodedness combined with a beauty of tone makes his voice seem instantly right for the part. Listen to 'novissima hora est' for example: indeed if you start there you will want to go on to the end of this recording which, however, is not without its considerable drawbacks.

This Italian broadcast captures Vickers' voice as well as it does (alas) Barbirolli's groans and grunts as he urges his forces into an unfamiliar work. The orchestra manages well, but the chorus, although poorly caught by the microphones, is out of its depth. This is not a recording for those interested in high-fidelity, for it sounds older than its age; but it is a vital document.

Barbirolli drives the performance forward with great certainty, once he gets over a wayward Prelude where the orchestra is finding its voice and getting to grips with its responsibilities.

Constance Shacklock is a warm, sure-footed Angel, if somewhat unimaginative and Marian Nowkowski, clearly unused to his two parts is nevertheless quite striking in his vividness. This is, however, a vitally important recording for the interpretation of Vickers. The two CDs are well filled with an Italian *Enigma* which is overshadowed in every way by the Phoenixa reissue (JOURNAL September 1991) and a raucous performance of Mozart's *K. 338 Symphony*. Arkadia have clearly attempted to trace as many 'Italian' performances by Barbirolli as possible!

It is clearly important that as many of Sir Adrian Boult's Elgar performances as possible are available, and this second manifestation on CD of his performance is something that all should have. This was his fifth and last recording of the work with which he is so closely identified, and is indispensable. Jeffrey Tate will, I am sure, grow into the symphony, and allow his interpretation to breathe more easily, particularly when he eschews the modern tendency for extra slow performances. A shining light in this collection though is the Gerontius of Jon Vickers, a Parsifal grown worldly and accepting his end with dignity. All should have this unique performance in their collection to study and marvel at.

Andrew Neill

## Roger Fisher plays Elgar at Chester Cathedral

*Motette CD 11501. 70'48" obtainable from Priory Records  
or from Roger Fisher, 11 Abbey Street, Chester CH1 2JF  
CD £11.99. Cassette £6.99, 70p extra p & p*

Roger Fisher has been a committed Elgarian all his life. His enthusiasm was no doubt acquired at an early age from his father's intense interest in the music of Elgar, and he is of course, a member of the Society.

As a composer for the organ Elgar began in a small way. His eight *Vesper Voluntaries* are short works written for "organ, harmonium or American organ" towards the end of 1889 when Elgar went to live in London. It is said that within two weeks of taking up residence he had an organ installed in the house. It seems unlikely that a pipe organ could have been procured at such short notice so it may well have been an American organ. I have been unable to trace any details from the usual suppliers of these instruments in the Metropolis and wonder whether his friend Archibald Ramsden, a music and instrument dealer in Leeds, might have supplied it. The firm's records seem to have disappeared. Be that as it may, the *Vesper Voluntaries* are a series of short works giving some indication of Elgar's potential as an organ composer. Somewhat uneven in character, they have been unjustly neglected for years. Roger Fisher here shows his maturity of intellect by making this set of pieces sound very much better than at first glance they might appear.

The *Organ Sonata in G* was composed in 1895 for the visit of some American organists to Worcester. The work was delivered to Hugh Blair, the cathedral organist, only four days before the event. We now know the work to be one of the more difficult sonatas in the whole organ repertoire so it is not surprising that the resulting performance was not a success. It requires great technical skill in registration if the "orchestral" character of the work is to be appreciated. I am pleased that before recording the *Sonata* Roger Fisher had the good sense to wait many years, thus ensuring a maturity of outlook essential to such a work. It is not, I think, a project for the young, however talented. In a lifetime of concert-going this sonata is the one work that has provided the most disappointments.

To those brought up on Herbert Sumsion's magnificent recording at Gloucester Cathedral over 25 years ago there seemed little possibility that his insight would be superseded. Roger Fisher's handling of the extremely fine organ at Chester Cathedral shows him to be in the same league and that here is another performance to be cherished.

The *Organ Sonata No. 2* in B flat Op. 87a is an arrangement by Sir Ivor Atkins of the *Severn Suite* for Brass Band. The organ and brass are both wind instruments so it is not surprising that this organ arrangement is a success. I am sure that Roger Fisher must have heard the brass band version before learning this work as he seems to have captured its essence in his registration and dynamics. Such persuasive playing makes it easy to think this is a greater work than perhaps it is and I am sure most listeners will enjoy it immensely.

*Cantique* is an Elgar organ arrangement (1912) of the second movement of an incomplete wind quintet of 1879 and acts as a "lollipop", as Beecham would say, before the grand finale—the *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1* in D in Edwin H. Lemare's arrangement. A robust and thrilling performance.

In the last 30 years I have listened to countless recitals and recordings by Roger Fisher, all of them good, but this is one of the pinnacles of his achievement.

Douglas R. Carrington

## CD Round-up

The ways of the record companies are mysterious indeed. EMI has recently reissued Boult's 1970 recording of the *Enigma Variations* (with the LSO) in their splendid new *British Composers* series of CDs. However, another branch of EMI, Classics for Pleasure, has simultaneously issued a CD transfer of Boult's 1961 recording with the LPO, originally on a World Record Club LP.

The 1970 version, number CDM7 64015-2, is a brisk, no-nonsense performance, exceptionally well played and warmly recorded in the late, lamented Kingsway Hall. For me, however, there is something missing, as though the old dog has been asked to perform one of his best tricks just once too often. Despite Boult's scrupulous professionalism, obvious meticulous preparation and, when appropriate, astonishing rhythmic vitality (an electric *Troyte*, to compare with the 1956 Barbirolli, also on mid price EMI) this performance of the *Variations* somehow lacks spontaneity and involvement. The CFP issue, CD-CFP 4022, thinner in sound and with the 1961 LPO much less accomplished than their LSO rivals, somehow captures a freshness and warmth lacking in the later version. The couplings do not make decisions easier. The EMI CD adds all five of the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches in sparkling extrovert performances recorded with the LPO in 1976 and 1977. The CFP fillup is a fine version of *Introduction and Allegro*, but the 1961 LPO strings lack the polish of their later selves on Boult's 1972 version, which will hopefully itself reappear in the *British Composers* series in due course.

The *British Composers* series is a curious mix of brand new recordings at full price (such as the Jeffrey Tate *Second Symphony* reviewed above) and mid-price reissues. Amongst the reissues are several gems to delight the collector, including Boult in Vaughan Williams symphonies (nos 4 and 6 on CDM7 64019-2, Sinfonia Antarctica on CDM7 64020-2, and nos 8 and 9 on CDM7 64021-2) and a most welcome reissue of the 1974 Groves recording of Bliss's *Morning Heroes* – the massive choral symphony in which he exorcised the horrors of his World War One experiences (CDM 63906-2). For the Elgar enthusiast, however, the most welcome reissues are of Boult's late recordings of the two Elgar symphonies.

Somehow Boult seems never to have been totally in sympathy with the *First Symphony*, his first recording, dating from 1949 (reissued on LP and cassette in 1983) sounding to my ears rather detached. By 1976 his interpretation had acquired much more warmth and flexibility, though retaining perhaps a certain degree of emotional reticence. Nevertheless it is a highly recommendable bargain on CMD7 64013-2, in impressively rich sound, if a little less clear in detail than some of the other reissues in this series. As on EMI's first (1985) CD transfer of the symphony the fillups are *Chanson de Nuit*, *Chanson de Matin* and the *Serenade for Strings*, the latter newly remastered from the original tapes, and now sounding warmer and less strident than on the original CD issue.

There can be no doubts about the *Second Symphony* however; Boult's interpretation was one of the greatest achievements of his long career. The 1975/76 performance is a little slower than the classic 1946 recording (and the similarly paced 1956 Pye-Nixa version), and the urgency and defiant passion of the opening twenty bars is now rather subdued. However, Boult's clear concentrated overview soon asserts itself, resulting in an exceptionally powerful performance of the first movement. The *scherzo* may lack the fire of some other recent versions, but no one else, not even

Handley, can quite match Boult's masterly conducting of the *larghetto*, the special dignity and nobility of which is achieved without a trace of exaggeration, the subtlest of tempo variations being contained within a steady pulse throughout the movement. The recorded sound (Abbey Road, Studio One), is beautifully balanced: the strings now sound a little more grainy, but the brass is rich and ideally integrated into a very natural sound picture. The fillup is a 1970/71 recording of *Cockaigne*, not one of Boult's more characterful interpretations and with some obvious ensemble problems in the very resonant All Saints' Tooting (CDM7 64014-2).

As the Chandos series of recordings of Parry symphonies progresses, I can only echo Michael Kennedy, writing in *Gramophone*, who said that it 'beggars belief' that music of this quality should have remained hidden for so long. I urge all lovers of music of this period to hear these recordings. Parry may have lacked Elgar's melodic individuality and ability to surprise us with highly original ideas, but he was a very great symphonist indeed. The latest in the series is the Second Symphony (the *Cambridge*) written in 1883 (and substantially revised three years later). It is wonderful music (with, as in several Parry symphonies, a glorious slow movement) and the performance (the LPO under Matthias Bamert) has an attractive sense of commitment by all concerned. The fillup is one of the few Parry works to have held a (tenuous) place in the repertoire, the *Symphonic Variations* of 1897 – twice recorded by Boult. The number is CHAN 8961. We now have all Parry's symphonies available on CD, but at the time of writing still await Bamert's version of No. 1, which should be more recommendable than the rather unsatisfactory William Boughton on Nimbus.

Finally a composer of the same period (a close contemporary of Elgar) who has long intrigued me – Sir Frederick Cowen (1852 – 1935). Cowen was one of the most important musicians of his day, long time conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Society Concerts and the Liverpool Philharmonic Society, conductor of the Halle Orchestra during the interregnum between the death of Halle and the arrival of Hans Richter, celebrated pianist and prolific composer who even won some appreciation from the notorious Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick.

Like Parry and Stanford, Cowen's major works have been neglected for far too long, and I was delighted to see that the enterprising Marco Polo Company had recorded his third symphony (the *Scandinavian*), dating from 1880, together with the concert overture *The Butterfly's Ball* (still occasionally played on Radio 3 afternoon concerts) and the lengthy *Indian Rhapsody*. The symphony became quite popular in its day and was even played in Vienna under the baton of Richter. I have to record, however, that having enjoyed the two lightweight but colourful 'fillup' pieces, which are placed first on the CD, the symphony disappointed me. It is tuneful and skilfully orchestrated, but seems to me to lack concentration and any real sense of symphonic development.

It is possible, though, that this recording does Cowen's music less than justice. Conductor Adrian Leaper has shown himself elsewhere to be a talented and sympathetic interpreter of British music. Here he is hampered by a close-up boxy recording and by an orchestra (the Czechoslovak State Philharmonic of Kosice) which falls well below the standard set by Eastern European orchestras on other Marco Polo and Naxos discs. However, we are unlikely to get another recording of a major Cowen work (unless Nimbus can persuade the BBC Welsh SO to record Cowen's fourth symphony, the *Welsh*). As the only recording of a major Cowen work, the Marco Polo disc can be cautiously recommended – but all in all, like the recent Virgin recording of Ethel Smyth's *Mass*, an opportunity for rehabilitating a substantial British composer might well have been missed (Marco Polo 8-223273).

Gareth H. Lewis



## LETTERS

From: Gareth H. Lewis

*At one time a performing artist would only be accorded the privilege of being asked to record an interpretation for posterity when he or she had achieved, over a period of many years, a reputation for a special understanding of a particular work. Those were the days when the managers and producer of the major recording companies could still be said to be in charge of their own ship. Now things have changed. In these days of massive record sales, it is the artists themselves, backed by the economic worth of their international reputations, who seem to dictate the recorded repertoire.*

*That this is not always to their own advantage is clear from many of the recordings of major Elgar works which I have reviewed for the Journal in recent years. The majority had nothing new to say about the music, some were little more than competent runs through the music, and a few fell well below an acceptable standard of execution. I will not list them here: interested readers need only thumb through the review pages over the past two or three years to discover what I mean.*

*My anger at this state of affairs has finally spilt over into print after hearing Jeffrey Tate's new recording of the 2nd symphony. I must make it clear that these are my own personal thoughts, penned without having read Andrew Neill's review – and for all I know, he may have reacted quite differently. I must also emphasise that I am a great admirer of Tate. This totally inadequate recording, however, is quite misguided and can do nothing to enhance his reputation. In due course, perhaps Tate will become a sympathetic interpreter of Elgar, when he will no doubt blush with embarrassment at this initial effort, which shows every indication of hasty and rather superficial preparation.*

*To begin with this is far too slow a performance. After a commendably brisk start to the first movement, Tate slows up horribly for the second subject (at no. 10 in the score) **despite** Elgar's specific instruction to the contrary, ('in tempo, dotted crotchet = 100'), and he vulgarises the moment by encouraging the LSO strings to play with soupy portamenti. Repeatedly throughout the rest of the movement Tate allows the tempo and rhythm to sag in this way, ignoring Elgar's frequent 'In Tempo' and 'Tempo Primo' exhortations. The resulting 'stop-start' effect totally undermines the continuity of the movement.*

*Far worse, however, is Tate's handling of the wonderful larghetto. It surely needs to be played with dignified restraint, the music being allowed to unfold with a straightforward directness, without a trace of exaggeration. Tate, however, lays on the emotion with a spade, horribly underlining the climaxes, and again with such wide tempo variations, that the movement lacks a steady pulse.*

*I could go on: a lack of lightness and grace in the scherzo undermines the shock of the unexpected angry outburst at the climax, and the fourth movement lumbers along doggedly and shapelessly, achieving neither the autumnal melancholy of certain more introspective interpretations, nor the expansive warmth of Boult and Handley.*

*Every modern conductor, it seems, likes to have complete surveys of the works of certain composers under his belt, and it is likely that Tate will now wish to proceed to the 1st Symphony, not to mention other major Elgar orchestral works – a depressing thought. Of course it is not just Elgar who is suffering from a plethora of inadequate and badly prepared recordings. However the reputations of composers such as Beethoven, Brahms and Mahler are sufficiently secure to withstand a few poor performances. Elgar's hold on the international ear is still tenuous, and unsatisfactory recordings by widely respected conductors can, I feel, do untold harm.*

*From my point of view, happily, I was able to allow myself a cooling draft of Boult (see CD Roundup) to counter the fever induced by Tate's overheated approach to the 2nd symphony.*

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*From: Rick Paulsen, Seattle, USA*

*In the May 1991 Journal the section "Elgar's Top Ten on Radio" was noted with particular interest, especially the mention of the Elgar arrangements. There also exists a version for organ of the 1911 Coronation March by Elgar's friend Herbert Brewer. I can trace no recording of it. But I have access to a score and, as an organist myself, can attest to its fidelity to the original as well as its idiomatic conception for the organ. Any organist willing to tackle its formidable difficulties should find it quite a tour de force. How about it Jennifer Bate?*

*P.S. Perhaps some of your British readers could look into this matter further. To me the 1911 Coronation March is one of Elgar's most magnificent compositions.*

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