

# The Elgar Society JOURNAL



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

# The Elgar Society Journal

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## EDITORIAL

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When I first bought a recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* in the late 1960s, there was no choice; only Barbirolli's was available, and before that only Sargent (twice) had made a complete recording. It has been gratifying to see that, despite many critics dismissing it as old hat, the work continues to grow in popularity, and that many more recorded versions have appeared over the years. The total now stands at thirteen (including two from live performances); they have all been released on CD, and so for someone new to Elgar - unlike me in the 60s - there is an abundance of riches, and therefore choice is difficult.

For this reason we are featuring in the current issue a comparative review of all these recorded versions, similar to the 'Building a Library' feature on Radio 3. Walter Essex, Chairman of Southern Branch, has loved and studied the work for years, and as a trained singer is in an ideal position to make considered judgments. I hope members will find his comments useful. Perhaps understandably he draws back from making a final recommendation (though he does state his own favourite), as personal tastes will inevitably differ, and thus objectivity is virtually impossible. As one who sang in the chorus on the Boult recording the week before he got married, I have a strong attachment to that version; but it is not my first choice!

I guess we all have memories of *Gerontius*es we have heard over the years, and ideas of our perfect "team". I first sang the work with the Harrow Choral Society with Kenneth Bowen in the title role - a much-underrated singer, very popular for years at the Three Choirs, who sadly never recorded the work. I met him some years later and he talked about the part. "Every time you sing it, it is the musical equivalent of climbing Everest", he said.

I also remember singing the work in the Albert Hall for the 85th birthday concert of the stalwart conductor of Goldsmith's Choral Union, Frederick Haggis, when the Angel was sung by Alfreda Hodgson. An unforgettable occasion; as was the time I sang it in the Festival Hall, with Richard Lewis, then past his best and performing at the rehearsal a kind of *sprechgesang* to save himself for the concert. On another memorable occasion in 1979 I supplemented the Dutch Handel Society Chorus when Jack Loorij conducted a concert in aid of Vietnam Boat Children; the Angel was a young mezzo named Jard van Nes, destined for greater things. But then *Gerontius* is the kind of work which makes for memorable performances, even when perhaps they fall short of musical perfection. Like Walter Essex I long ago gave up trying to be objective about the piece, being too emotionally attached to it. That seems to be the effect *Gerontius* has on people; to me it is a mark of its greatness, and the reason its continuing popularity is assured.

GEOFFREY HODGKINS

## ELGAR'S LETTERS TO ROSA BURLEY

Kevin Allen

### Part II

1914 had seen Miss Burley visiting Severn House during May, July, August, and over Christmas. Of this last, she wrote :

The Christmas of 1914 I actually spent with them at Severn House and it was good to find that our old friendship, which had tended to cool during the long periods of separation, was becoming closer and warmer than it had been at any time since the old days at Malvern.<sup>1</sup>

On 14 March 1915, she visited Severn House with her new charge.

"Miss Burley & Cecily to supper"

There was another visit in May.

2 May 1915. "...A. in bed all day had cold &c. Miss Burley...in afternoon...Miss Burley stayed & dined with E. A. so glad for her to be here - & help -"

No doubt Miss Burley was easily able to offer reliable and practical help; but there would come a time when her tendency to take charge of matters at Severn House would be distinctly less welcome.

Elgar wrote briefly soon after, evidently in response to an invitation from Miss Burley and her new employers, to visit their delightful family house, 'Hookland' at Midhurst.

Severn House, 42, Netherhall Gardens, Hampstead, N.W.  
May 12 1915

My dear P.

Many thanks but your pleasant plan is not possible : I am fearfully busy trying to do things which may or may not help

Bless you  
EE

Please give our grateful thanks to Mrs Caulfeild<sup>2</sup>

The 'P' was short for 'Peggy', a nickname derived from the "hit" song from the London musical *Peg O' My Heart*. The chorus ran :

*Peg o' my heart, I love you;*

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<sup>1</sup> Burley & Carruthers, p 198

<sup>2</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

*We'll never part, I love you;  
Dear little girl, sweet little girl,  
Sweeter than the rose of Erin,  
Are your winning smiles endearin',  
Peg o' my heart, your glances  
With Irish art entrance us,  
Come, be my own,  
Come make your home in my heart.*

The last lines seem to match almost word for word those of the conclusion of Shelley's 'Spirit of Delight' lines :

*...Oh come,  
Make once more my heart thy home.*

The Hookland visit eventually took place in July, and a link with the creative past was discovered.

20 July 1915 "...E to dentist. A. with him into town & then on to Waterloo & Liphook - Mrs. Caulfeild's car met her with Miss Burley - *Lovely* drive & *lovely* paradise of a place - delicious house & c - Mrs C. *very* nice & Cicely quite delightful - Walked about & into wood, just like Birchwood woods, scent & all - *Lovely* views - "

It was the kind of environment which had possibilities.

21 July 1915 "...E. raser worried over his music & wanting change...decided to take Hookland for possible dates in Augt. A. so delighted. Felt we *must* go there..."

A further attraction for Elgar himself was the family's black and white sheep dog, Schiff, more often anglicised as 'Ship'.

[Severn House]  
Thu 29 [July 1915]

Dear Rosa :

Many thanks for the photos of Ship. Greet him for me & thank the dear child for the pictures of my friend & *confidant*! He knows a lot & when he finds communicable speech, in the next world, he will astonish, to insulting point [,] many winged angels!

I *have* read the MS. I find it interesting - but it wants putting together in places which I do on occasion.

*[illegible]*  
Yours Sincerely  
in haste  
EE<sup>3</sup>

The Elgars stayed at Hookland for a fortnight in August in the absence of the family, while Miss Burley made use of the empty Severn House. Although Alice prepared some scoring paper, the weather was kind and many long walks were undertaken,

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<sup>3</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

together with visits to Rogate, Midhurst, Cowdray Castle and Stedham. Elgar enjoyed the schoolroom with its view and no doubt its books.

18 August 1915 "...A. busy settling orch. for E. very delightful sitting up in the Schoolroom with the lovely view - "

The day after the return from Hookland on 30 August, Alice noted that he was restless and wanting to go away again, and on 6 September he left by himself for the Lake District, being joined by Alice on the 10th. Before meeting her that day and proceeding to the Stuart Wortleys at Ravenglass, Elgar wrote to Miss Burley. The friendship with Ship had continued during the Hookland stay, and the dog provided the opportunity for a little gallantry.

Prince of Wales Lake Hotel, Grasmere  
Friday [post mark 10 September 1915]

My dear Peggy :

Alice has sent on a letter for Mrs Caulfeild & I am much distressed to hear of that dear child's accident : I do hope & trust she is better, it seems too distressing. We loved Hookland & Schiff : he was charming to me &, as one of the villagers (name unknown) said to me 'He's a *wonderful civil dog*' - he was my inseparable companion & occupied the place you should take in my walks even if he did not quite fill the situation.

Elusive Peggy! I am just leaving this & meet Alice a little southwards & we pay a visit.

I should love to send most respectful greetings to Mrs. Caulfeild & my love to the child : I hope her beautiful face is not injured.

My love to you  
Yours Sincerely  
E.E.<sup>4</sup>

Of Elgar's affection for the Caulfeild children, Miss Burley wrote : "He was not a man who could be said to be fond of children but the beauty and charming manners of the young Caulfeilds...won his friendship and affection from the start".<sup>5</sup>

Elgar spent a few days at Stoke after the Lakes, and on his return to Severn House wrote in bantering style to enquire after a book that had caught his eye at Hookland.

Severn House, 42, Netherhall Gardens, Hampstead, N.W.  
Sep 28 1915

Dear Pythoness prophetess or seeress

We are back from our mild wanderings & I want to get the name of the little elementary *Greek book*: will you be so good as to give yourself the trouble to exert yourself sufficiently to propel yourself along the corridor & hurl yourself into the room which I occupied as a dressing room[.] Amongst a lot of boys' books you will, - if you condescend to give yourself the trouble, all as aforesaid - find this little Cambridgey Greek book. Please send me title & sufficient particulars to

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<sup>4</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

<sup>5</sup> Burley & Carruthers, p 199

procure it. My nieces desire it.

The weather has been lovely & I trust soothing & restful.

All good wishes[.] I hope the dear & beautiful child is well again - my love please

EE

Greetings to Ship<sup>6</sup>

There was to grow up a myth that Elgar was far more conversant with classical languages than was in fact the case. Siegfried Sassoon noted a conversation with Frank Schuster in his diary for 1922 : "August 24th. This morning in delightful weather...I walked for a couple of hours among the woods and hills. With Schuster as far as the Grand Hotel. He was talking about Elgar. Old father peering out of window above music shop when E. was receiving freedom of Worcester...His mother - 'that wonderful woman used to sit up half the night reading Greek and Latin with him when a boy'".<sup>7</sup>

No doubt the works read were in translation. Many of Elgar's public writings and speeches were littered with classical reference and quotation, but in thanking Miss Burley for the information about the Greek primer Elgar honestly acknowledged a limited acquaintance with the language. Miss Burley had begun her letter in Greek.

Severn House, 42, Netherhall Gardens, Hampstead, N.W.  
Sunday [post mark 4 October 1915]

Dear Miss Burley -

Many thanks for the name & pub. of the Greek book, by far the best beginning in Gr. I have seen. However my knowledge (?) of the language does not carry me far enough to decipher your phrase at the beginning of the letter - so I crave for a less multiplied stile [*sic*] in the characters chosen. Please send it again.

I was glad the dear child is going on well.

Again thanks, & love to Ship.

Yours Sincerely,

EE<sup>8</sup>.

Later that month Elgar took Carice to Stratford and Stoke, as her plans to spend a much-needed holiday from the Censorship Department with a friend had fallen through. He returned on 22 October, feeling unwell.

"E. very bad cold, hard, tiresome cough"

That day he wrote again to Miss Burley, the last surviving letter of 1915.

Friday [22 October 1915]

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<sup>6</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

<sup>7</sup> Sassoon, Siegfried : *Diaries 1920-1922*, ed. Hart-Davis (Faber, 1981) p 223

<sup>8</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

My dear Peggy :

I was so sorry to hear via Carice, that you have been attempting influenza & that you do not really like it now you have it; it is extremely careless of you & I hope most sincerely that you are much better. C. will have told you or will tell you of our sudden flight to the Midlands on account of the sudden change of plan by her friend. I rushed home yesterday (leaving the child at Stoke) as I go on to Bournemouth tonight to be in time for a rehearsal tomorrow - also I have a detestable cold which I am sure is worse than yours - but I was not careless so I feel it is gratuitous & beastly.

Send word very soon that you are better & also that Cicely is well & that Ship flourishes

Best regards  
[illegible]  
Edward Elgar<sup>9</sup>

December 1915 saw breathless work on the incidental music for Blackwood's play *The Starlight Express*, followed by its run through most of January 1916, which Elgar attended very often despite initial misgivings about the sets. He attended its final performance, having earlier conducted the première of *Une Voix dans le Désert*. That day he wrote to Miss Burley, emphasising poor health.

Sunday [post mark 29 Jan 1916]

My dear Rosa :

It was very kind to send me your vain bibble babble which amused a biliary hour & has remained a sweet savour (among drugs) since reading.

I am not much better - but it has been & is a good rest. I get out a little now & then but I am really no better.

All good wishes for the season & a good new year

Yours Sinly  
EE

A woundy great jar of ginger has arrived - & I am not well!<sup>10</sup>

Elgar continued work on the orchestration of the Binyon music during February, and at the end of the month embarked on a conducting tour of northern cities with the LSO.

Midland Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool  
Wedy [1 March 1916]

Dear Rosa,

I am "on the wing" as Byard said - touring with the L.S.O. so don't write here.

I quite follow your letter which is only the sap rising in the spring - it goes to the head I know.

This pen is not for me as you see & very little more of it for you - I cannot write with it - it writes with me - all your theories of character & writing are null, void & of no effect. Ecce signum

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<sup>9</sup> MS in possession of Raymond Monk

<sup>10</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois



The weather is better & no snow left. My love - (that of it which can get past you) to Ship & Cicely

I fear they will starve

Bless you  
EE<sup>11</sup>

Byard was a singer whom no doubt both Elgar and Miss Burley knew, and the rest of the letter maintains a note of teasing intimacy. Again there was a reference to the spring, repeated memorably in the next letter, which contained also a sardonic appeal for sympathy of the kind which possibly went back to the very roots of their relationship.

Severn House, Hampstead N.W.  
Sunday April 30th 1916

Dear Peggy,

I know how fine the gorse is and how everything is quivering with spring but I do not get on at all well & am very shaky indeed.

I am trying to get ready for the journey which is long, but I should not be in the least surprised if it turned out to be the longest - a final joke of the poor old Arch-jester.

All good wishes  
Yours Sincerely  
E.E.<sup>12</sup>

The journey was to Leeds, where Elgar conducted the first performances of 'To Women' and 'For the Fallen'. His persistent ill-health during these years had brought about a collapse earlier that month, when he had been taken to the Acland Nursing Home at Oxford while travelling by train to Stoke. In September Miss Burley visited Alice and Carice at Severn House while Elgar was at Stoke. Alice reported :

15 September 1916. "...Miss Burley stayed on this night - seemed rather sad - "

At some point this year Miss Burley left Hookland to work, like Carice, in the Government Censorship Department.

30 November 1916. "E. out took Miss Burley to lunch & see pictures & to tea - A nice rest & change for her..."

1917 was the year of Elgar's first visits to the remote cottage 'Brinkwells' at Fittleworth in West Sussex. This retreat had been found by Alice, realising the need for an environment which might help him regain his well-being and stimulate composition. Edward and Alice made the first of two short visits that year towards the end of May, and were joined by Carice. She remained behind when they returned to London on 4 June, but Miss Burley came to stay and keep her company. It was no doubt another welcome change. Before the ladies returned to London, Elgar wrote

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<sup>11</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Young, p 176

to acknowledge the gift of a book, presumably *Highways and Byways of Sussex* by the biographer and essayist E V Lucas. Like Elgar himself, Lucas was a self-made man, having acquired much of his education while working in a Brighton bookshop, and the two men would meet in Sussex in the following year. This is another letter that contains an erasure.

[Severn House]  
June 15 1917

Dear Peggy :

It was very good of you to write & still gooder of you to give me that lovely book "Highways & Byways" - of course Carice *thinks* it hers - poor child! It's Mine.

I'm thrilled about the adder which was only a common snake for sure - no adder wd. look at either of you - don't flatter yourselves : forget it!

I am sorry to miss ~~you~~ the fine weather at Fittleworth & I am sure it is healing & restful : directly you return we *must* have an afternoon [-] you will be ready for any exertion in the way of theatre, tea etc

With that I leave you.  
The theatre goes well.  
Yours ever  
EE<sup>13</sup>

*The Fringes of the Fleet* had begun its twice-daily run at the London Coliseum four days earlier. Literature remained an interest in common between Miss Burley and the Elgars, and an undated note about an unidentified book is placed here.

Dear Orisca : p6.

In greatest haste I write a line to accompany this belated book. I have not read it but only opened it to see what it was like & found several things that we know. I have feminised the name as above but no doubt my Latin like my affection is misplaced

When are you coming?  
Yours ever  
EE<sup>14</sup>

Another note, like others that have survived, seems to have been written not with the intention of communicating a great deal of hard news, but out of the sheer habit of friendship. It was sent to Miss Burley at a Malvern address.

Stoke  
Saturday (off tomorrow)[11 August 1917]

My dear Peggy :

Your letter came all right but I wonder why it did as there are so many wild interruptions here.

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<sup>13</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

<sup>14</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

I do not know when I shall be in town again as my engagements multiply - however I will let you know as soon as the desirable time comes

Take care  
Your affect  
EE<sup>15</sup>

The "wild interruptions" were presumably due to the postal deliveries; Alice herself had noted the previous year that delays resulted in letters taking two days to arrive at Stoke. The dating of this letter is tentative - Elgar visited Stoke some fifteen times during the war years, leaving on a Sunday on three occasions - 12 August 1917, 7 October 1917, and 18 November 1917. 12 August is suggested because on this date Elgar left Stoke to conduct *The Fringes of the Fleet* in Manchester, rather than returning to Severn House - "I do not know when I shall be in town again as my engagements multiply". After Manchester the run continued at Leicester, which seemed to provide the right ambience for the looked-for meeting.

Grand Hotel, Leicester  
Aug 22 1917

My dear Peggy :

I wish you were here, it's such a nice town. I leave on Saturday night or Sunday[.] It wd do you good to have a clear day here : send a wire if you can come & you shall be met but I fear your holidays may be over

Yours  
EE<sup>16</sup>

This time the letter went to an address in London's Lower Sloane Street, but another early in 1918 was sent to Miss Burley at Bicester in Oxfordshire.

Hampstead  
Wedy [post mark 9 Jan 1918]

My dear Peggy

It is *very good* of you but you really should not send anything - butter least of all; bless you! The air is thick with butter & I was not (you mark this) thinking of it, on Sunday

We are nearly snowed up but I have struggled out on to the heath very cold. I am not so well internally & suffer much.

All good wishes for 1918  
Yours affly  
EE<sup>17</sup>

The remark about not thinking about the butter on Sunday, when presumably it arrived, would seem to be a rejection, repeated in a later letter, of the "mental telepathy" theories that Miss Burley apparently espoused ; "She was interested in

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<sup>15</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

<sup>16</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

<sup>17</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

TELEPHONE NOS. 4322 AND 4323.  
MANAGER'S OFFICE 4324.

TELEGRAMS:  
GRAND HOTEL, LEICESTER.

T. H. SWAIN,  
MANAGER.



**Grand Hotel,  
Leicester.**

August 22 1917

Dear Peggy:

I wish you were here,  
it's not a nice town. I bought  
on Saturday night or Sunday  
I tried to do you good & have  
a clean day here: send a  
note if you can come to you  
shall be met but I fear you  
Whidys may be over  
Yours  
T. H. Swain

magic - of the white variety, as I was assured by a pupil deeply devoted to her memory" (Moore, *Edward Elgar : Letters of a Lifetime*, OUP 1990, p 485). In March Elgar underwent an operation for the removal of diseased tonsils, and there was every hope of a recovery from the poor health of which he complained at the end of the letter, and which had dogged him for years. The process was slow but at the beginning of May he was well enough to return to Brinkwells for a visit that would last, with one major interruption, until Christmas. After a period of much therapeutic outdoor activity, he settled to composition and the *Violin Sonata* and *String Quartet* were completed by the end of the year. On his sixty-first birthday in June, one present only arrived.

2 June 1918. "...Lovely, exquisite day - E.'s dearest birfday - No letters & no pesents [*sic*] had come for him except some asparagus from Rosa..."

Brinkwells etc  
June 6. 1918

My dear Rosa :

The birthday 'went off' very quietly with the assistance of your good asparagus : it was wrong of you to send a valuable present but it was enjoyed.

It is, of course, lovely here & requires much weeding : however, the gardener has been furiously attacking the weeds & the place looks much more civilised than last year despite your frantic efforts with Carice[.] If you know anyone requiring "Willow-bark" (I think that's right) I can supply it by the ton.

I hope you are well : I am rested but do not get well at all & never shall. But I am strong & eat & sleep & work work work.

Yours ever  
EE<sup>18</sup>

The "work" was not composition but the variety of practical gardening and woodworking tasks at Brinkwells to which Elgar devoted an almost frenetic energy at this time. Gradually he found his way back to composition as the Sussex woods worked their magic. On 19 August the ever helpful neighbour, Farmer Aylwin, helped to deliver the old 'Plas Gwyn' piano to the garden studio, stimulating work on the *Violin Sonata* which was finished at the end of September. Billy Reed twice travelled down to Sussex to try the work over with the composer, although amateur forestry was not neglected. Elgar kept his own diary that year :

16 September 1918 "The Reeve came. I bought the near underwood for £3 & proceeded to cut a boundary..."

A letter to Miss Burley at this time, again to the London address, sent thanks for another gift of food, and issued another invitation; it concluded with the composer's own brief, eloquent estimation of the *Sonata*.

Brinkwells

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<sup>18</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

Thursday [undated; probably late September or early October 1918]

My dear Peggy :

It was most kind of you to send the birds which were - *are* for I can taste them now - lovely. I wish you would come here for a day or two : we are staying on & I have bought a piece of the underwoods - which I am cutting down : the only tangible result is a chip in my eye which has successfully closed the left one for a long time[;] if this writing is more erratic than usual the above is the reason.

You might be glad? amused? interested? - something anyhow - to know that I have had a rabid attack of writing music - *encore the musiciae* - is that good Latin [?] I have finished a full sized sonata for piano & violin! Mr Reed has been down to play it thro' & its equal to anything I have done - I know myself that its really *better* & so wd. you. It is concise & clear & passionate.

Love  
EE<sup>19</sup>

Elgar had suffered the chip of wood in his eye on 28 September; on 11 October he and Alice returned to Severn House for a month. Time was spent at Ridgehurst and at The Hut, and at concerts and the theatre, but the reason for the visit seems to have been an operation for a wen on Alice's forehead. It was presumably a comparatively minor process, but Elgar did not find it easy to deal with.

29 October 1918 "Sir Maurice, Barrow & an[othe]r doctor - A's 'Wen' removed E then sick many times".

That day he wrote to Miss Burley at the Bicester address, evidently the last letter of their correspondence to have survived. Its main burden concerned the source of his creative renewal at Brinkwells.

Hampstead  
Oct 29 1918

My dear Peggy :

I should have written before but at Brinkwells I managed to (adroitly) send a chip into my sound eye & we had to scrimmage up here, where we have been torn in pieces & hope to be able to get back to the cottage in a day or two.

I fear your occult or other sources of information are at fault as they were in the spring when they told you nothing of my operation. However although that was the thing I adjectived as foolish & even more decisive than that! - we will say nothing of that. Your letter was wrong in several things one only of which I correct. I *never have & never will* write under the influence you name, inconceivable! The rest[,] quiet & *reminiscent* feeling of the *woods* seems to have tapped a spring of woods of long ago - this I thought you wd. have known or at least understood.

Alice has just had a little operation : removal of a 'wen' sort of thing. She is going on quite well & shd. be about again soon.

Love  
Yours

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<sup>19</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

So Elgar seemed to reject the various accumulations of "occult" legend and atmosphere that grew up around the chamber music while he was composing it, particularly the *Piano Quintet* - the Spanish monks, the sinister "dispossessed" trees with their strange dance and a "wail for their sin", Lytton's *Strange Story*. Miss Burley's interest in "white magic" had perhaps led her too far in whatever she had written, and instead Elgar seemed anxious to emphasise again the world of their shared cycle rides around the countryside nearly twenty years before, and the woods around Birchwood Lodge. The new music had grown out of the past, and the new environment was stimulating in so far as it represented the old. In one simple, nostalgic sentence Elgar laid bare a simpler view of his Brinkwells' experience: "The rest, quiet & *reminiscent* feeling of the woods seems to have tapped a spring of woods of long ago..."

It was Miss Burley herself who had indirectly led Elgar to his final creative achievements in the Sussex woods, for she had taken him to Hookland, and thus to Brinkwells; but it was Alice's role to see the creative possibilities and ensure that they were exploited.

\* \* \*

That balance of power between the two women was put to a final test on Alice Elgar's death. Miss Burley joined other guests at Severn House on 18 January 1920, and wrote later: "Early in 1920 I spent a day at Severn House and was shocked to find Alice shrunk and terribly depressed"<sup>21</sup>

She appears to have met Alice for the last time on 2 March 1920.

"Met Rosa at Club - walked around, had tea there & so home..."

Some two weeks after this meeting, Alice abandoned the diary that she had begun in the early days of her marriage in 1889. On 23 March she attended what was to be her last concert. Elgar noted:

A. & C. to Chamber Music (Sonata, Quartet, & Quintet) Sammons etc. My darling's last concert all my music. Thoughts of the 30 (weary fighting) years of her help & devotion".

Two days later Muriel Foster came and took tea with Alice in her room, "...the last person [outside] to see my poor darling..." Although some of the oldest friends called at Severn House during the last days of Alice's life - Alice Stuart-Wortley, Billy Reed, Frank Schuster - no visit by Miss Burley was noted by Elgar. She seems however to have been at Severn House on the day that Alice Elgar died.

So stunned was he by the blow, so withdrawn into himself that no one at Severn House dared to

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<sup>20</sup> Northwestern University, Illinois

<sup>21</sup> Burley & Carruthers, p 201

approach him even when the undertaker had to be interviewed. I was in the house at the time and, realising that something had to be done, I went into the study and told him as gently as I could that he really must pull himself together."<sup>22</sup>

Various other accounts exist as to what was said on that day. Moore says : "Carice heard Miss Burley say on that occasion that she herself now stood as Carice's mother and would take over the running of the Elgar household for the future"<sup>23</sup>.

But in *Spirit of England*, published the same year, Moore adds a comment the burden of which seems to be at something of a tangent from that : "...when Lady Elgar died, Miss Burley's jealousy overcame her : she betrayed herself by suggesting to Elgar's daughter Carice that she had been more than Carice's schoolmistress"<sup>24</sup>.

Young does not mention the incident in his book on Alice, or in the first edition of his *Elgar O M*; but in the preface to the second edition he says : "At a time of great distress - in which, according to the narrative on pp.202-3 of her book, Miss Burley was the good angel - she invaded Severn House and made observations to Carice that were both false and offensive".<sup>25</sup>

Further, in a letter published in *Music and Musicians* (June 1973 p 4) Dr Young wrote: "...Miss Burley claims...that Carice Elgar Blake remained her friend always. This is simply not true. Any claim that the lady might have had on Carice's friendship collapsed on that day of (and just after) Lady Elgar's death, when Miss Burley invaded their house and threw a fit of malicious hysterics".

"Observations...false and offensive"... "a fit of malicious hysterics"... I wonder if these equate with something that was told me by the late Alan Webb in a conversation during the seventies. He thought that the real source of the offence lay in a claim that Miss Burley made on that day in Severn House that she was Elgar's daughter. There are of course various ways in which such an expression, used at such a time, may be intended; a simple comparison of birth dates will rule out the most literal meaning, and my own feeling has always been that the claim was made in some kind of poetic sense. I did not pursue the point at the time, but I have no qualms about recording it here as emanating from one whose integrity was above reproach.

It was the end of the friendship and of the correspondence with Elgar. That year Miss Burley went abroad again and when she returned "...I found that I was one of a number of friends who had been tacitly dropped though I am glad to say Carice has remained my friend to this day. It was odd after nearly thirty years of intimate friendship to meet him face to face as often happened at festivals and to find that I

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<sup>22</sup> Burley & Carruthers, p 202

<sup>23</sup> Moore, *Edward Elgar : A Creative Life* (OUP, 1984) p 753

<sup>24</sup> Moore, Jerrold Northrop : *Spirit of England : Edward Elgar in his world* (Heinemann, 1984) p 28

<sup>25</sup> White Lion Press, 1973, pp.15-16



was completely ignored..."<sup>26</sup>

In the aftermath of Alice's funeral, Elgar went to Stoke, and then spent a few days in Kent. Returning to Severn House at the end of April, he began to deal with legal affairs and other necessary matters.

1 May 1920 "C. & E. at home clearing things up..."

Perhaps it was the day he began to destroy so many letters from the past. There was to be one final communication to Miss Burley.

At the Christmas of 1932...I was surprised to receive a card from him. It had been posted in the Earl's Court district and was inscribed simply, 'From Edward'...I was rather puzzled by this sudden mark of recognition and wondered why it had been made. Could it be that he hoped by reviving an old friendship to recapture some of the youthful urge towards composition of past years? I shall never know.<sup>27</sup>

It was a perceptive comment, for this was the period of the final creative stirrings towards the *Third Symphony* and *The Spanish Lady*. But Elgar's answer to Miss Burley's question was to find a new friendship with a younger woman, Vera Hockman, his final muse.

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<sup>26</sup> Burley & Carruthers, p 203

<sup>27</sup> Burley & Carruthers, p 204

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## THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS

### A personal view on the recorded legacy

Walter J Essex

I remember vividly my first encounter with *The Dream of Gerontius*. It was the summer of 1963. I used to visit my local record library in Coventry every week, invariably taking home a diet of Gilbert and Sullivan, Tchaikovsky and certain Verdi operas. On the occasion in question, I decided to be adventurous and took home Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* (all six discs of it!) and *The Dream of Gerontius*. The Wagner I found very boring (a judgment long since thoroughly revised!), but that may have been because I was so completely bowled over by what I heard of the Elgar. I remember it was Sargent's 1955 recording that I had taken home, the only one available at the time, and whilst my rapture at this performance has been somewhat modified over the years, it remains a very special item in my current collection for what it did both *to* me and *for* me at that time.

With anything that remains a focal point for devotion, one is always in danger of losing a sense of objectivity. With regard to *Gerontius* I admit that I quite fail to be objective about it; it is too deep-rooted in my spirit for that. However, with recordings I find that I can bring a level of objectivity to the work, but inevitably personal taste plays a considerable part and I do not necessarily expect everyone to agree with my views.

In greeting the most recent recording of *Gerontius* (Handley), the Society Chairman wrote of "a work which has now been recorded more times than Elgarians have any right to expect". With eleven different versions (not all currently available) as well as the excerpts conducted by Elgar himself, one can only agree. Among these recordings there are many fine performances: from soloists, choirs, orchestras, and conductors; but these "fine performances" do not always coincide within the same recording. To my mind, the *Gerontius* recording with the perfect synthesis of forces has yet to be made, and in this I perhaps strive for an improbable perfection.

I do accept that we all hear voices differently, and with the soloists, at least, there can be wide divergences of opinion. Within my own immediate Elgarian circle, several people will each come up with a different *Gerontius* recording from which they could not be parted, or which they would have to take with them to that mythical "desert island". For myself, I could not be parted from *any* of them; each performance has at least *one* element I could not be without.

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In all the recordings of *Gerontius*, the playing of the Prelude gives notice of the style of performance which is to follow, which is not to suggest that the Prelude is detached from the rest of the work: it is a vital ingredient of the whole. At the very opening, as with *Parsifal*, the listener immediately enters a unique sound world, and I look for the way a conductor recreates this "sound world" in terms of orchestral

textures, dynamics and tempi. In both of his recordings, Sargent indicates that it is the dramatic rather than the spiritual nature of the work which will predominate. There are some oddly perfunctory sections in both performances (a criticism that can be levelled at Sargent's interpretation overall, particularly that of 1955). In 1945 the 'Go forth' theme moves briskly, yet retains much warmth. By 1955 this same section lacks impetus; there is no forward flow, and the tempi throughout the Prelude are pulled about rather too roughly. Britten, as might be expected from an opera composer, unfolds the full drama of the work in a quite thrilling performance of the Prelude. He takes a few liberties with the score, not only here but throughout, but there is an unerring "rightness" about it when he does, given his intense interpretation. An example is at eight bars after fig 9 and again at fig 10 where Elgar indicates a total silence on the bar line - a moment's pause to gather strength. Britten allows the timpani roll to continue right across the bar line, thus momentarily assuming the spotlight. Unauthentic it may be, but it is undeniably spine-tingling. Gibson is disappointing, many of the contrasts in both tempi and dynamics going for nothing.

Handley is very attentive to the dynamic shading, without giving any hint of calculation. His transition into the 'Go forth' theme at fig 12 is probably the smoothest of all, and he conjures up a real shiver down the spine just before fig 17 with the *fp* on woodwind and tam-tam as it introduces the 'Sleep' theme.

In both of his recordings, Barbirolli establishes his dramatic viewpoint in the Prelude. He makes the most of every contrast and maintains a forward impulse, avoiding all the temptations to linger. The "live" 1957 Rome performance perhaps catches him in more inspired mood than in 1965, although the Symphony Orchestra of Rome Radio seems unhappy at times, with some raw string tone at the great climaxes. Both Rattle and Hickox blend the dramatic and spiritual in an almost ideal way. The very opening of the Prelude with Rattle and the CBSO is the most sheerly beautiful of all. When I first heard this performance, I was reminded immediately of the opening to *Parsifal*. Both openings, in their transparency and colouring, establish the spiritual "feel" of what is to follow. With Rattle the opening *pp* and the *ppp* at fig 2 really are just that. However, given the very wide dynamic range accorded to this recording, the great climaxes make for uncomfortable domestic listening when the volume control is adjusted to be able to acknowledge the very quietest moments.

Boult is very much in a dimension of his own. Certainly there is drama in his Prelude, but it is the spiritual resonances which impinge on one's consciousness. Even the magnificent 'Go forth' theme, for once, is not brazen, but manages to convey a measure of gentleness and restraint - a real nobility of spirit. Throughout, Boult is not one to linger and he keeps up the forward momentum of the piece...which is more than can be said for Svetlanov! His recording, on the Russian Melodiya label, is an oddity amongst all these recordings. It was a performance recorded live in Moscow in April 1983 with British soloists and choir, and Russian orchestra. Svetlanov's reading of the Prelude is idiosyncratic, to say the least. Both opening and ending are very slow; there is little sensitivity to the changing tempi, creating an overall blandness. The somewhat bronchially afflicted audience mars some of the quieter moments.

Elgar's audience at the Royal Albert Hall in February 1927 was similarly afflicted - some should clearly have been at home in bed! - and Elgar himself proclaimed the test pressings of the recording "a sad disaster". However, thanks to the tenacity of Jerrold Northrop Moore, we have this recording of the Prelude. Inevitably there is something special about Elgar's own recording. Is the intensity I feel when listening to this account real or imagined? Am I simply in awe of the presence of the composer himself? Again, objectivity fails to register as one submits to the overwhelming majesty of the performance.

And so, our conductors have laid down their credentials and little that follows should take the listener by surprise. None of them is let down by his orchestra. Even Barbirolli's Rome orchestra has some fine moments; in any case with the actual recording quality rather unfocused, it would be unfair to make a negative judgment. However, if I were to choose amongst the orchestras for sheer brilliance, Rattle's CBSO and Handley's RLPO really do stand out for the body of string tone, unanimity of woodwind blending, and all sections proving a virtuosic command of the score. The score itself is incredibly detailed in both dynamics and tempi; again and again both Rattle and Handley prove the composer's eloquence in their adherence to these markings, although, paradoxically, neither is slavish in his approach.

\* \* \*

*Gerontius* makes tremendous demands on the choir(s) and there is not one choir amongst these recordings which does not rise to the challenge, even if full satisfaction is not always achieved. The two big set pieces - the 'Demons' Chorus' and 'Praise to the Holiest' may be the bench-marks by which any choir is judged in this work, but there is much else in the score which taxes their full resources.

Both of Sargent's recordings use the Huddersfield Choral Society. In 1945 the choir displays great depth of tone, with altos and tenors particularly striking. The latter are quite superb in the 'Demons' Chorus', and this section shows the power and vitality of the whole choir. Sargent's beautifully-shaped account of 'Praise to the Holiest' raises the hairs on the back of the neck. By 1955 the HCS has lost some of its bloom, the tone often sounding pinched. In the 'Go forth' section at the end of Part I, the choir sounds stodgy and there is some suspect soprano intonation. Even 'Praise to the Holiest' fails to lift off. The HCS reappear, in combination with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir, under Vernon Handley, and very fine they are. The 'Demons' Chorus' is a real *tour de force*. It is sung "straight", ie. no leering characterisation, but is rhythmically taut and exciting. Throughout, the tone is full-bodied and the semi-chorus sopranos are truly ethereal. Only in the closing pages of 'Praise to the Holiest' is there a slight feeling of "running out of steam".

Barbirolli (1965) certainly presses his combined choirs to play up the drama of the 'Demons' Chorus'. The sneering and leering are vividly characterised, but at the expense both of tone - very ragged at climaxes - and rhythmic precision. Elsewhere, the choirs acquit themselves well and satisfy this listener at least. Barbirolli's Rome choir (1957) sometimes has difficulty with the English vowel sounds, but otherwise diction is the least troublesome aspect. There is a forthright honesty about much of the singing, and they master Barbirolli's variations in tempi in 'Praise to the Holiest'

magnificently, but ultimately it is the unyielding tone of the choir that wearies the ear. The sopranos, particularly, lack the essential purity of sound.

Under Britten, the London Symphony Chorus sounds undernourished at the great climaxes, although in the quieter moments there are some ravishing sounds; for example, 'Be merciful, be gracious' (fig 35), where Britten provides a tempo steadier than many to great effect. Where Britten really scores is in his use of the choir of King's College Cambridge for the semi-chorus. The section in Part II which leads up to the main statement of 'Praise to the Holiest' (figs 60-68) is stunning, the choral sound being truly of another world. Britten also manages in this section to convey the necessary forward momentum of Gerontius's soul moving "with extremest speed" to its judgment.

Gibson's SNO Chorus offers good, forthright singing, but little subtlety. Occasionally the sopranos are edgy at the top of the range, and the tenors ragged. Gibson's sometimes hard-pressed speeds may be responsible for some lack of unanimity of tone. There is a great warmth of tone in Boult's combined London Philharmonic Choir and John Alldis Choir. This registers immediately in the 'Kyrie' (fig 29) and 'Holy Mary, pray for him' (fig 30) sections. The choirs sound particularly beautiful in the double chorus section at the end of Part I (fig 75): 'Go forth on thy course'. The *pp* and *ppp* markings are observed without any loss of intonation and the soprano top B $\flat$  is etched in ethereally. The 'Demons' Chorus' is very impressive both in its choral sound and in the power of the orchestra, although ultimately real drama is lacking. 'Praise to the Holiest' does not move along as one might wish, Boult's tempi not entirely in keeping with the score, but there is an undoubted grandeur in the reading. The choirs respond with some glorious singing and achieve a real sense of repose at the section beginning 'O gen'rous love' (two bars after fig 80).

The London Symphony Chorus's contribution to the Svetlanov recording is uneven, but given the conductor's eccentric tempi this may not be surprising. The 'Kyrie' and the ensuing 'Holy Mary, pray for him' sound very stodgy. 'Be merciful', at a very fast speed, is very edgy with almost an air of impatience about it - quite wrong for the feeling behind the words! However, the 'Demons' Chorus', again very fast, has a real thrill about it. Part way into 'Praise to the Holiest' I closed my score and simply listened. I stopped worrying about the tempi; the choir, singing superbly, simply followed Svetlanov and it seemed all of a piece; it felt right! A stunning account. Recording the work in the studio some five years later, the LSC seem much happier and their singing is uniformly excellent throughout. There are moments when I feel it is not quite big enough in sound to encompass the big climaxes, but there is energy and a sense of drama when needed, and no thinning out of tone in the quieter passages.

If I leave Rattle's CBSO choir until last, it is because I feel that, in conjunction with its conductor, it approaches the ideal. It does not sound as large a body of singers as in other recordings, but there is a richness of tone throughout the dynamic range. (It also sounds a youthful choir!) If I were to choose just one example to display the merits of this choir and conductor, I would choose the section 'Be merciful be gracious' (fig 35). At the beginning the tenors sing "Be merciful" (*mf*), joined by the

altos in the same register on "Be *gracious*" (*pp*). At fig 38 it is the basses (*mf*), joined by the tenors (*p*), who have these phrases. The seamless *legato* and precise observance of the dynamics make these ecstatic moments. On the words "Lord, deliver him" there is a unanimous rhythmic precision which I find matched only by Boult. Boult's choirs are also matched by Rattle's at fig 75 ('Go forth on thy course') at the end of Part I. The clarity of texture and secure intonation, in a section which can too often sound pinched and undernourished, almost takes one's breath away. This choir's precision is used to great effect in the 'Demon's Chorus' where, incidentally, there is a real difference between the slurred "Ha! ha!"s and those marked *staccato sfz*. 'Praise to the Holiest' provides a sumptuous piece of choral singing. Rattle's tempi towards the end might not accord exactly with the score, but the ending brings an exhilaration matched only by Sargent (1945) and - yes! - Elgar himself. If there is a drawback with the CBSO Chorus, it is in the rather distant recording afforded it by EMI. I feel this is a miscalculation, but it cannot diminish my sheer joy in listening to this choir.

\* \* \*

For many people, I am sure, the casting of the principal singers is a major factor in any recording of *Gerontius*. With regard to Gerontius himself, what sort of voice does one expect? In Part I he is a man near to death, burdened by the weariness of pain. This must be conveyed by any interpreter, as well as the fear and dread; and yet he must rise to the heroic challenge of 'Sanctus fortis' in Part I and 'Take me away' in Part II. Inevitably it is a difficult part to bring off in all its facets.

There is certainly a richness of interpreters in recorded performances. However, before examining the complete recordings, I must go back to Elgar's own recorded extracts. There is too little of Stuart Wilson on the Royal Albert Hall account to make any real judgment, although the tone, in what we do hear, has a heroic ring to it. There is a little more of Tudor Davies in the Hereford extracts (and how tantalisingly brief they are!) Here we have a wealth of open, Italianate tone and operatic full-bloodedness which would seem to have the composer's blessing. Elgar himself said that he saw Gerontius as "a man like us, a sinner, a repentant one of course, but still no end of a worldly man in his life"; his music, therefore, was no "church tunes and rubbish, but a good, healthy, full-blooded romantic, remembered worldliness". That would *seem* to point to the Tudor Davies approach, and I have to admit that it is the approach I personally prefer. In the complete recordings only two interpreters measure up to this (Arthur Davies and Jon Vickers); which is not to say that the others are not equally valid.

Only one interpretation would I willingly discard; regretfully it is that by Robert Tear. I say "regretfully" for Tear is an artist I much admire, but on his recorded showing at least, he is not a Gerontius. His singing is forthright and honest but no more. The varied dynamics go for little; more often than not his singing is unrelentingly loud. His opening in Part I is effortful (perhaps not inappropriately so!) 'Sanctus fortis' begins *ff* rather than the marked *mf* and so leaves no room for expansion. (Few of the tenors actually observe this; those who do show that Elgar really knew what he was about!) However, Tear is not helped in this section by Gibson's very fast tempo which robs the piece of any dignity. In much of the

colloquy with the Angel in Part II Tear is unbearably hectoring. No, this is not a performance to be comfortable with.

Richard Lewis has assumed the part twice on these recordings, with Sargent in 1955 and with Barbirolli in 1965. The later recording displays a certain loss of bloom on the voice in the intervening years, and a beat in the upper register has developed. However in both recordings his is a riveting interpretation. At the opening he is utterly believable as a man on his deathbed, employing a "drained" tone which, however, opens up magnificently when required. Particularly in the later recording, there is real exhaustion expressed in the words "I can no more" (two bars after fig 57), yet there is no holding back from the high B♭ in the phrase "in thine *own* agony" (two bars before fig 63), thrillingly delivered. The natural speech rhythms in the opening section of Part II are a joy. "Take me away" finds Lewis stretched in both recordings, with some lumpy phrasing, but overall his performances are heartfelt and truly cherishable.

Peter Pears (with Britten) is completely credible in his characterisation. In Part I one can really empathise with the anguish of Gerontius, and his verbal articulation in his exchanges with the Angel in Part II is mercurial. However, although his is a voice I much admire, it is not one I can really love. It is neither lyrical (at this stage in his career) nor heroic, and it is the latter qualities that he is lacking for a fully rounded portrayal. The climactic passages in 'Sanctus fortis' and the attack on 'Take me away' are really not for him, but for much else in the score I am thankful that he recorded the part.

John Mitchinson's recorded Gerontius (with Rattle) has not met with universal approval, the undeniable beat in his voice troubling some listeners. Certainly in live performance I have found him less constrained and with a much freer tone. He has the full vocal resources to do the part justice, from the hushed opening to Part I to the demands of 'Sanctus fortis'. There are some magical moments, such as his colouring of the word "bewilderment" (fig 34), and the lovely head tones at the reprise of 'Sanctus fortis' (fig 53) which expand seamlessly into full voice. There is real fear in the voice as he conjures up the Demons in his mind (fig 58-61), and there is real heartbreak in 'Take me away', without becoming maudlin. This is a vital portrayal which goes right to the heart of the character.

Perhaps the most sheerly beautiful (vocally) assumption of the role of Gerontius is that by Anthony Rolfe Johnson (under Handley). A voice of much lighter means than Mitchinson's, he too has the resources to meet all the vocal demands, but I have the overriding impression of blandness in his reading. Yes, the opening is exquisitely sung, but there is no real anguish. Where Mitchinson (and Pears) conjured up horror at the vision of Demons in Part I, with Rolfe Johnson the feeling is almost casual. The opening of Part II finds him at his best: "I went to sleep" (fig 4) is a *real* awakening and Elgar's *parlando* markings are observed to wonderful effect. But when we reach 'Take me away' there is no real emotion, just good, clean singing.

Arthur Davies appears as Gerontius twice on these recordings. When I first heard his performance with Hickox I was bowled over by the sheer generosity of voice in the

part. Here, at last, was a tenor to match his namesake, Tudor Davies. There are many places in the score where one simply wants sumptuous tenor tone to match the passion in the music, eg. in Part II, "But hark! a grand mysterious harmony..." (fig 71), and Davies provides this in abundance. His is a thrilling performance *per se*, but characterisation is not consistent. With Svetlanov, five years earlier, and caught "on the wing" as it were in a live performance, the voice is even more free in tone, but there is a tendency to a lachrymose delivery and much use of the glottal stop, presumably for dramatic effect. 'Sanctus fortis' is taken at a very hectic pace by Svetlanov, leaving Davies no room for dynamic shading (and probably the cause of some doubtful verbal juggling!) 'Take me away' is probably even more exciting than with Hickox and is given a forward momentum by the conductor whereby the singer can express the heartbreak without becoming sentimental.

Boult's casting of Nicolai Gedda as Gerontius caused a few ripples back in 1976. This much-admired tenor had previously recorded *Elijah* and *Messiah* (neither with a British conductor) to give notice that the English oratorio 'tradition' was not alien to him. I was excited by his performance at that time, probably because he opened my eyes to the full operatic potential of the role, having been so used to Richard Lewis as the "norm". I am not sure that that excitement has remained. I say "not sure" because it is a performance I "blow hot and cold" over. Currently, I find it a heart-warming, sometimes thrilling re-creation of the role, but set beside the two interpreters yet to be discussed, it is not fully satisfying. Gedda's English is almost wholly idiomatic, only the occasional too-open vowel, as in "manhood" and "veneration" betraying his non-native background. In Part I and the latter part of Part II he is almost perfect, characterising vividly and scrupulous over dynamics. Only in the exchanges with the Angel in Part II does he appear a little brash, the tone consistently open and bright and, consequently, tiring on the ear.

The final two interpreters of Gerontius are Heddle Nash and Jon Vickers. No serious lover of *Gerontius* should be without either performance. They are very different interpretations, yet each reaches the very heart of both music and character as no others. The voices themselves are quite different in timbre, Nash essentially a lyric tenor, Vickers a dramatic tenor, though that is over-simplifying the matter. Both singers command attention from their first utterances, both for beauty of voice and for interpretative powers. Both conjure up a picture of a man *in extremis*. Both produce beautiful head tones at "That I am going, that I am no more" (one bar after fig 25). Both begin 'Sanctus fortis' *mf* and observe the *semplice e dolce* at fig 44. Both....but no. I could go on pin-pointing so many places in the score where Elgar's detailed markings really tell in these interpretations. If I might choose just one more highlight for each: at fig 53, the *pp* reprise of "Sanctus fortis", Vickers also observes the *piangendo* and produces an ethereal head voice which he then gradually mixes with full chest voice as the music expands - all quite seamless and creating a heart-stopping moment; Nash's "Novissima hora est" (fig 66) is the most moving and most beautiful of all, and the ensuing phrases, up to when he expires at fig 68, make me really believe that he is "wearied" and at the end of all he can bear. No words can do full justice to these interpretations; they demand to be heard. If, under threat of rack and thumbscrew, I was forced to choose between these two singers, I think it would have to be Vickers for the sheer thrill and open-hearted generosity of his tenor voice.



The casting of the Angel has been particularly successful in *Gerontius* recordings. There is not one of the nine mezzo/contraltos who fails to bring some insight or special quality to the part. However, what is your view of an angel? It is definitely male; but the voice is that of a mezzo-soprano or contralto. There are, of course, no real problems with this, especially if one can take Cherubino, Oktavian *et al.* But there is a danger that the singer might sound rather matronly - or perhaps I should say motherly - which gives quite the wrong effect. If I include Helen Watts, Alfreda Hodgson, Marjorie Thomas, Gladys Ripley and Constance Shacklock in this category, this is not to denigrate them, for they all give quite lovely performances; but if one wants something a little more self-effacing of femininity, one must look to Yvonne Minton, Felicity Palmer, Catherine Wyn-Rogers or Janet Baker.

Margaret Balfour, Elgar's Angel, has a voice which moves me very much. There is not much to judge her by, but enough to wish there were more! Her 'Farewell' is sung with gorgeous velvety tone. The timbre of the voice is of a type rarely heard these days. Amongst the complete recordings, Gladys Ripley and Constance Shacklock come nearest in style. Ripley (Sargent 1945) is consistently warm and comforting, a voice one feels almost able to wrap around one to keep out cold winter draughts! One of my personal testing points for any Angel is the launching of the duet beginning "A presage falls upon thee" (fig 26), and here Gladys Ripley is radiant and the blending of her voice with that of Heddle Nash is matched for sheer beauty only by Janet Baker and Richard Lewis (Barbirolli 1965). Constance Shacklock, in Barbirolli's 1957 Rome performance, has some wayward intonation to begin with, but settles to give a satisfying performance overall. There is something deeply affecting about her characterisation - something indefinable. At the words "And I will come and wake thee on the morrow" (in the 'Farewell' three bars before fig 134) there is a smile in the voice which lifts the spirit; after all, the message is full of hope and promise. A wondrous moment.

Marjorie Thomas (Sargent 1955) is a generally sensitive Angel, but surprisingly bland in places and quite fails to move me. However, her rendering of the 'Farewell', poised and beautiful, redeems much. Alfreda Hodgson is the one cherishable ingredient of the Gibson performance I simply could not be without. Her opening 'Angel's Song' is a trifle edgy, but thereafter there is one glorious moment after another. Her utterance of "Yes, for one moment thou shalt see thy Lord - one moment" (two bars before fig 56) never fails to bring a lump to my throat, not only for the tonal quality of the voice, but for the intensity of meaning she brings to this phrase. She is consistently responsive to the text and secure in all the extremes of the role. Thus, her build-up to "Praise to the Holiest" with its climactic Ab is ecstatic and exciting; her final words, "Brother dear", sung *dolcissimo* as marked, are truly melting. This is a jewel of a performance in a less than lustrous setting.

Helen Watts, for Boult, is not as vocally resplendent as other recorded Angels, yet she gives a fascinating account of the role, constantly alert to verbal nuance, not least in her exchanges with Gedda's Gerontius. Her account of the "stigmata" beginning at fig 58, "There was a mortal who is now above...", aided by Boult's eerily brilliant accompaniment, represents the height of her art. Catherine Wyn-

Rogers, for Handley, does not have the warmth of tone which I find to be a prerequisite for an ideal Angel. To be fair, much of what she does is very good, even though I have a feeling that the recording does not do her justice - I know it doesn't, having heard her in live performance! She simply does not sound at ease for much of the time, and a rather neutral quality predominates. However, at the section "Thy judgement now is near..." (fig 102) she conjures up a real frisson of mystery, spirituality and drama, she sings beautifully - and all is forgiven!

Felicity Palmer appears with Hickox and also on the live Svetlanov recording, partnering Arthur Davies on both occasions. It is a voice which arouses much controversy in Elgar recordings, and it seems to me that it is a voice which either you can take or you can't. I can! There is little to choose between the performances although the live occasion engenders more electricity between Palmer and Davies. The "duet" is particularly lovely, beautifully blended. Miss Palmer brings her considerable dramatic gifts to bear on the 'stigmata' passage in both recordings; but under Svetlanov her 'Farewell' has a radiance which is missing with Hickox. The phrase (marked *dolcissimo*) "Shall tend and nurse thee, as thou liest" (two bars after fig 131) shows her at her most melting.

Yvonne Minton's Angel is one of the glories of the Britten recording. The opening 'Angel's Song' immediately marks her out as an Angel of special qualities. Her last "Alleluia" (one bar after fig 15), sung *pp*, would melt the stoniest heart, as would "You cannot now cherish a wish which ought not to be wished" (four bars after fig 20). With a fine sensitivity to words, combined with dark, honeyed tone, Yvonne Minton shines throughout the work. Even Britten's brisk pace for the 'Farewell' (thus avoiding any hint of sentimentality) cannot rob her of poise or dignity.

Janet Baker has recorded the role of the Angel twice : with Barbirolli (1965) and Rattle. More than twenty years separate the recordings and both bring huge rewards. There is no denying that the voice is far fresher in 1965 where Miss Baker delivers a very dramatic reading of the role, no doubt spurred on by Barbirolli. The interpretation has softened and deepened by 1986, but it is to the earlier recording I turn again and again. As when discussing the Gerontius of Nash and of Vickers, words cannot adequately do justice to the sheer thrill of Baker's performances, but a few examples must be given. As with Yvonne Minton, the poise on the last section of the 'Angel's Song' is exquisite with Barbirolli; with Rattle it remains very beautiful and there is even an added warmth. "You cannot now cherish a wish..." in the 1965 recording is one of those phrases that simply lives on in the mind - totally unforgettable. Staying with 1965, Baker's launching of the "duet" 'A presage falls upon thee' is simply glorious and, as already implied, with Richard Lewis an ideal blend is achieved to magical effect. With John Mitchinson (Rattle) this section lacks a sense of repose. Only Janet Baker, in both recordings, can match Alfreda Hodgson in the section "Yes, for one moment thou shalt see thy Lord - one moment". With Baker I hear it with tears pricking my eyes. Throughout her exchanges with Mitchinson's Gerontius, she achieves a stillness not always in evidence under Barbirolli. And so I could go on. If you want to judge for yourself, I would ask you to listen to the 'Farewell' under Barbirolli. This is glorious singing by any standard with some heart-stopping moments, eg. "I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold thee" (figs 128-129) - this is surely the peak of Janet Baker's art.

At the end of Part I we first hear the third soloist, the bass, or baritone, who intones "Proficiscere, anima Christiana!" - "Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!" - a magnificent set piece which brings Part I to an incandescent close. Our soloist is heard again in the Angel of the Agony's grave utterances in Part II. Much has been said and written as to the need for two different voices in these parts : a baritone for the Priest and a bass for the Angel of the Agony. Certainly the high tessitura of the Priest's music would seem to call for a baritone, whilst the Angel of the Agony ideally needs a true bass to bring the necessary weight to the part.

In Elgar's recorded extracts we have the second half (with chorus) of the Priest's part, and the whole of the Angel of the Agony's solo as sung by Herbert Heyner, and again the whole of the Angel of the Agony's solo as sung by Horace Stevens at Hereford. Heyner would seem to have the vocal means to encompass both parts and his Angel of the Agony is certainly very dramatic. But it is to Horace Stevens I constantly turn in this piece. There is, perhaps, too much use of snatched breath for dramatic effect, but the voice is just right; he instils both authority and awe. Elgar's accompaniment sends shivers down the spine. This is probably the most moving account on disc.

Sargent's 1945 recording is the only one to utilise two singers in the parts of Priest and Angel of the Agony. This may well have been the right idea, but is badly let down by Dennis Noble's Priest. I fail to understand the almost universal approval for this performance. In his contribution to the volume *Elgar Studies* Michael Kennedy, in discussing Elgar interpreters, writes : "Dennis Noble's 'Proficiscere' has a clarion quality all too often missing". Unfortunately I cannot share his enthusiasm. I find Noble's tone dry and ingratiating; he brings a laboured treatment of individual notes rather than smooth phrasing; there is a total lack of warmth. Elgar's detailed dynamic markings are largely ignored. The JOURNAL's Editor has referred to the worst fault of all ('Random Ramblings', November 1994), a fault I myself have drawn attention to on numerous occasions : the long notes (six crotchet beats) on the second syllable of "mundo" and on "world" are alarmingly cut to just two beats, leaving gaping holes in the texture of the music, the effect of the underlying changing harmonies being quite lost. Indeed, throughout this section long notes are often cut short; even his very last note. No, I cannot endorse the good opinion of this performance. In the same recording Sargent has Norman Walker as the Angel of the Agony. As a performance it is good and solid, but lacking in real imagination.

The Priest is a figure of authority, yet is present to bring comfort to the dying Gerontius - a sympathetic figure. Both aspects are there in Elgar's music : a commanding beginning; then a softening and warmth on the word "God" in the phrase "Go, in the name of God" (fig 70); a *diminuendo* on the words "who bled for thee", and again on the words "Holy Spirit", where notes and dynamics seem to indicate a caressing of the words. The Australian John Cameron (Sargent 1955) is a lightweight baritone and shows ease in the upper reaches of the music. He is exemplary in his adherence to the score's markings and his tonal colouring encompasses the full range of Elgar's expectations. Above all, there is great beauty of tone. His voice lacks the required weight for the Angel of the Agony, although it

is a beautiful performance which is, unfortunately, not matched by Sargent's rather pedestrian reading of the section.

A singer who really does fulfil the above-mentioned requirements for the Priest, as well as having the gravitas for the Angel of the Agony, is Boult's Robert Lloyd, to my mind the most successful singer on disc to combine these roles. As the Priest, Lloyd has the power and authority for the opening - also great dignity. He observes all the dynamics quite scrupulously, softening his tone beautifully where required, to astonishing effect. He manages the high tessitura well. Occasionally the long phrases find him a little short on breath, but the overall magnificence remains - and he shows that those long-held notes really count for something! Boult gives a very measured reading of this section, in accord with his intensely spiritual overview of the work. There is no undue haste in easing the soul of Gerontius out of this world. This performance is quite special. Lloyd's Angel of the Agony is equally magnificent. There is a huge ruggedness and a sense of anguish which is truly contained; he achieves a real *pp* in his handling of the wide dynamic range; there is warmth which is not contrived. The only blot occurs when he splits the phrase "glorious/home" when the orchestra swells in a sensuous arc, but it is a small price to pay for such a moving account.

Kim Borg (Barbirolli 1965) has had a rough ride from critics over the years, mainly due to his unidiomatic English, but he gives a beautiful account of the Priest - very warm and sympathetic, and it is a lovely sound. As the Angel of the Agony, the phrasing is a little choppy and he needs to get hold of the consonants more firmly, but it is by no means a bad performance. Gwynne Howell (Hickox), a singer I admire deeply, is sorely tested by the high, repeated notes of the Priest and there is some less than secure intonation. As the Angel of the Agony he exudes power, if not subtlety. I do not feel that he has done himself full justice in this recording. Benjamin Luxon's Priest (for Gibson) is much too hectoring; his "Go!" sounds like a rather cross schoolmaster shouting "Get out!" to a troublesome pupil. Hardly the tones for a deathbed! His Angel of the Agony is sung with a fine legato (in spite of the inherent vibrato in his voice, which troubles me not), but he is too overt, almost too expressive when restraint is needed; the drama should be internalised, the anguish *felt* rather than thrust full in the face!

Norman Bailey (Svetlanov) reminds us what a cruelly exposed first entry it is for the Priest, coming "cold" to it in live performance. Bailey makes a very rough start, but he quickly settles to give a moving account of the music, although some of the phrasing is choppy. Elgar wanted the voice of a Wotan for the Angel of the Agony and in Bailey we have a favourite interpreter of Wagner's god. His singing here is very satisfying. The weight of tone is right and the long-breathed phrasing is helped by Svetlanov's relatively brisk tempo. Marian Nowkowski (Barbirolli, Rome 1957), a much underrated singer in his time, manages the first entry of the Priest in a "live" context much better than Bailey. He brings a full, rich tone to the Priest and is not troubled by the tessitura. His Angel of the Agony is just as satisfying, if a little generalised, but there is a disfiguring moment at fig 113 on the phrase "where they shall ever gaze on Thee"; Nowkowski uses an upward *portamento* on the second syllable of "ever", followed by a large breath before attacking the word "gaze". Not a comfortable moment.

Handley's Michael George is prodigious in his breath control; as both Priest and Angel of the Agony there is seamless phrasing. As the Priest this (combined with the controlled approach to dynamics) makes him a very comforting figure. His Angel of the Agony opens with a curiously muffled quality on the high Ds and Es, but he gives a satisfying account of the solo, without achieving the fully searing quality which one finds with Robert Lloyd and Horace Stevens. John Shirley-Quirk appears for both Britten and Rattle and, like Michael George, he has tremendous breath control, achieving long, beautifully-shaped phrasing. His dark-hued baritone fully encompasses both roles. Inevitably, the voice is fresher in his earlier recording with Britten, but ultimately I would choose the performance under Rattle to represent this singer. His Priest has command and warmth in equal measure and his Angel of the Agony is filled with anguish and awe. In this latter part, he really does observe the *pp teneramente* and *p dolce* to spine-tingling effect. Rattle's accompaniment here achieves the right proportions of fear and comfort.

\* \* \*

Going through all these recordings within a relatively short space of time has not wearied the ear of the work; rather has it enriched and energised it and left me wishing for more. There are always artists who one hoped would have recorded the work or one hopes might yet do so, but one must not be greedy! We are lucky indeed to have so many recordings to choose amongst. I am not going to be presumptuous in recommending a recording outright - and nothing I have written is going to influence firm adherents to particular recordings or performers - but recently I had cause to introduce *Gerontius* to an acquaintance for whom it was his first experience of the work. I thought hard and long which recording to use, but I settled for Handley as a good all-round representation in modern sound.

Which recording do I turn to most frequently for sheer pleasure? That is easy : always Barbirolli's 1965 reading. However, in my "desert island" mood I conjure up my own personal ideal : Barbirolli, Vickers, Baker (1965), Lloyd, CBSO & Choir. Mind you, next week it could be Rattle, Nash, Hodgson..... See? The permutations are endless!

## RECORDINGS

### *Extracts*

- Elgar** (Royal Albert Hall, 1927) Steuart Wilson, Margaret Balfour, Herbert Heyner, Royal Choral Society, RAH Orchestra (EMI)
- Elgar** (Hereford Festival, 1927) Tudor Davies, Margaret Balfour, Horace Stevens, Three Choirs Festival Chorus, LSO (EMI)

### *Complete Recordings*

- Sargent (1945)** Heddle Nash, Gladys Ripley, Dennis Noble, Norman Walker, Huddersfield Choral Society, Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (Testament)
- Sargent (1955)** Richard Lewis, Marjorie Thomas, John Cameron, Huddersfield Choral Society, Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI)
- Barbirolli(1957)** (Italian Radio recording) Jon Vickers, Constance Shacklock, Marian Nowkowski, Orcestra Sinfonica e Coro della RAI di Roma (Arkadia)
- Barbirolli(1965)** Richard Lewis, Janet Baker, Kim Borg, Ambrosian Singers, Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus, Hallé Choir and Orchestra (EMI)
- Britten (1972)** Peter Pears, Yvonne Minton, John Shirley-Quirk, Choir of King's College, Cambridge, London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra (Decca)
- Boult (1976)** Nicolai Gedda, Helen Watts, Robert Lloyd, London Philharmonic Choir, John Alldis Choir, New Philharmonia Orchestra (EMI)
- Gibson (1976)** Robert Tear, Alfreda Hodgson, Benjamin Luxon, Scottish National Chorus and Orchestra (CRD)
- Svetlanov(1983)** Arthur Davies, Felicity Palmer, Norman Bailey, London Symphony Chorus, USSR State Symphony Orchestra (Melodiya)
- Rattle (1987)** John Mitchinson, Dame Janet Baker, John Shirley-Quirk, City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus & Orchestra (EMI)
- Hickox (1988)** Arthur Davies, Felicity Palmer, Gwynne Howell, London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra (Chandos)
- Handley (1993)** Anthony Rolfe-Johnson, Catherine Wyn-Rogers, Michael George, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra (EMI)

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1996

On 1 June the Chairman welcomed nearly 90 members to the AGM held at the Lyttelton Rooms in Great Malvern. He reported on another successful and encouraging year, and paid tribute to the contribution made to the Society by Carol Holt. Greetings were sent to the President, Lord Menuhin, on his 80th birthday; and extended to one of the Vice-Presidents, Ian Parrott, on reaching the same milestone. Andrew Neill outlined the work of the Society, and its plans for the future including possible new recordings and re-issues. He spoke of the Birthplace developments and their funding in the context of the place of art in modern society. (A full text of the Chairman's address is included with this issue).

The Acting Secretary, John Kelly, said that the Society should be aware of the sacrifices made by members of the General Committee in attending meetings in London. He reported on Committee business, including repair work in the area surrounding the Elgar grave in Little Malvern. There was increased interest in Elgar in many places, especially in Holland. Great possibilities were opened up by the Society going on to the internet; whilst at home "the next 15-20 years present special opportunities for the Society as the musical world celebrates successive centenaries of the major Elgar works". His year as secretary had, he said, "been mainly enjoyable, interesting, and revealing...it was an insight into what Carol Holt did for us all...something for which we should be forever grateful".

The Membership Secretary, David Morris, stated that there had been a slight fall in membership to 1290. Most of these, he said, were former Friends of the Birthplace who had "fallen by the wayside". A few branches had lost members, but others had shown an encouraging increase.

The Treasurer, John Greig, presented the accounts, which showed an income from subscriptions of over £13000. A large increase in the cost of advertising was due to the production of the new recruitment brochure. The balance sheet was very healthy, he said, but much of the money was already earmarked for future projects. The Committee had voted to supplement contributions made by individual members to the Carol Holt Fund, which now stood at almost £3500 and it would now be possible to begin the Fund's work of assisting young musicians. The accounts were approved, and Mr A Benselin re-appointed as Auditor.

The JOURNAL Editor spoke of the continuing interest in matters Elgarian, and how this put pressure on space in the JOURNAL. Many interesting articles had to be split due to the need to include items of current interest; and so to try and solve the situation, the JOURNAL will be split into two as from the March 1997 issue. A larger *Elgar Society Journal* will carry articles and reviews; and a smaller *Elgar Society News* will carry details of Society business, branch reports, concerts, and so forth. (More details will be given in the November issue).

The retiring Publicity Officer, Ian Lace, reported steady progress, and said he was constantly exploring new avenues. Opportunities were being sought (via Southern Branch) to include articles about the Society in county magazines; there has already been an offer to contribute to the Hampshire publication. This will target people who

don't read music magazines. Paul Rooke was appointed as Mr Lace's successor.

The International Co-ordinator, Margaret Benselin, said that "continental co-ordinators" had been appointed in North America, Europe, and Australasia to keep her informed of any activities. She spoke of Elgar performances abroad, and even of Elgar works played in this country by overseas performers.

The new Constitution was presented by the Treasurer, who spoke of the time and work spent on it by the working party. There were three very small amendments to the printed version (circularised to members in March). The discussion which followed centred on the different methods of electing Officers, and Council members; and on the composition of and appointment of members to the Executive Committee. However, no further change was made to the draft constitution, which was received unanimously (subject to the minor amendments mentioned above) by the Meeting. It comes into effect from 1 January 1997.

The President and Vice-Presidents were re-elected *en bloc*. The Chairman and Treasurer were also re-elected, while David Morris was chosen as Vice-Chairman to replace John Knowles, who was standing down. Wendy Hillary was elected as the new Secretary. Three new Committee members - John Norris, David Bury, and Roger Dubois - were elected to replace Paul Grafton, Arthur Reynolds, and Jim Holt.

Various items were mentioned under Any Other Business. Concern was expressed that the proposed refurbishment of the Winter Gardens complex at Malvern had raised the possibility of there being no Festival there next year. Paul Grafton reported on Malvern Hills District Council's decision not to back the Elgar Centre for English Music's attempt to purchase the Lawnside School site. "This has thrown ECEM into a certain amount of confusion", he said. "ECEM certainly exists, and has plans, but has gone into a process of reappraisal. It will rise from the ashes".

That evening, many members attended a performance of *The Apostles* in the Elgar Hall, given by the Malvern Festival Chorus and orchestra under Rory Boyle. It was good to hear it so close to the place where it had been written (Craig Lea). The singing of Catherine Sams as Mary Magdalene was a real delight; while Jeremy White gave a thoughtful, if slightly inhibited, account of Judas.

On Sunday, Elgar's birthday, members were given a warm welcome as usual to Birchwood for morning coffee. It was a glorious day, and the views of the Malvern Hills and across the Severn valley to Worcester and beyond, were spectacular. After lunch at the Malvern Hills Hotel at the foot of the British Camp, we were entertained in St Wulstan's Little Malvern by a string quartet from the Birmingham Conservatoire, who played the slow movement of Schubert's *A minor Quartet*; and then the Elgar *Quartet* (the slow movement of which was played in that same church at Alice Elgar's funeral in 1920). After that, a quick dash to Worcester for Evensong, when the anthem was Elgar's *Great is the Lord*, and after the procession to the Elgar Memorial Window Martin Passande placed a wreath, and the choir sang *They are at rest*. A large number carried on to Broadheath and the traditional sherry and birthday cake. It was a good opportunity for members to meet Melanie Weatherley, and to wish her well as she takes up her new position.



Our grateful thanks go to John Kelly, whose comprehensive organisation ensured smooth running of a very full programme of events.

The Editor

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## THE NOVELLO COLLECTION

On 15 May Sotheby's held a sale comprising "autograph letters, music manuscripts, and books from the Novello collection". The family firm founded by Alfred Novello handled the work of many important composers, including Mendelssohn, Gounod, and Dvořák; and of course were the publishers of virtually all the important works of Elgar. The letters from the composer to members of the firm, most notably Jaeger, but also Littleton, West, Brooke, and others are a most valuable collection and give a unique insight into the evolution of Elgar's greatest music. Fortunately, we have Jerrold Northrop Moore's edition of the correspondence, *Elgar and his Publishers* (Oxford, 1987, 2 volumes), which also includes letters held at the Birthplace and at the Hereford & Worcester Record Office, and elsewhere.

In its catalogue Sotheby's makes much of the fact that although Dr Moore published "four hundred or so" of the Novello letters, "almost as many have not appeared in print and a number of these are of the utmost interest and importance". Dr Moore makes clear his reason for omitting these letters in the Preface to his book, and it is worth quoting: "The major omission has been correspondence with Novello fixing details of concerts Elgar conducted. Novello acted for years as Elgar's agent, but these are not really publishers' letters. Their inclusion...would have made less clear the central matter of publishing Elgar's music; and it would unquestionably have introduced much tediousness in fixing and re-fixing dates, programmes, and fees - lengthy paragraphs of queries from Novello, brief and neutral replies from Elgar". Similarly, for such as letters accompanying the despatch of manuscripts or corrected proofs, Dr Moore has made textual reference, with date and source in a footnote.

One has to say that if the extracts from unpublished letters which Sotheby's quotes in the sale catalogue are anything to go by, it is questionable that they are "of the utmost interest and importance". This appears to have been the reaction of potential buyers, as the overall response to the sale was very disappointing. Almost half of the 36 lots were brought in without reaching their reserve price (ie. not sold); and only five lots exceeded their pre-sale estimate. One notable letter - to Alfred Littleton on 13 April 1911 giving a description of the *Second Symphony* - did fetch £2200. (An extract is reproduced overleaf; the whole text can be found in Moore, pp.741-2). Generally, the pre-sale estimates seemed very high for material much of which had already appeared in print, or was relatively unimportant; for instance, the note from Elgar to Jaeger sent on 28 August 1899 with the revised manuscript score of the *Enigma Variations* was sold as a separate lot, and although the wording was terse and routine, it went for £420 (its estimate had been £500 - £600).

NB. This is not to be printed literally  
 as extensive. It is only a guide  
 of things may be seen if suitable  
 you may No 2. Ch

(1857-1860)  
"Nerdy, rarely comest thou  
Spirit of Delight"  
Shelley

To get near the mood of the ~~And~~ Symphony, the whole of Shelley's poem may be read, but the music does not illustrate the whole of the poem, neither does the poem entirely elucidate the music.

The germ of the root  
is in the opening bars - there  
is a modified form of an  
hook for the last time in the closing  
bars of the last movement.

Clearly people *did* have money to spend. In a later part of the sale, following the Novello collection, a photograph of Elgar lying in bed holding a record, and inscribed by him to W L Streeton of HMV, fetched a staggering £3500. Could it have been a morbid interest in one of the last signatures of a dying composer which raised the price to this level? A full score of the *Cello Concerto*, inscribed by Elgar to Felix Salmond, who gave the first performance, went for £1800. This too seems excessive, given that Elgar apparently "could no longer remember the precise date of the premiere", which was added later.

In a perfect world money would have been made available from some national source to keep this unique collection together and available in, say, the British Library or the new Birthplace Centre. The amount needed would be small indeed compared with some of the projects financed by Lottery money. Now sadly it has been split, and may never come together again.

The Editor

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### BIRTHPLACE NEWS

We are delighted to welcome the new Curator of Elgar's Birthplace, Melanie Weatherley, and very pleased that Chris Bennett will be working with her on a part-time basis during what promises to be a very busy summer. Melanie is completing her postgraduate Diploma in Museum Studies at Leicester University, and has a Masters of Social Science from the Ironbridge Institute and a BA in English and History of Art from York. She has worked with the National Trust, Ironbridge Gorge Museum and most recently at the Black Country Museum. Melanie is also an accomplished artist and a keen amateur musician, playing the piano and the clarinet.

The Birthplace was involved in National Museums Week from 18-26 May with an exhibition entitled 'Music and Nature' which explores the influence of the countryside of Elgar's life and music, and was open until 2 June for the Elgar Society Birthday Weekend Celebrations : it was then taken by Melanie round interested local schools. An exhibition on *The Light of Life* will be held in August to coincide with its centenary performance at the Three Choirs. Our Member of Parliament, Sir Michael Spicer, visited the Museum on 18 May and opened the Exhibition. He also looked round the shell of the new Centre and the work which has begun on the landscaping and car parks - Phase 2 of the Appeal. We hope this will be completed before the Three Choirs Festival in August, and the orchard will then be planted in the late Autumn.

Another important event this summer was the presentation on 7 June of a cheque for £60,000 by the Chairman of the Malvern Hills District Council, Councillor John Tretheway, to Tim Waterstone, Chairman of the Elgar Foundation. This generous grant has been largely instrumental in enabling Phase 2 to go ahead.

We hope many supporters of the Appeal will be able to come to the Concert at Symphony Hall in Birmingham on 17 October, which promises to be a truly

memorable and indeed emotional evening, as it celebrates the 80th Birthday in April of our President Yehudi Menuhin, whom we are delighted and proud to welcome as conductor for the concert. Coupled with this we mark the centenary of our sponsors, the British Motor Industry. The Philharmonia Orchestra will be playing Mendelssohn's *Hebrides* overture, followed by Elgar's *Violin Concerto* with Menuhin's protégé Leland Chen as soloist; and the much-loved *New World Symphony* of Dvořák. Ticket prices range from £32.50 to £5; full details and a booking form are available from me at The Old School, Abberley Avenue, Stourport-on-Severn DY13 0LH. It is anticipated that all seats will be sold well before the performance date.

A further exciting date for your diary - the Philharmonia will again be playing for the Appeal, this time at London's Royal Festival Hall on 6 February 1997 with Leonard Slatkin conducting Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Elgar's *Cello Concerto* played by Stephen Isserlis, and *Symphony no 5* by Sibelius; again an extremely popular programme with marvellous conductor and soloist. Tickets will soon be on sale from the Appeal Office, price £18, £24 and £30.

Diana Quinney

SEVENTY FIFTH ANNIVERSARY  
CITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM  
CHOIR

1921 - 1996

75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Concert

SATURDAY 16th NOVEMBER 1996

Sir Edward Elgar :

THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS

Catherine Wyn-Rogers - Contralto

Anthony Rolfe Johnson - Tenor

Matthew Best - Bass

Conductor: CHRISTOPHER ROBINSON



TICKETS £8.00 £11.00 £15.00 £19.00 £22.00 £26.00  
BOX OFFICE 0121 212 3333

## RANDOM RAMBLINGS...

The Society will hold its annual Tea at the Three Choirs Festival on Sunday 18 August between 4.45 and 6.00 pm in the Great Hall of the Old Palace in Deansway, Worcester. The price is £5 per head, and details of booking can be found elsewhere. The Elgar elements in the Festival were given in the November JOURNAL, and are itemised in the Concert Diary. Apart from the concerts, there is *The Wand of Youth*, a new play by Peter Diamond "which explores, both nostalgically and controversially, through dialogue, music and photographs, the relationship between Elgar's boyhood and youth and his mature work". The play is being performed by the well-known actors Claire Nielson and Paul Greenwood, at 3.00 pm on 17 & 18 August at the King's School Theatre. An archive film programme at the same venue on 22nd at 11.00 am includes film of Elgar and Vaughan Williams at the Three Choirs, plus clips of Beecham, Koussevitsky, Paderewski, and others. Finally, Percy Young's realisation of *The Spanish Lady* will be "semi-staged" by principals and chorus of Opera Severn conducted by John Frith, in the Huntingdon Hall at 2.30 pm on 24th.

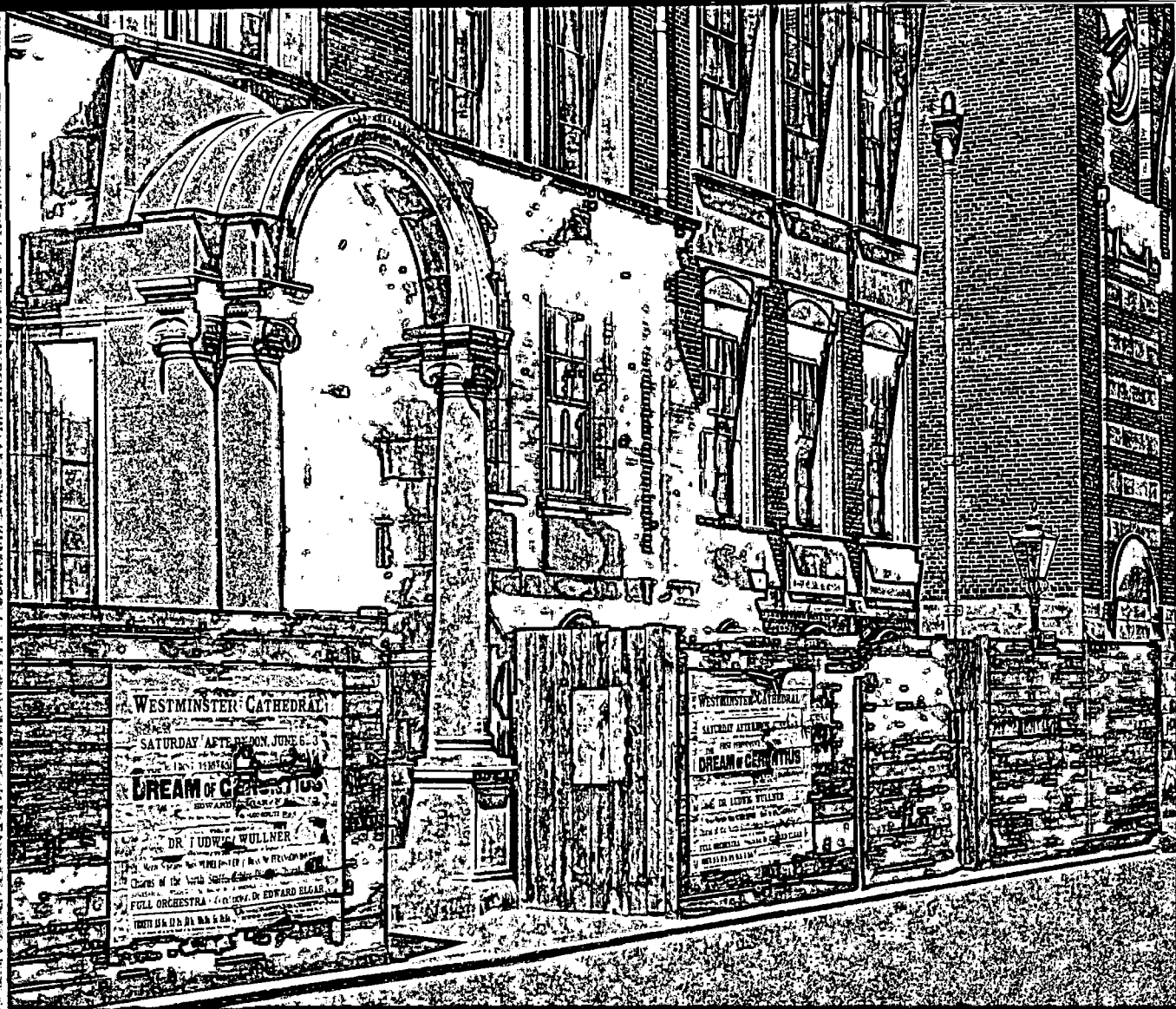
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Is there any chance that the *Reading Chronicle* was referring to one of our distinguished Vice-Presidents when it stated that the audience for a concert contained such musical celebrities as "Lady Barbara Olly, wife of the famous conductor"? This puts one in mind of a report of a concert in the North of England where some Beethoven was performed by a Miss A Solemnis.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first London performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* at Westminster Cathedral in June 1903 is well-known and has been well covered by biographers. (David Bury's article in the JOURNAL for January 1981 is particularly valuable for filling in much background detail). The performance took place because the Cathedral, although virtually finished, still awaited its consecration, after which only liturgical items could be performed there. Work had begun on the building in 1895, and so the centenary was celebrated last year, in honour of which a book was brought out. Entitled 'Westminster Cathedral 1895-1995' it was written by Peter Doyle and published by Geoffrey Chapman at £16.99. I was drawn to one of the photographs, which the Cathedral authorities have kindly allowed me to reproduce in the JOURNAL, showing the Cathedral just before its consecration. The horse and cart are a wonderful contemporary touch, but the dating of the photograph to the summer of 1903 is of course confirmed by the tattered posters advertising the Westminster *Gerontius*. The wording is very similar to that on the title-page of the programme [reproduced in Bury's article], and I have enlarged that section for the interest of members. It is fascinating to find that the name of the German tenor soloist is in larger print than that of the composer! Wüllner, although a singer of international fame, had only made his British debut a few weeks before, and his performance in the title role caused very different reactions among his listeners. The wording of the poster seems to be as follows: "Westminster Cathedral/ Ambrosden Avenue, Victoria





# WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

SATURDAY AFTERNOON JUNE 6-3

## DREAM OF GERONTIUS

DR. LUDWIG WULLNER

Choirs of the North-South Choirs of the Cathedral

FULL ORCHESTRA CONDUCTED BY EDWARD ELGAR

TRUTH SHALL BE ALONE

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FULL ORCHESTRA CONDUCTED BY EDWARD ELGAR

TRUTH SHALL BE ALONE

Street, S.W./ Saturday afternoon, June 6 at 3/ under most distinguished patronage/ First performance in London/ *The Dream of Gerontius*/ Edward Elgar/ Under the sole management of Mr Hugo Görlitz/ Special engagement of Dr Ludwig Wüllner/ who will sing the part of Gerontius in English/ Mezzo Soprano Miss Muriel Foster Bass Mr Ffrangcon Davies/ Chorus of the North Staffordshire District Choral Society/ Conductor Mr J Whewall/ Full Orchestra Conductor Dr Edward Elgar/ Tickets £5 5s £2 2s £1 1s 10s 6d 5s 2s 6d/ The net proceeds will be for the benefit of the Westminster Cathedral Choir Schools".

\* \* \* \* \*

Over the Easter weekend Classic FM broadcast its 'Hall of Fame', having asked its listeners to vote for their favourite pieces of classical music. It received more than 23000 replies and compiled a Top 300. The surprise winner was Bruch's *Violin Concerto no 1*, and the top ten contained no less than six concertos. Mozart was the most popular composer with 27 entries, followed by Beethoven with 22, Bach 14 and Tchaikovsky 13. Elgar was joint fifth with Brahms and Schubert. The eleven works chosen were the *Second Symphony* (293rd), *Salut d'Amour* (247th), *Chanson de Matin* (181st), the *First Symphony* (153rd), the *Violin Concerto* (143rd), *Serenade for Strings* (130th), *Introduction & Allegro* (119th), *The Dream of Gerontius* (99th), *Pomp & Circumstance no 1* (91st), the *Enigma Variations (Nimrod)* (seventh) and the *Cello Concerto* (sixth). Only Elgar and Beethoven had more than one composition in the Top Ten. Only ten of the 80 composers were British; Vaughan Williams had a creditable seven works, Delius and Holst two each, Britten, Butterworth, Clarke, Purcell, Tallis, and Warlock one each. I confess to surprise that such popular works as *Crown Imperial*, *Jerusalem*, and *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* failed to appear. What was very clear was that popularity is often a result of music being used in films, TV programmes, or commercials, or even from radio 'plugging' (Górecki's *Third Symphony* - virtually unknown three years ago - came 98th).

\* \* \* \* \*

The Society has a new Secretary, Wendy Hillary. Wendy is a Lancastrian, and her father was a music teacher. "There was always music in my home - Third Programme!" She leads a busy life, working for Oxfordshire Social Services as a Community Development Manager and teaching at Brooks University in Oxford; in her spare time, Wendy works as a Co-ordinator for the Emergency Service. An enthusiastic supporter of Elgar, recently she has kindly undertaken the job of putting the JOURNAL on to tape for blind members. "I look forward to a happy association with my fellow Elgarians", she says.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Prom season is almost upon us again. The prospectus this year contains a promotional CD on which various celebrities talk about their favourite music. Dame Judi Dench related how as a drama student in the 1950s she would cut lectures to attend rehearsals in the Albert Hall. The piece which made the greatest impact on



her was the Elgar *Cello Concerto*. "I was deeply moved by the music, as I am with all Elgar, who is to me so essentially English", she said. "But I was also moved by the tremendous passion of the music, which in a way is not English, and perhaps that's why I like the piece so much". The young Norwegian cellist Truls Mørk plays it on 25 August; the other works are to be found in the Concert Diary. As usual, there is a good deal of imagination in the choice of works, but the usual dearth of English music; hardly any Walton, Vaughan Williams, Britten, and only a token Arnold work in this his 75th birthday year (why no symphony?); and no Delius, Holst, Bliss, Bridge, Ireland, etc etc etc; or even Bantock in the 50th anniversary year of his death.

However, good news for lovers of English music. At the Strobe Theatre in Street Rutland Boughton's *Immortal Hour* will be given at the end of August as part of the Glastonbury Arts Festival; and a rare performance of Dyson's *The Canterbury Pilgrims* at the Barbican on 29 September, with Hickox conducting the London Symphony forces (and presumably a recording to follow).

Finally, at the Royal Albert Hall on 14 July, just before the Proms start, there is a 'Choral Masterclass' at 11.00, when 1200 voices will rehearse *The Dream of Gerontius* under the distinguished tenor Robert Tear, who will conduct the work in the evening. Proceeds are in aid of The Children's Society; I'm afraid the choir places are taken up, but you can still attend the concert. Contact the Hall Box Office (0171 589 8212) or The Children's Society (0171 639 1466).

\* \* \* \* \*

Christopher Harmer died in February at the age of 85. A member of the Society, he was also Vice-Chairman of the Elgar Birthplace Trust and the Foundation for many years. He practised as a solicitor in Birmingham but during the war worked for MI5 in recruiting and supervising double agents who fed false information to the Germans. To his wife Peggy and their four children we send condolences.

\* \* \* \* \*

Multiple Oscar-winning film composer John Williams was in London recently to record extracts from his new work *Summon the Heroes*, the official theme music of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. In a subsequent interview with Ian Lace, he revealed his love of Elgar. "I particularly like the two symphonies, and the *Cello Concerto* is my favourite Elgar work. I have had the privilege of performing it several times with Yo-Yo Ma". He also expressed admiration for the concert and film music of William Walton. "Walton's music was held in great regard by the Hollywood musical community and it greatly influenced my own work", he said. After expressing admiration for the writings of Jerrold Northrop Moore he left with a copy of the two most recent editions of this JOURNAL. Amongst John Williams' best-known scores are *Jaws*, *Star Wars* (the coronation scene march of which is very Elgarian), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (his favourite score), *Schindler's List* and his two 1996 Oscar-nominated scores, *Nixon* and *Sabrina*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Another interesting Hollywood connection in this centenary year of the cinema is with Miklós Rózsa, who died last year. Ian Lace points out that his music for Billy Wilder's film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* includes material from his *Violin Concerto*; and the march *Victoria Regina* which accompanies Queen Victoria as she arrives from Balmoral to inspect the newly-invented submersible. Rózsa directed the orchestra to play it "*quasi una marcia britannica e elgariana*"!

\* \* \* \* \*

Elgar Court, the first block in the new housing development at Symphony Court in central Birmingham was opened in May by Hilary Elgar, the composer's great-niece. She was very impressed by the area. "An ideal location for those who want to live by the water in the centre of the city", she said.

\* \* \* \* \*

Further to the piece by John McMinn on Thomas Neuhoﬀ's Elgar performances in Bonn comes news of performances of *The Dream of Gerontius* on 14 and 15 June at the Staatstheater in Mainz by the local forces under the direction of Peter Erckens. Dr Ursula Kramer of the Music Department of the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz writes the programme notes for the concerts at the Staatstheater, and has kindly sent details of a number of Elgar performances there. Herr Erckens, she says, "has built up a sort of Elgar tradition in Mainz". The *Cello Concerto* was given in February 1992 with Maria Kliegel as the soloist; followed in April 1993 by the *First Symphony*. The *Enigma Variations* were performed in February 1994, and in the November of that same year a complete Elgar programme comprising *Pomp & Circumstance March no 1*, *Introduction & Allegro*, and the *Second Symphony*. A performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* will take place at Riga in Latvia at the beginning of August.

On a slightly less exalted level, I notice that Bayern-Munich, one of Germany's most successful football teams, have adopted *Pomp & Circumstance no 1* as their team's signature tune! It seemed slightly incongruous to see the German fans on television responding so wholeheartedly to music which has always been seen as quintessentially British! Is this further proof that Elgar's music *can* travel, after all?

\* \* \* \* \*

Many members have spoken of their appreciation of Patrick Little's article in the last issue, on the poems used in *Sea Pictures*. Whereas I have always hesitated to draw conclusions and to make links and assumptions, particularly in regard to the women in Elgar's life, yet I found Dr Little's arguments well-reasoned and broadly convincing. What was of particular interest, and which I had not spotted before, is a *musical* link between *Sea Pictures* and Helen Weaver. The third song, 'Sabbath Morning at Sea', with its theme of a woman on a long sea voyage which would separate her from her friends, opens with a rising seven-note phrase. This same figure was originally used in 1883 (sixteen years before) as the closing chords of a polka written for the Powick Asylum. Entitled *Helcia*, it is one of three polkas from around that time which have links with Helen Weaver; the word, which I have been

unable to trace otherwise, seems to have been one of Elgar's pet names for her. It is surely more than coincidence that he chose to use this same theme to introduce that particular song.

\* \* \* \* \*

The other day I was pleased to come across in a bookshop (at a very reasonable price!) Sir Sidney Colvin's *Memories & Notes of Persons & Places 1852-1912*. It is an intriguing account of his friendships in the world of art and literature, and was much enjoyed by Elgar on its publication in 1921 (his letter to Colvin about the book appears in Moore's *Letters of a Lifetime* (p 358)). There is no mention of Elgar in it (their friendship only covered the last few years of the period); but what struck me as odd is the complete absence of any reference to music or musicians. From the correspondence between the Colvins and Elgar it is clear that Sir Sidney enjoyed music. Is it a reflection of the lowly place which music held among intellectuals in Britain during the late nineteenth century?

\* \* \* \* \*

The answer to the crossword clue "Prelude from Elgar's first in concert (5)" is 'Proem', meaning "introduction, preface". It was the title of the first of six poems by Gilbert Parker which Elgar chose to set to music as his Op 59. The other two he chose but did not set were 'The Waking', and 'There is an Orchard'. Another quiz question: I was recently given a pile of music which included a Prom programme for the first performance at those concerts of *The Dream of Gerontius*. In which year did it take place, and who were the performers? Answers next time.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Malvern Hills District Council has decided, by forty votes to three, not to give financial support to the Elgar Centre for English Music in its attempt to buy the empty Lawnside School site. A councillor was quoted as saying: "They are asking nearly £700,000 just to get it started and there is no guarantee that it will take off, and where will the money come from?" The owner of Lawnside said: "I would have liked to see Lawnside become the base for ECEM but it seems increasingly as if this is not going to happen, so I have to look at other uses for the building". His company has applied to the Council to convert the main house into eight flats, build six new houses in the grounds, and six more on the old tennis courts.

\* \* \* \* \*

A member has kindly provided the following information regarding Christopher Kent's *Edward Elgar: a Guide to Research*, described in the review in the March JOURNAL as "elusive". It can be obtained from Marston Book Services Ltd, PO Box 269, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4YN (tel: 01235 465500; fax: 01235 465555). The publishers, Garland, have also stated that their books can be ordered through local booksellers, but you will need to know the ISBN, which is 0824084454.

\* \* \* \* \*

Writing in *The Times* the journalist Joanna Pitman described her recent stay in Rangoon. She found difficulty in locating a suitable restaurant, and having found one she frequented it. When the management discovered she was British, every time she went there they would guide her to a special corner table: "then I would hear a preliminary scratching and an ancient gramophone would begin to play Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, followed by the Hallelujah Chorus from the *Messiah*. It was always in that order".

\* \* \* \* \*

As reported last year, the retiring organist of Wells Cathedral, Dr Anthony Crossland, chose *The Dream of Gerontius* as his final concert with the Cathedral Oratorio Society. He shared his thoughts on the work in the concert programme: "I do have a particularly deep attachment to the music of Elgar which defies any attempt at intellectual explanation. It is possible to talk of his very personal harmonic idiom, or the emotive effect of the wide interval spans in his melodic lines, or his heart-rending use of suspensions, or his amazingly rich orchestral language, all of which are true, but there is something beyond all these which provokes an immediate response not from the head but from the heart (or should it be even the soul?) What that something is one cannot easily say but a few clues may be gleaned from Elgar himself. In Part II of the *Dream*, the Soul of Gerontius describes the Angel's song thus: 'I cannot of that music rightly say whether I hear, or touch, or taste the tones'; whilst at the head of the score, Elgar writes: '...this I saw and knew; this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory'. Perhaps it is this refusal of the music to be defined, analysed or pigeon-holed, but become rather a form of communication which by-passes the mind and provokes an instinctive response from and rapport with the listener which accounts for my special love of Elgar's music and my wish that this should be the last work which I conduct for the Society".

I recently came across some similar reflections from Robert C Rusack, a former Bishop of Los Angeles: "If you wonder how an earthly life of only some 30 years' duration can possibly be spoken of in terms of the eternal Godhead, dare I write that the great hymn 'Praise to the Holiest' from *Gerontius* provides us with a hint. It took Elgar so many days, if not weeks, to compose it. It takes but a few minutes to perform. Yet for millions of people who have given themselves to it as listeners in a kind of act of faith, it has opened a way to a reality which transcends the bounds of time and space into an experience which we might even call a sort of resurrection. I have always thought that theology can take us just so far in our exploration of God, but then a limit is reached. That is the point where experience must take over: the experience of love, or prayer, of poetry, and of art and architecture, and of music".

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2 July                      Symphony no 2  
                                    Kensington SO/Keable

Queen Elizabeth Hall  
South Bank 7.45 pm

6 July	Enigma Variations <i>Forest PO/ Shanahan</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank 7.30 pm
9 July	Serenade for Strings <i>RCM Jnr Dept Ch O, Latymer Sch First &amp; Ch Os</i>	Queen Elizabeth Hall South Bank 7.30 pm
13 July	The Kingdom <i>Soloists/Bromley Summer Chor Fest Ch/Bromley SO/Brown</i>	Ravensbourne School Bromley 8.00 pm
14 July	The Dream of Gerontius "from scratch" (see Random Ramblings)	Royal Albert Hall 7.30
23 July	Bach Fantasia & Fugue <i>BBC PO/Sinaisky</i>	Royal Albert Hall 7.30 pm
3 August	Enigma Variations <i>European Union YO/C.Davis</i>	Royal Albert Hall 7.30 pm
3 August	Serenade for Strings <i>ASMF/Sillito</i>	Westmoreland Hall Kendal 01376 584453
17 August	'The Wand of Youth' (play)	King's School Theatre Worcester 3.00 pm
18 August	repeat of above play	as above
18 August	Piano Quintet <i>Susan Tomes, Alberni Stg 4tet</i>	Huntingdon Hall Worcester 3.00 pm
18 August	Give unto the Lord, Organ Sonata no 2 <i>Worcester Cathedral Choir</i>	Worcester Cathedral 5.30 pm
18 August	The Light of Life <i>A.Pearce,M.McDonald,N.Jenkins, R.Hayward/ W'ter Fest Ch/ RLPO/ Hunt</i>	Worcester Cathedral 8.00 pm
21 August	Symphony no 1 <i>BBC PO/Hunt</i>	Worcester Cathedral 8.00 pm
22 August	Vesper Voluntaries, String Quartet <i>David Brookshaw, Arioso Stg 4tet</i>	St John's Church, Claines 10.30 am
22 August	Archive film programme	King's School Theatre Worcester 11.00 am
24 August	The Spanish Lady (arr.Young) <i>Opera Severn/Frith</i>	Huntingdon Hall Worcester 2.30 pm
24 August	The Dream of Gerontius <i>S.Burgess,A.Davies,L.Albert/ W'ter Fest Ch/ BBC PO/Hunt</i>	Worcester Cathedral 8.00 pm
25 August	Cello Concerto <i>Merk/BBC Scott SO/Vänskä</i>	Royal Albert Hall 7.30 pm

30 August	Cockaigne <i>LPO/Norrington</i>	Royal Albert Hall 7.30 pm
1 September	'Elgar on Film' presentation <i>Andrew Youdell</i>	New Park Film Centre Chichester 3.00 pm Tel : Roger Gibson 01243 784881
20 September	The Dream of Gerontius <i>J.Rigby,A.Davies,P.Coleman-Wright/ LSC/ Bournemouth SO/ Hickox</i>	Barbican Hall 8.00 pm 0171 638 8891
21 September	The Apostles <i>S.Chilcott,L.Finnie,A.Thompson, P.Coleman-Wright,C.Bayley,S.Roberts Bournemouth S Ch &amp; O/ Hickox</i>	Barbican Hall 7.30 pm
22 September	The Kingdom <i>S.Chilcott,L.Finnie,A.Thompson, P.Coleman-Wright/ Bournemouth S Ch &amp; O/ Hickox</i>	Barbican Hall 4.00 pm <b>Please note time</b>
2 October	Enigma Variations <i>Bournemouth SO/ Kreizberg</i>	Poole Arts Centre 7.30 pm
6 October	Cello Concerto <i>Soloist tba/ NQHO</i>	Barbican Hall 7.30 pm
15 October	Violin Concerto <i>Chen/ RPO/ Menuhin</i>	Barbican Hall 7.30 pm
17 October	Violin Concerto <i>Chen/ Philh/ Menuhin</i>	B'ham Symphony Hall 8.00 pm
30 October	Cockaigne <i>CBSO/ Seaman</i>	B'ham Symphony Hall 7.30 0121 212 3333
31 October	Symphony no 1 <i>Philh/ Slatkin</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank 7.30 pm
2 November	King Olaf <i>Soloists/ Ceramic City Ch/ BBC PO/ Hunt</i>	Victoria Hall Hanley 7.30 pm 01782 207777
3 November	The Dream of Gerontius <i>C.Wyn-Rogers,J.Lavender,A.Michaels- Moore/ Philh Ch/ Philh/ Slatkin</i>	Royal Festival Hall South Bank 7.30 pm
13 November	The Dream of Gerontius <i>S.Fryer,W.Kendall,M.Best/Waynflete Sgrs/ Bournemouth S Ch &amp; O/ Hill</i>	Poole Arts Centre 7.30 pm 01202 685222

## CONCERT REVIEW

King Olaf.

*Hitchin Girls' School and Hitchin Boys' School, conducted by Paul Rooke  
20 & 21 March*

The combined forces of these Hitchin schools have a proud record, having in the recent past presented *Messiah*, *The Creation*, the *Requiems* of Brahms and Mozart, and Elgar's *The Light of Life*. However, when Paul Rooke told me that he hoped to conduct centenary performances of *King Olaf*, I must admit to having silent doubts mainly centred around the difficulties of young singers with a long and unfamiliar work. I am pleased to report that Paul's confidence was fully justified in these performances, the second of which was attended by several members of the London Branch.

From the opening bars Paul Rooke so paced the performance that interest never flagged. The combined choirs, assisted by teaching staff, parents and friends, sang strongly and confidently, obviously well-prepared and rehearsed. The children's voices were heard to beautiful effect, especially in 'As torrents in summer', and were well supported by the orchestra which achieved a fine string tone and a generally good ensemble. Roderick McPhee (bass) and Louise Hemmings (soprano) gave characterful performances in their solo roles, whilst Ashley Catling's lyrical tenor promised a fine voice when it achieves more power.

The performances (which were in part sponsored by the Elgar Society and also a 24-hour sponsored piano practice) involved over 250 youngsters and at least a hundred rehearsals. It was a credit to both schools and a tribute to the vision of Paul Rooke, true to his belief that one of the best ways for children to appreciate Elgar is to perform his work. To perform it to this standard made for an inspiring experience for all who were present.

Peter Greaves

## VIDEO REVIEW

Elgar's Tenth Muse, starring James Fox, Faith Brook and Selma Alispahic.  
*Warner Music Vision VHS Hi-fi 0630 14011-3. 51 minutes.*

Be thou the tenth Muse, ten times more in worth  
Than those old nine which rhymers invoke

*Shakespeare : Sonnet XXXVIII*

Paul Yule's fanciful teleplay about the origins of Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, screened by Channel Four's *Without Walls* programme on 12 March and now available on video, asks Elgarians to suspend momentarily their keepers-of-the-flame objectivity. If he is honest in the weave, can the dramatist take liberties with the embroidery? To serve the exploration of a larger truth, can the facts of an incident in Elgar's life be distorted if the story is told with a delicacy and good taste that matches the music?

The film's title poses the question by analogy : is Shakespeare guilty of reprehensible mythological incorrectness by invoking a tenth muse when Zeus and Mnemosyne produced only nine daughters?

Yule's tenth muse inspiration for what one critic termed "this elegant non-event" was Natalie Clein, whose performance of the *Cello Concerto* won the 1994 Young Musician of the Year competition. Set in 1919, the drama develops a relationship between our inspiration-starved composer and a young, exotic-looking Hungarian violin virtuoso called Jelly d'Aranyi. Yule fast-forwards Alice Elgar's last illness to make plausible her husband's need for muse-substitution.

Romance is frustrated by incongruity : Elgar's dalliance remains platonic whereas Jelly's infatuation races forward until a private performance of the *Violin Sonata* at Severn House brings her the realisation that Elgar cannot relinquish his buttoned-up milieu of leftover "Victorian antiquities" whose attitudes are irreconcilable with the manic post-war bohemianism embraced by Jelly and her companions.

The foundering friendship ends unhappily when Jelly takes flight from Severn House after Elgar proffers a clumsy kiss in the library. Yule's final frames invite us to associate the assertions that (i) henceforward Elgar "never completed another major work", and (ii) Jelly never married.

The strong points of the piece are the casting and the music. James Fox makes a convincing Elgar. So does Faith Brook's Alice. Bosnian actress Selma Alispahic is memorably good as Jelly d'Aranyi. The players make the best of a weak script by Nigel Gearing, enlarging their written roles with what Anthony Payne, writing in *The Independent*, sums up as "a touching emotional truth". The action is interspersed with musical interludes during which Miss Clein plays the concerto's Adagio exquisitely. Miss Alispahic mimes Maxim Vengerov's admirable playing of the *Violin Sonata*.

Yule's editing seems rough-hewn to me. Odd scene shifts and fragmentary narrative movements suggest that too much connecting tissue was left on the cutting-room floor to meet Channel Four's 51-minute broadcasting limitation. If so, what a pity that the playing-time could not have been lengthened in the video version.

How worrying are the factual distortions? Perhaps Yule's tenth muse should have the last word : "Everything I heard and felt in the music can be seen in the story", says Miss Clein.

Arthur S Reynolds

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

*A Prevailing Passion : a History of Worcester Festival Choral Society,*  
by Mary Parsons. *Osborne Heritage (Osborne Books Ltd), £9-95*

This is a well-produced and printed account of the Choral Society which has supplied the singers for the Worcester Three Choirs Festivals continually since 1887.



In fact, its antecedents go back before that for there was an earlier Society, documented in this book, which began supplying singers for the Festivals from 1861-68. Lack of finance and an equal lack of interest by members seems to have forced the Society into an unlooked-for period of non-activity, before the supposedly "passionate" music-lovers of Worcester made a more successful and sustained effort to promote choral music in the city. Of course, they did not only sing in the Festivals. There were a number of extra concerts given in Worcester; not in the Cathedral in the early days, as might be supposed, but in the then-standing Worcester Music Hall, and in the Public Hall. In the First World War the Theatre Royal was also used.

The compiler of this account, with, it appears, a deal of assistance from Donald Hunt, has researched diligently and has produced a detailed survey up to the end of 1995. A useful appendix lists almost all the works which the Society performed from its first days, and an interesting list it is. Some of those early concerts were very long, and must have taxed the energies of musicians, singers, and public alike! The Elgar family comes into the story of course - in the Band (it was not called Orchestra for many years), and then in the case of Edward Elgar as conductor. No startling new information, but enough detail to add that little extra to our knowledge of Elgar and his contemporaries.

The book is generous with photographs and reproductions of early programme sheets and posters. How nice to see a youngish, smiling Edgar Day, a vigorous Bertie Shaw, a more youthful Douglas Guest (in his Worcester days), and many others in the Worcester story. Incidentally, am I the only one not to know that the famous nineteenth-century Worcester musician William Done pronounced his name to rhyme with 'stone'?

This is, of course, a factual record of a local, but important, choral society. As such it falls under the heading of a work of reference for all those interested in choral music, Worcester, and not least Elgar and his friends. In addition, we learn of the many musicians who found their way to Worcester to make music both sacred and secular.

Ronald Taylor

Henry J Wood : Maker of the Proms, by Arthur Jacobs.

Methuen, 1994. 494 pp. £20.

The life of Henry Wood has been covered already in several books - his own *My Life in Music* in 1938; Jessie Wood's *The Last Years of Henry J Wood* in 1962, and Reginald Pound's centenary biography in 1969. Arthur Jacobs, well-known for his book on Sullivan, claims that the autobiography contains many errors and omissions, 'Lady' Wood's book is by definition restricted in its scope, and Pound failed to use much archival material, notably that of Wood's daughter Tania, and the BBC Archive at Caversham. One suspects that the title of this new book - published in the 100th year of the Proms - may have been insisted upon by the publishers to increase sales, for it is one of the author's main assertions that Wood's place in musical history is much more than that. It is beyond question to say that he

established the figure of the orchestral conductor in British society, giving it the eminence that it already enjoyed on the continent. Wood did this the hard way; not for him the selective repertoire of a Toscanini - his tastes were wide and generous. In the summer of 1942 Wood both premièred Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony* in this country, and also held a concert to celebrate the centenary of Sullivan's birth. "It was a combination", writes Jacobs, "which enshrined the musical range and character of Henry J Wood". Appendix 4 contains a list of some 716 works by 356 composers of which Wood conducted the first performance, or the first British performance, between 1889 and 1944. The figures are staggering, and worth reflecting upon. Bach, Bartók, Debussy, Mahler (four of the symphonies), Sibelius (three symphonies), Stravinsky... the list is long and awesome. And, despite his well-known advocacy of Bach and Russian music (and others!) Wood did noble work in promoting British music. There is scarcely a modern native composer who was not given a première by Wood. (He was a passionate early advocate of Delius; Jacobs thinks it is likely that criticisms made to Delius by Philip Heseltine about Wood's conducting in 1914 may have turned the composer towards preferring Beecham as an interpreter).

Elgar does not figure prominently in the book, though his music does. He and Wood were never close, though there was always a warm relationship and mutual respect (Wood is the dedicatee of the *Grania & Diarmid* music). Most Elgar premières were conducted by the composer (with three famous exceptions by Richter); yet Wood managed to conduct the first performances of *Wand of Youth Suite no 1*, *Sospiri*, the versions of *The Snow and Fly*, *Singing Bird* with orchestral accompaniment; and the last two *Pomp & Circumstance* marches (though no 5 was the first *public* performance, Elgar having recorded it two days earlier. Jacobs omits the fact that Wood conducted the first public performance of the *Nursery Suite*, again after the composer had recorded it). Wood also conducted the famous London première of the first two marches in 1901 - a significant occasion in Elgar's career. Wood played Elgar abroad (including a notorious account of the *First Symphony* at the Hollywood Bowl in 1926, when the annual 'Lions' Night' led to some high jinks in the audience which did *not* please the conductor!) At the beginning of the Second World War, Wood featured *Polonia* in many of his concerts; and during his years at the BBC regularly conducted *Gerontius* on Good Friday.

All this devotion to his profession was not without its cost; the well-known crisis in Wood's marriage in the mid-1930s is carefully chronicled in a sympathetic way, avoiding sensation and making clear that there were faults on both sides. What remains after reading this well-written and extremely fascinating book is the warmth and affection in which Wood was held by those who worked with him.

Misprints and other errors seem to be few and far between (Frank Schuster was *not* knighted, though members of his family were!)

The Editor

## RECORD REVIEWS

The Black Knight, Op. 25. Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands, Op.27  
London Symphony Chorus, London Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by Richard Hickox  
Chandos CHAN 9346

It is staggering to realise that Groves' première recording of *The Black Knight* is now twelve years old. The Society played an important part in getting that project off the ground and the thought that there might ever be a rival recording probably never entered our heads! Earlier issues in the series of Elgar recordings Hickox is making for Chandos have left me somewhat underwhelmed. For me, they have smacked too much of the routine; safe studio events rather than dynamic live music making. I am, however, very enthusiastic about this newcomer.

In spite of comments in the control room during the EMI sessions, no one seemed brave enough to say directly to Sir Charles that the opening could go a touch faster. Even in the hall, it all sounded a bit lumpy and rather thin. Hickox shows that tempo is not necessarily what it is all about. His first page is slightly slower than Groves' but the music sounds more alive and immediate. The first choral entry is instantly arresting. That said, the tempi of the two rival versions are remarkably close for the whole work. As Hickox moves towards letter C and the "play of spears", there is a fine sense of onward movement building through to the reprise of the initial theme at J which sounds strong and purposeful, a nicely-blended sound with a clear bass line, crowned a page or two later by rich sounds from the organ.

There is a fine sense of swagger in the second movement. The sudden silence at letter D and the *pianissimo* choral entry that follows it brought problems of stage noises during the Groves sessions - it was the early days of digital recording. The Chandos engineers handle this very well and there is a very wide dynamic range from the quietest whisper to the sound of the full forces. The ride into battle, punctuated by a very telling bass drum, goes particularly well; had Elgar heard the Ride to the Abyss in Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*, I wonder? In the following movement, the *pianissimo* sounds as the King's daughter begins to dance with the stranger are very effective.

The opening pages of the Finale are also impressive with a lovely lilt to the playing and singing with an engaging swagger as the claims of the effectiveness of the "golden wine" are propounded. The highlight of the performance though is the largely unaccompanied singing describing how the King "beholds his children die", with each nuance and marking clearly etched within the warm choral sound. To hear these singers in some of the unaccompanied choral songs would be a treat. Notice too the part for solo violin, a real foretaste of things to come.

Listening to either recording is to marvel afresh at the confidence of the writing, a huge undertaking from seemingly so inexperienced a composer. The Groves is now generously coupled with Handley's *King Olaf*, a must for any Elgar collection. Hickox gives us another "second" recording - *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands* in the version with orchestral accompaniment. I have written in these pages before

of my conviction that Elgar worked on both versions of these songs simultaneously. It is not as though he orchestrated the accompaniment as an afterthought. I believe that the orchestral sounds were always there. That said, in spite of the affecting intimate, almost domestic quality of the piano version, I much prefer to hear the songs in full dress. Del Mar's première recording for EMI was fine but on the whole the newcomer is even better. The *giocoso* marking of the opening (a resonance with the third movement of Brahms' *Fourth Symphony* written just a decade earlier?) is delightfully realised. The unaccompanied singing of "Ever true was I to thee" in the second song is very special and once you have heard the violin countersubject a little later, then you have glimpsed one of the delights of the orchestral version. Suffice it to say that the account of 'The Marksman' is full of energy and is delivered with great panache. Once it has been heard like this, then both the version with piano and the purely orchestral third Bavarian Dance inevitably sound incomplete and somewhat inadequate.

John Knowles

'The Long Day Closes' : English Romantic part-songs.

*Canzonetta conducted by Jeffrey Wynn Davies*  
SOMMCD 204

'Bushes and Briars' : Folksong arrangements and part-songs by Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst and others

*London Madrigal Singers conducted by Christopher Bishop*  
*Baccholian Singers of London*  
EMI CMS 565123-2 (2 CDs)

I will declare my partiality immediately; I take enormous delight in part-songs of this period, particularly when the singing is of such a high standard as here. Canzonetta were winners of the 'Choir of the Year' in 1992, and here on the new Somm label they sing twenty-one items, nearly all from the nineteenth-century. There is a good mix of the familiar - *Sweet and Low*, *The Long Day Closes*, *The Blue Bird*, and *As Torrents in Summer* are all here - and the neglected. I particularly enjoyed *Music all powerful* by T F Walmisley and Macfarren's *When daisies pied*. The three Elgar songs are all well done, but the first - *As Torrents in Summer* - is sung in D rather than E♭. (Were there problems with intonation?) *My Love dwelt in a Northern Land* is beautifully sung. The general tempo is just about perfect, but the conductor has an annoying tendency to linger in places where the music needs to press on; an unmarked *ritardando* at "we watched the moon" (bar 30) is a case in point. The tune, marked *pp*, in this central section is given to Soprano and Tenor I; the other parts should be *ppp*, but here they are too loud and the balance suffers as a result. But I am being ultra-critical; as I said, this is lovely singing, with a wonderfully controlled ending ("colder than the clay"). *Go song of mine* is a real test for any choir; Canzonetta rise to it nobly, and come through with (generally) flying colours. The sole qualification is that the tenor sound is a little harsh, with one or two voices which stand out (the tenors are very exposed in this song); but once again this is very much a performance to live with. The recorded sound is good, and if this repertoire is new to you, this disc would be a wonderful introduction.

The two-CD set at mid-price is a combination of three LPs from EMI's old CSD series. The Vaughan Williams arrangements are sung by the London Madrigal Singers under Christopher Bishop, probably more familiar to Society members from his work on the other side of the microphone as one of EMI's leading record producers, and responsible for many Elgar records over the years. These are very compelling performances, sung by outstanding voices (solos are sung by such as Ian Partridge and Christopher Keyte); the marvellous choral suite *Five English Folk Songs* with which the collection ends, can rarely have been sung more musically or convincingly.

The Baccholian Singers are another ad hoc group (this time male-voice only) containing such as Ian Partridge (again) Stephen Varcoe, and Michael George, so once again the listener expects and gets impeccable singing from a technical point of view. The vexed question of whether just eight voices, however wonderful, can do justice to such a repertoire has to be raised. To me it works better in some songs than in others; it is not inappropriate for the rather spare textures found in some of the Holst songs from the second LP, for instance; but the thinness shows in places in the Elgar, despite the compensation of some close-miked recording. One longs for more body in such as 'Feasting I watch'; and the soldiers following the drum in *The Reveille* sound a pretty depleted squad! After all, we know that Elgar wrote these songs for competitive festivals where choirs were probably five or six times larger than the forces here. Having said that, there is little competition on disc in the *Greek Anthology* songs, and again there is some wonderful singing; the closing bars of *The Wanderer* ("Methinks it is no journey") are absolutely superb. The remaining songs from what was the third LP are well worth having, especially Britten's *Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard*, and Warlock's rollicking setting of *The Lady's Birthday*, a wonderful way to round off the disc.

The Editor

#### CD Round-up

Last issue contained a review of the LPO under Richard Armstrong playing Elgar on the budget-price label Belart. Members might be interested in two other recommendable discs which have both been available from Belart for some time. On one, Sir Arthur Bliss conducts the *Pomp & Circumstance* Marches, as well as his own suite from the film *Things to Come*, and *Welcome the Queen*, a piece Bliss wrote as Master of the Queen's Musick to celebrate the young queen's return from her Commonwealth tour in 1954. The Elgar was recorded in 1959, and though the sound shows its age, the Marches are given wonderfully spirited, invigorating performances. Only 50 minutes music, but at around a fiver still extremely good value (450 143-2). So too is the combination of Elgar's two most popular large-scale works : Lynn Harrell's very enjoyable account of the *Cello Concerto*, and the *Enigma Variations* from Mehta and the Los Angeles Philharmonic - this last a little idiosyncratic in places, perhaps, but generally an exhilarating performance (450 021-2).

It is said that EMI allowed Vernon Handley to record the incidental music to *The Starlight Express* as a reward for helping Boult on *The Apostles*' sessions. Whatever the reason, we can be grateful that this wonderful music is available to us. There is

that same sureness of touch one finds in all Elgar's music with childhood connections, and yet amazingly the composer wrote well over an hour's music in just over a month. Although Elgar did draw on a little of *The Wand of Youth* music in places, it is carefully selected and integrated into the plot; and there is some fine original music of considerable depth. The words of the third *Laughter's Song* - "They'll listen to my song, and understand that...the weary world has rather lost its way" - must have touched a deep chord in Elgar in the second year of a frightful world conflict. The music to this song is akin to the quiet inner musings one finds from the same combination of soprano and solo violin in parts of 'The sun goeth down' in *The Kingdom*, and it is immensely powerful.

Handley is as reliable as ever as an interpreter, although the main theme of the opening is a little plodding, considering the *moderato con moto* marking. The LPO are generally responsive, though there is some shoddy string ensemble in track 8, and suspect intonation in the solo clarinet in track 2. The soloists are adequate, although I feel that Derek Hammond-Stroud could have been a little more relaxed, like the eminent Savoyard we know him to be. Perhaps he was overawed by singing Elgar, as he is at his best in 'Wake up, you little Night Winds' where the music is much more like Sullivan. *The Starlight Express* first appeared on CD some years ago, as part of a two-disc set which also featured Delius' *Hassan*. It should be pointed out that in order to accommodate the work on one CD, two short pieces of instrumental music, of 35 and 38 bars respectively, have been omitted. But every Elgarian should have this (CD-EMX 2267).

Barenboim's recording of the *First Symphony* now joins its companion on Sony's budget-price 'Essential Classics' series. I gave it a fairly thorough review in the JOURNAL for January 1994, and can add little to what I said then; to me it remains an attractive, but ultimately flawed, account. The fill-up then was Barenboim's *Sea Pictures* with Yvonne Minton. Now the symphony is found with two other works; the *Bassoon Romance* played by Martin Gatt, which is adequate, but inferior to the Michael Chapman version with Marriner (soon to be re-issued by EMI). However, Barenboim's *Cockaigne* is a real joy; he indulges himself to just the right degree. It has appeared on CD before, but not for some time and only then as part of a two-disc set, so is worth having (SBK 53510).

A new Philips recording restores to the catalogue *Cockaigne* and the *Enigma Variations* played by the LSO under Sir Colin Davis from the 1960s, which I think are new to CD. The *Variations* are very fine, played with great warmth and affection and attention to detail - one of the finest recorded versions, I think. The overture is slightly less successful, played a little too slowly for me, the military band being especially ponderous. The fill-up on this well-filled disc is Heinrich Schiff's excellent account of the *Cello Concerto* with the Staatskapelle Dresden under Sir Neville Marriner. Well worth getting [442 652-2].

The Editor

## BRANCH REPORTS

**SOUTH WALES.** Members were pleased to welcome Professor Emeritus Ian Parrott to its meeting of 20 April. An old friend of the Branch, Ian Parrott had recently celebrated his 80th birthday and delivered - to a larger audience than is usually seen at Friendship House - a talk entitled 'My Life of Music'. Betraying no signs of the advance of years and full of *joie de vivre* as ever, the speaker touched upon several phases of his life, including his military service during World War II in North Africa, where his well-known orchestral piece *Luxor* was conceived. Extracts from other works were also heard, giving abundant evidence of his range and versatility as a creative artist; amongst recordings played was one, kindly provided by the Branch Secretary, of the speaker's 80th birthday concert.

Later this year George A Davies will address the Branch on 'The Bakers of Henton', and Trevor Fenemore-Jones will speak on 'Elgar and Purcell'.

**SOUTH-WEST.** In February we were honoured to welcome Anthony Payne to speak about his work on the *Third Symphony*, which should soon become known as Elgar's 'Unfinished'. March saw David Bury giving his fascinating talk on 'The Sad Doll'; and in April Peter Sargent spoke about his famous father. A large audience raised £100 for the Sir Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children. At our first May meeting held in Exeter, we were pleased to welcome Branch Chairman (and Bantock Society Chairman) Ron Bleach to speak about 'Elgar and Bantock - a musical friendship'.

An interesting group of meetings for the autumn season has been arranged; further details from the Branch Secretary.

**YORKSHIRE** Branch has had two very interesting meetings since the last issue of the JOURNAL. On 11 March we had a visit from David Denton of the Naxos record company. Naxos has risen to a surprising eminence in the recording world with their all-digital, super-budget CDs and we heard from David the story of this achievement, together with excerpts from their growing number of Elgar recordings. Also played were excerpts of English light music from their associated Marco Polo label, and at the end members were able to buy copies of the discs played.

After the AGM had been disposed of on 8 April, with no change in officers or committee, our next meeting on 13 May was the occasion for a visit from Paul Grafton, grandson of Elgar's sister Polly and Will Grafton. To have a member of the 'Elgar family' actually with us was a great occasion and Paul fascinated us all with his Elgar account as seen from the Grafton side, with many instances of the way in which Edward maintained contact with and often sought refuge with his sister's family, throughout his life. Some family photos were shown on the screen, including one very early one of Polly and Will, probably from about the time when Edward lodged with them in the 1880s.

**NORTH-WEST.** Since the last report we have had a talk by Dennis Clark on Fred Gaisberg, and one on Gustav Holst by Ian Lace. Both of these were greatly enjoyed by the branch. In March our Elgar luncheon took place when our speaker was Arthur Butterworth. This was also much appreciated by all present.

With the end of the present season the branch is already involved in organising the 1996-97 programme. To date we have planned a visit to Liverpool Anglican

Cathedral for an Elgar Evensong; a music recital to be performed especially for the branch at Chetham's Music School; and a talk by Michael Kennedy on Elgar, Strauss and their wives.

WEST MIDLANDS. Our annual Lunch Party was held in Malvern on 17 February. The occasion was a great success, 44 members being present. The Chairman proposed the toast "To the memory of Sir Edward Elgar"; and members entered into the spirit of Elgar's love of word games as they struggled to decipher anagrams of titles of his music : "INLAND COD ROT REGULATION" gives quite a different nuance to *Introduction and Allegro*!

Our season ended on 20 April with a thought-provoking and well-received talk by conductor/composer Arthur Butterworth on 'Elgar from the Conductor's Viewpoint'. He offered his own long-considered views on musical interpretation. He felt that a piece of music should be approached with a knowledge of all the composer's works, his life and character and the times in which he lived. The printed score should not be regarded as sacrosanct. Interpreters are sometimes able to enlarge a work beyond the composer's original conception. Arthur's obvious pleasure in sharing his musical philosophy added to ours in listening to him.

Through the good offices of Mrs Katie Bishop we have been honoured to take into our care some paintings and prints, relating to Elgar, by the late Vivian Cooke (obituary, November 1995, p 139). It is Mrs Bishop's wish that they should be displayed in honour of Sir Edward and in memory of Vivian Cooke herself. They will be on permanent loan to the Birthplace.

At the suggestion of the Branch, Malvern Hills District Council acknowledged the work of Hilary Carruthers, sculptor of the bust of Elgar in Priory Park, Malvern, by an inscription on its plinth. Sadly, as we go to press, we have to report that the bust was vandalised and stolen on 10 May, a week or so before the Malvern Elgar Festival. It is a matter of great sadness that this should happen; the bust has stood there since 1960. Must the mindless vandal have his way in this day and age?

Our first event of the 1996-97 season will be a talk by Michael Hurd on 'Novello', in Christ Church Hall, Malvern on 5 October at 2.30 pm.

Elgar's association with places has been prominent in the SOUTHERN Branch's programme this spring. In March, Ian Lace gave a talk on 'Elgar and London'. Both Ian's observations and the many slides proved endlessly fascinating. In May it was the turn of 'Elgar and Yorkshire'. Dennis Clark came to us for the third year in succession, this time illuminating us southerners on the delights of Elgar's haunts in Dennis's own part of the world. His skills as a photographer were as much in evidence as those as presenter and entertainer!

In between these meetings there was a members' afternoon when 'Tingle Factor' Elgarian choices were played. *Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, the *Piano Quintet* and the *First Symphony* might seem rather obvious choices, but who would have thought that the song *Pleading* would have been chosen, quite independently, by two members?

We reconvene in the autumn with a repeat (by public demand) of the presentation of *Sea Pictures* by Jennifer Nicholas and Phyllis Shipp.

LONDON. At the February meeting, Geoffrey Brand gave a most interesting and informative presentation, entitled 'The Severn Suite'; in March, Diana McVeagh, a



Vice-President of the Society and former Branch Chairman, delighted us with a finely-wrought analysis of the relationship between Franck and Elgar; and the May meeting consisted of A P Hollingsworth's presentation of the late Kenneth Seed's 'Elgar's Worcestershire', an audio-visual treat in which slides of the county were seen against a background of music by Elgar and others.

In March, members of the branch were actively involved with two performances of *King Olaf*, one at the University of Reading, the other at Hitchin Girls' School; both received the Society's financial support.

On 19 May, members and their partners and guests, a total in all of about one hundred, celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the branch by meeting for lunch at Monkey Island Hotel, Bray, just a stone's throw from The Hut. A first-rate meal was followed by some excellent speeches and then by a short programme of music for violin and piano given by Ruth Williams (who played for us at last October's meeting). A memorable day was brought to a fitting and moving conclusion by a service of Evensong at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, where, through the kindness of the authorities, and in particular Jonathan Rees-Williams and Roger Judd (Organist and Assistant Organist respectively), we heard some of the *Vesper Voluntaries*, the chant in D $\flat$  written for Psalm 68, Hugh Blair's setting of the canticles, the anthem *Give unto the Lord*, and as a closing voluntary, the *Second Sonata*. Our thanks go to all who worked behind the scenes to ensure a successful day, particularly John Kelly and John Norris, and we hope that a detailed account will appear in due course.

At the time of writing, preparations are in hand for the Branch AGM, and the programme for the 1996-7 season is gradually taking shape.

## LETTERS

From: Sandy Morrison

*It is unexpected to find Elgarian references in a book ostensibly on a Lincolnshire childhood. This is indeed the case in The Brides of Enderby by Ralph Townley published by Century (Hutchinson) in 1988.*

*The writer states that his father, although later resident in Horncchurch, Lincolnshire, was born in Tewkesbury where his father (ie. the writer's grandfather) Nelson Townley was a stocking maker. "Father held a strong resemblance to his older second cousin Edward Elgar and, apart from looking alike, in their early lives they had much in common" - that is, primarily an interest in liturgical music.*

*The writer describes how he was drawn to Elgar's music and mentions that on several occasions his father used to visit the Elgars in Hereford, presumably from Tewkesbury, having travelled by train with his bicycle in the guard's van.*

*I don't recall previously having noticed the name Townley in the Elgar literature but there would have been nothing before now to bring it specially to my attention. The book's title refers to a so-named peal of bells at Boston rung as a warning of floods, named after womenfolk in the village of Mavis Enderby. A specific incident of its use was celebrated by Jean Ingelow (1820-97) in a poem The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire 1571, published in 1863. To complete the circle there is an interesting Elgarian reference here in that in 1892 and 1901 Elgar contemplated setting this poem to music but without positive result [see*

From: John Hammond

*For many years I have been intrigued by the words of The Dream of Gerontius, and in particular whether the poem is meant to be a description of a dream or whether we are meant to infer that an actual death has occurred. The title of the poem would suggest that it is indeed a dream, an interpretation confirmed by Henry J Jennings in his biography of Cardinal Newman : "Gerontius, while he lies dying, dreams of his soul's transportation to the unseen world, and its reception by the ministering agents of the Almighty's will".*

*However, in the original poem there are some lines (not set to music by Elgar) which suggest that only Part I is a dream :*

*I had a dream; yes, someone softly said  
'He's gone'; and then a sigh went round the room,  
And then I surely heard a priestly voice  
Cry 'Subvenite'; and they knelt in prayer.*

*I would be interested to know whether there is a definitive answer to the question of whether an actual death has occurred, or whether this is still a matter of debate.*

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From: Neil Mantle

*I thought it might be of interest to members to know that I have just returned from Orléans where I conducted what is believed to be the French première of Elgar's The Music Makers. The performers were the Dundee Choral Union (of whom I am the conductor), and the orchestra of the Conservatoire d'Orléans. We performed it in the beautiful Cathedral as the opening concert of the Orléans Festival. The work was enthusiastically received by a capacity audience of around 200. Interestingly, if surprisingly, the review compared the work with the Verdi Requiem!*

*I pointed out to the French orchestra the quotes from Rule Britannia and La Marseillaise - citing them as an early example of European co-operation. I hope that some at least of the missionary zeal I felt in presenting this beautiful music to the French audience succeeded in making some fresh converts!*

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