

SYM: III.

The Elgar Society

JOURNAL

Percuss.

I.
Flaut.

II.

Oboi.
I, II.

Coro
Inglor.

I.

Clarineto
in Bb

II.

Clarineto
Basso

Fagoro.
I, II.

Contra
Fagoro.

I, II.

Coro
in F

III, IV.

I.

Trombe
in C

II, III.

I, II.

Tromboni
e Tuba.

I, II.

Arpe.

Violini I.

Violini II.

Viola.

Violoncelli.

C. Basi.

JULY 1997

VOL. 10, No. 2

The Elgar Society Journal

115 MONKHAMS AVENUE, WOODFORD GREEN, ESSEX IG8 0ER
0181- 506 0912

Vol.10, No.2
July 1997

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ELGAR'S 'BRASS BAND THING'

The Severn Suite

Philip Maund

Although held to be a relatively minor work in Elgar's canon, written after the 1920 watershed of his wife Alice's death, the *Severn Suite* (1930) is nevertheless revered as a brass band institution which gave the stamp of legitimacy to a medium whose repertoire of original works was in its infancy at the time it was written. For the performer and listener it is an eighteen-minute cocktail of pomp, virtuosity, dignified solemnity, poise and playfulness; and its unique hybrid structure of five interlinked movements, combining Romantic gesture with classical form, makes it a rewarding subject for study. Yet on many occasions in Elgar literature it has received only cursory comment and has been portrayed as a piece undertaken reluctantly, tacked together from previous sketches, and left in another's hands to bring it before the band public.

This paper is based on research carried out since the composer's autograph brass band score of the *Severn Suite* was put up for auction at Sotheby's in May 1995. It queries the standard account of events during the work's composition, specifically the part played by its supposed arranger Henry Geehl, offering evidence which suggests Geehl played up his role in an article published thirty years later, and that Elgar himself was involved to an extent not previously acknowledged. It also offers fresh perspectives from the work's manuscript sources on the question of whether the key in which the work was first published for brass band corresponded to Elgar's intentions, a matter which has recently stimulated much debate in brass band circles.

Unfortunately, in an effort to provide a ready answer to a complex question, that debate has on occasions drawn conclusions from groundless speculation rather than the interpretation of tangible evidence. The findings presented here, based on the source material currently available (which includes several previously uncited documents), do not claim to be a definitive interpretation. Rather, in challenging received opinion, they indicate the need for further detailed scholarly appraisal of the work and its sources, which in turn may shed more light on a period towards the end of Elgar's life which has until recently been regarded as a creative wilderness.

In 1930 John Henry Iles' National Brass Band Festival at the Crystal Palace celebrated the occasion of its 25th annual contest. To mark the Jubilee the Master of the King's Musick, Sir Edward Elgar was asked to compose a piece which would test the musical mettle of the best amateur brass players in the country. The person behind the test-piece commission was Iles' right-hand man Herbert Whiteley (1873-1953) who in the early 1900s had embarked on a crusade to establish a repertoire of original works for brass band at a time when it relied entirely on selections and arrangements of works from outside the brass band medium. Whiteley had been organist and choirmaster at Saddleworth, Lancashire in his younger days. He had also run musical correspondence courses which first brought him into contact with



Herbert Whiteley (date unknown) editor of the British Bandsman (1906-30) and musical advisor to the publishers R Smith. Whiteley played a central role in engaging Elgar to compose the Severn Suite for the 1930 Crystal Palace contest (Photo courtesy British Bandsman)

band musicians and earned him the nickname 'The Harmony Man'.¹ Moving to London, he was appointed editor of the *British Bandsman* newspaper in 1906 and musical advisor to the brass band music publishers R Smith & Co Ltd, both companies owned by Iles.

Whiteley was a great admirer of Elgar's music, and during his time as editor of the *BB* regularly devoted space to news and comment on Elgar in its columns. In a letter to the composer written in 1930, Whiteley presented his Elgarian pedigree : "...I have in the past (when living in the Manchester district) upheld & supported your music & your photograph (and the only one) was hung in the old farmhouse where, on the Yorkshire and Lancashire border, many musicians used to meet and discuss native music at a time when almost every British composer was ignored...Those days were long before Richter came to Manchester"² Whiteley

appears to have first made personal contact with Elgar in 1912, shortly after the Elgars moved home from Hereford to Hampstead. Writing to Carice Elgar Blake a few years after her father's death, Whiteley noted that Elgar "was the first composer to give me any encouragement in my plan of improving the outlook of brass bands & their music. That was in 1912! A long time ago"³ According to Whiteley, he corresponded with Elgar over a period of eighteen years between 1912 and 1930.⁴ So far no letters prior to 1930 have come to light, but Whiteley alludes to having regularly supplied Elgar with the published scores of new works for brass band as they emerged. In February 1930, whilst they were discussing terms for the *Severn*

¹ Obituary notice by Denis Wright, *British Bandsman*, 24 January 1953, p 1

² Letter dated 31 January, Hereford and Worcester Record Office (HWRO) 705:445 2084; published in J N Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers : Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford, 1987) p 869

³ Unpublished letter dated 12 October 1939; HWRO 705:445 9428

⁴ Letter by Herbert Whiteley to the *Daily Telegraph*, 15 April 1939

THINK IT OVER.
*How many think justly of thinking for I
 How many never think, who think they do?*

HAVE YOU
 ever thought of
Studying by Post,
THEORY OF MUSIC?

IF NOT,
WHY NOT?

Write for details to
'Herbert Whiteley,
Marslands, Dobcross,
via Oldham.

*The correspondence pupil can
 Study under whatever conditions
 he finds most convenient
 and favourable to himself.*

*The terms of tuition are so moderate,
 that no one will be debarred from taking
 the lessons on the score of expense.*

An advertisement for Whiteley's correspondence courses from the 1902 Coronation issue of the *British Bandsman*. Before becoming Editor, Whiteley advertised regularly and was known as 'The Harmony Man' (*British Bandsman*)

pulled out all the stops to elicit confirmation : "I declined other works on the strength of your promise - [with the understanding that the fee should be reconsidered]. £60 was the largest fee paid previously; I suggested £100 in your case & half gramophone rights or £150 inclusive. What more can I add? - except to ask you to name your terms. Please do not let me down".⁵ A week later a figure had still not been settled, but the tone of Whiteley's next letter is more confident :

7 February 1930
 Dear Sir Edward Elgar

As you say the terms I have proposed are not acceptable, will you kindly outline the terms that would be agreeable...

I sent some of the new scoring paper yesterday which I have had especially engraved for you in the hope that you would send a short score within the next three or four weeks...

⁵ Unpublished letter dated 7 February; HWRO 705:445 2085/6

⁶ Letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, op cit

⁷ Geoffrey Hodgkins and Ronald Taylor, 'Elgar and Percy Pitt', *Elgar Society Journal*, vol 9, no 2, July 1995, pp 64-6

⁸ Letter dated 31 January 1930, op cit

Suite, he wrote to Elgar : "If you desire me to send some of the previous scores - I think you have them all - with a few notes regarding each that may be helpful I will do so but is it necessary?"⁵ A dozen or so original pieces for brass band had been published prior to 1930, including Percy Fletcher's *Labour and Love* (1913). This piece was widely publicised as the first original work for brass band, and Whiteley later claimed he sent the score to Elgar the year it appeared⁶. In his February letter he also infers Elgar had received copies of Bantock's *Kubla Khan* (1922) and Holst's *A Moorside Suite* (1928).

It is not clear when Whiteley first suggested to Elgar he might write for brass band, though his building a rapport would undoubtedly have had this end in view. Letters between Elgar and Percy Pitt of the BBC published recently in the *Elgar Society Journal* hint at a similar request from other quarters in the late 1920s.⁷ But the air of desperation in a letter from Whiteley dated 31 January 1930 (the earliest extant example of their correspondence) suggests Elgar had recently made a firm commitment to compose the piece which would crown the Jubilee Festival. The sticking point was the composer's fee, and Whiteley

You know the ideal length - 12 minutes, & a piece which is technically difficult is as necessary as one on a subject which appeals to men who are most efficient technically but know little about music in a general sense.

Believe me to remain
Sir Edward
Yours faithfully
Herbert Whiteley⁹

This brought negotiations to a head, with Elgar settling for Whiteley's inclusive offer of £150. On 12 February Whiteley wrote a short confirmatory note specifying he would need the short score by the end of March and the full score by the end of May.¹⁰ Whiteley's deadlines left Elgar some six weeks to complete the work in short score, and a further two months in which to score it up for band. There is no extant record of when or whether the short score was sent, though on 14 March Elgar signed a receipt "for the copyright and all other rights for brass band, of my new work, entitled 'The Severn Suite'"¹¹ for £150 paid to him by Herbert Whiteley on behalf of the publishers.

A few days earlier on 8 March Elgar wrote a note to his daughter Carice on the back of Whiteley's 12 February letter. The belated postscript reads: "I have undertaken t[o] write Brass Band thing. See over".¹² The following week, in another letter to Carice dated 16 March, he reported he was due to leave for a few days in London: "I have much business to do between rehearsals. I have a cornet player (!) he of the theatre coming on Sunday (!) morning to attack the Brass Band piece".¹³ Perhaps a meeting with Whiteley was scheduled during the London visit; Whiteley refers to "an interview which I had with him [Elgar] during the interval of a Saturday morning rehearsal of 'Gerontius' at the Albert Hall [in 1930]" when brass band scoring was discussed.¹⁴ The proposed run-through with the cornet player also demonstrates Elgar taking characteristic pains over practical matters by consulting with a trusted executant.

Shortly after his return from London, Elgar was hard at work on the full brass band score. On 9 April he noted in the short score that pages 1 - 55 were dispatched to Whiteley, and during the following week two further packages were sent: on 15 April pages 56 - 88, and the next day the final portion, pages 89 - 97 (Elgar having signed and dated the last page on 14 April).¹⁵ Also on 16 April he wrote to Carice:

⁹ Letter dated 7 February 1930, op cit

¹⁰ Unpublished letter, HWRO 705:445 317v

¹¹ R Smith & Co Ltd archives; published in J N Moore, op cit, p 870

¹² Unpublished letter, HWRO 705: 445 317

¹³ Unpublished letter, HWRO 705: 445 318

¹⁴ Letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, op cit

¹⁵ Robert Anderson, *Elgar in Manuscript* (London, 1990) p 166

"I have sent off the end of the Brass Band *The Severn Suite* by this post. Much gardening being done & the Holy Season in full prospective [?] swing".¹⁶ The same day Whiteley wrote to Elgar acknowledging receipt of the second package : "The minuet is just lovely, & the muted cornets and trombones will be most effective. This movement will make a big appeal owing to its majestic simplicity. I ought to have said before that you have shown the youngsters 'how to do it' in the double [sic] fugue".¹⁷

At this point the extant correspondence between Elgar and Whiteley ends, though communication would without doubt have continued during the four months preceding the announcement, on 16 August in the *British Bandsman*, which heralded the *Severn Suite* as the test-piece for the Crystal Palace contest on 27 September. In the meantime, whilst the score and parts were being prepared for publication, Elgar offered the dedication to his friend George Bernard Shaw who, in a letter of acceptance, noted a phonetic allusion to one of his own dramatic creations: "Naturally I shall be enormously honoured : it will secure my immortality when all my plays are dead and damned and forgotten. I am really not worthy of a symphony; but a Serenade, say : - A Serenade for Brass Band to the Author of Captain Brassbound's Conversion [1899] - that would be about my size. The Cockney sailor [Drinkwater] calls him Brarsbahnd".¹⁸

Up to this point the evolution of the *Severn Suite* follows a familiar Elgar *modus operandi*, which can be traced through the existing source material listed by Kent (1993) and Anderson (1990)¹⁹. Elgar had met Whiteley's deadline with some six weeks in hand as a result of concentrated effort on scoring the work in the days leading up to Easter 1930. But what happened next has prompted speculation and debate for a number of years, not least because until Elgar's autograph manuscript brass band score appeared under the hammer at Sotheby's in May 1995, it was widely believed the job of scoring the work had been delegated to the composer and brass band *savant* Henry Geehl. The basis of this assumption is a magazine article written by Geehl entitled 'The Unrecognised Arranger'. It was published in *The Conductor* of April 1960 and has been cited as a reliable first hand source of information on the *Severn Suite* in a number of standard Elgar biographies.²⁰

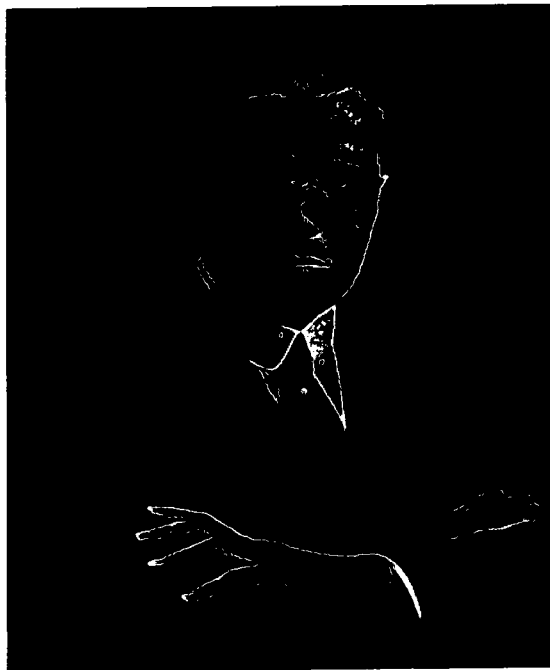
¹⁶ Unpublished letter HWRO 705:445 2761

¹⁷ Unpublished letter dated 16 April 1930, HWRO 705: 445 9426

¹⁸ Letter dated 25 May 1930; HWRO 705: 445 2230; published in J N Moore, *Edward Elgar : Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford, 1990) p 426. The letter to Shaw which prompted this reply is one of the most intriguing lacunae in the documentary record of the *Severn Suite*, since Shaw's response suggests Elgar had shared in it his thoughts on brass band instrumentation and scoring.

¹⁹ Christopher Kent, *Edward Elgar : A Guide to Research* (New York & London, 1993), and Robert Anderson, *op cit*.

²⁰ Henry Geehl, 'The Unrecognised Arranger', *The Conductor* [The Quarterly Journal of the National Association of Brass-Band Conductors], vol 5 issue 8 (April 1960), p 3; the passage in this article which relates to Geehl's "collaboration" with



Henry Geehl, an accomplished pianist and composer, photographed around the time he emerged on the brass band scene with his two Crystal Palace test pieces.

(Photo courtesy British Bandsman)

accuracy of Geehl's article has not been questioned; rather it has been quoted as a reliable source giving a rare and intimate pencil sketch of Elgar as the crabby and vexatious composer in decline :

During the time that I was arranging Elgar's 'Severn Suite' I was in continuous consultation with the composer, who provided me with a very sketchy piano part with figured bass and a kind of skeleton orchestral score, mostly in two or three parts, with an indication of the sort of counterpoint he desired me to add; the rest of the score he left to my discretion. Elgar was not an easy man to work with. He had many pre-conceived ideas on brass treatment - usually unworkable - which he tried very hard to get me to adopt, and it took a great deal of argument on my part to convince him that his ideas were just not possible. I remember particularly a "bad" afternoon when I endeavoured to persuade him to omit the mutes in the Minuet, well knowing that the sound would be entirely different from what he imagined. But all to no purpose! So the somewhat banal sound of the muted trombones will be handed down to posterity! I did, however, get my own ideas adopted in several

Elgar is quoted, without further comment, in Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford, 1987, 3rd edn), p 314; and J N Moore's *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford, 1984) p 784

instances, but these were always conceded rather grudgingly.



Henry Geehl, pictured probably in the 1950s, when he was a professor at Trinity College of Music and an elder statesman of the brass band movement. The account of his 'collaboration' with Elgar appeared in 1960; in it he also claimed he materially assisted "many other composers", including Holst and Ireland, with their works for brass band.
(Photo courtesy British Bandsman)

Reed's recent biography.²¹ Geehl in turn was obviously piqued by Whiteley's letter, in particular his assertion that "when he [Elgar] came to score his own composition, although he used the specially printed scoring paper for brass band, he wrote both bombardon parts in the bass clef, and consequently when the fair copy was made for the engraver they had to be transposed". Geehl responded :

I am responsible for the scoring of the 'Severn Suite', which I did at the earnest request

²¹ Letter by Herbert Whiteley to the *Daily Telegraph*, op cit; Whiteley's criticisms were aimed at the account of the *Severn Suite* given in W H Reed, *Elgar* (London, 1939)

Quite apart from seeming to claim a lion's share of artistic credit for the piece, Geehl makes a number of odd assertions in this account. First, and most remarkable, is the claim that he was presented with an incomplete work, and that matters of musical substance were left to his "discretion". Then there is his description of "a very sketchy piano part with figured bass" - nothing matching this is found among the extant sources of the *Severn Suite*; it also stretches the bounds of possibility to suggest Elgar, whose style is fundamentally linear, would have resorted to figuring a bass line. The "kind of skeleton orchestral score, mostly in two or three parts" is just as elusive. And it is ironic that Geehl questioned the effect of the muted trombones in the Minuet movement, having used them previously himself in *Oliver Cromwell*!

An earlier account by Geehl of his "collaboration" with Elgar appeared in 1939. It was communicated to the *Daily Telegraph* in response to a letter from Herbert Whiteley aimed at redressing certain statements about the *Severn Suite* in W H

of Mr Whiteley when he was musical editor to Messrs R Smith, who published the work. This well-known fact is mentioned by Basil Maine in his life of Elgar [*sic*]²² True, Elgar made a fairly comprehensive sketch on the brass-band paper supplied - writing all the instruments at concert pitch - which had to be drastically modified when it came to the scoring, as much of the writing was not practical for brass, and it was left entirely to me to alter where necessary. I relied mostly on a two-stave version when scoring the work. This was a somewhat more difficult matter than simply transposing the instruments for the engraver!
The trombone parts - where they were sketched in - were at concert pitch in the bass clef, as were the rest of the E flat transposing instruments. I also arranged the work for military band for Keith Prowse²³.

There are clearly several important inconsistencies between this and his subsequent account. What Geehl describes as a "two-stave version" had become in 1960 the "very sketchy piano part with figured bass", and "a fairly comprehensive sketch on the brass-band paper supplied" had transformed into the "kind of skeleton orchestral score". Some elements of Geehl's account can be verified. His arrangement for military band was published by Keith Prowse & Co Ltd in 1931 and is still in use. It is also true that Elgar's autograph brass band score uses bass clef - and not just for the bombardon (bass tuba) parts, as Whiteley stated - where convention dictates all instruments except the bass trombone are transposed into treble clef. But Geehl's 1939 version of events makes no mention of his being in "continuous consultation with the composer" or of "bad" afternoons when they fell out over matters of scoring.

Further doubt is cast on both of Geehl's accounts of the relationship between composer and arranger by a newly identified document which suggests, astonishingly, that much of his story was fabricated. In June 1930 Elgar had signed an exclusive contract with the publishers Keith Prowse in which he undertook to supply a minimum of three new pieces a year for publication. In December 1932 Prowse submitted to Elgar an orchestral arrangement of his piano *Serenade* (which had appeared earlier that year) made by Geehl. The arrangement passed muster, and Elgar asked the publishers to thank Geehl for his work.²⁴ Shortly afterwards Elgar made a personal gesture by sending Geehl a Christmas card, which drew an effusive response from its recipient.

30th December 1932
Dear Sir Edward,

I feel I must write and thank you for your 'Xmas card which I appreciated very much and, at the same time, I should like to express my sincere thanks for the kind remarks about my scoring of your little *Serenade* which were communicated to me by Mr Van Lier [Keith Prowse's publishing manager].

I should like to take this opportunity of telling you how much I appreciate your music. I have been

²² Maine in fact refers to Geehl as the arranger of the military band version; see Basil Maine, *Elgar: His Life and Works* (London, 1933) vol 2, p 247

²³ Letter by Henry Geehl to the *Daily Telegraph*, 22 April 1939

²⁴ Letter dated 9 December 1932; published in J N Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers : Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford, 1987) p 900

one of your greatest admirers ever since the Düsseldorf days when, as a student, I played in the first performance [in Germany] of your 'Gerontius' [19 December 1901, under Julius Butts]. When I returned to England, dear friend Jaeger soon made me acquainted with the rest of your work and I have full scores of all your works which have given me many hours of joy. In fact, I made my own Piano arrangement of your A♭ Symphony which I used to play from memory.

I have played it on broken down pianos in ruined chateaux in France (I was interpreter during the war) and made many Elgar converts - I have heard the opening tune whistled many a time! Forgive me worrying you with all this, but I do want you to know how much your music has influenced my life and work and how much I love and admire it.

At the Trinity College, where I teach, I make a point of my Composition students studying your scores which I consider the finest examples of classical modern orchestration.

One day I hope to meet you.

Yours Sincerely

Henry Geehl.

All best New Year wishes.²⁵

This letter, written neatly on two folios and clearly signed and dated, is now preserved in the Worcester Record Office archives. The biographical details match Geehl's curriculum vitae, including his studies abroad and his position on the staff at London's Trinity College of Music (where he remained until his death).²⁶ Remarkably, Geehl's signing-off appears to rule out his having met with Elgar prior to early 1933, well over two years after their supposed collaboration (if, indeed, they ever met). Its tone and content also suggest there was little or no intimacy between Elgar and Geehl prior to this exchange of greetings, despite Geehl's later claim that he was "in continuous consultation with the composer". Had Geehl been involved in the scoring of the *Severn Suite* to the extent which he subsequently stated, it is hard to imagine he would have penned such a letter so soon after the event. Clearly, the accuracy of his published accounts of 1939 and 1960 should not now be taken for granted.

The document which for some time backed up the 'Geehl' hypothesis is a manuscript brass band score of the *Severn Suite*, privately owned and held on the premises of the publishers R Smith & Co Ltd. A description appears in Robert Anderson's *Elgar in Manuscript* and the story of its discovery has been told in the band press;²⁷ the score is unsigned and undated, its provenance is not documented,

²⁵ Unpublished letter; HWRO 705: 445 4394

²⁶ See Harold Rutland, *Trinity College of Music : The First Hundred Years* (London, 1972) pp 39-40

²⁷ (i) Geoffrey Brand, 'The Severn Suite - Whose scoring?', *British Bandsman*, 4 October 1980, p 12; also (ii) Geoffrey Brand, 'Mystery of Elgar's The Severn Suite', *Brass Band World*, Issue 30, December/January 1993/4, pp 8-11. The manuscript was auctioned at Sotheby's in May 1996, exactly a year after Elgar's autograph score had made its appearance. As had happened a year earlier, the bidding failed to reach the reserve price, though in the same sale two other important brass band manuscripts (presumably from the same source) were sold, namely, the short score of a previously unknown work by Havergal Brian, and the autograph full score of

but it contains a number of corrections and additions in Elgar's hand including a part for percussion (not required at the time for contest purposes). This find in the late 1970s and the subsequent claim, based presumably on Geehl's 1960 account, that it is Geehl's scoring of the work from material supplied by Elgar, raises two fundamental questions.

First : if the manuscript was by Geehl, did his role involve anything more than, as Whiteley implied, making a fair copy for the engraver? The questionable nature of Geehl's own reports suggests the answer now lies in a detailed note-for-note comparison with Elgar's autograph. At the time of writing the author has not been permitted an examination of the autograph, though information received indeed points to the 'Geehl' manuscript being a first generation copy of the autograph score transposed for brass band.

Second : Was the brass band version of the *Severn Suite* published in the key which Elgar had intended? This question arises because the key of the 1930 published edition made for the National Festival is concert B♭ major; the 'Geehl' manuscript pitches the entire work a tone higher, in concert C major, with the B♭ and E♭ transposing instruments scored respectively in D major and A major in the treble clef. One published opinion, based on the premise that brass bands at the time were uncomfortable playing in sharp keys, suggests "it was Whiteley who, when Geehl scored the piece in Elgar's key, thought it was too much and instructed the printer to put it down a tone".²⁸

Elgar's autograph brass band score in conjunction with the 'Geehl' score appears to support this contention; the autograph is scored in C major, and the use of bass clef seems to suggest all instruments are written at sounding pitch. But since the work was published in B♭, another fair copy must have been made from which the engraver could work. This assumption is backed by the identification of an extra folio in the 'Geehl' manuscript, numbered 57, which duplicates the material on the corresponding fo.57 of the main sequence a tone lower. The entire page is crossed out with a single blue pencil stroke, undoubtedly because the scribe had mistakenly begun to copy the E♭ bass part on to the euphonium stave above. This abandoned page appears to be an artifact of a copy of the score made in B♭ from either the 'Geehl' manuscript (after it had been corrected by Elgar) or the composer's autograph, which found its way into the wrong pile on the copyist's desk.

No documentary evidence has been offered so far to substantiate the assertion that it was the publishers who decided to alter Elgar's key; consequently, any statement that this was the case is mere speculation. However, during this research a number of sources have been re-examined which add a new dimension to the debate by suggesting C major was not in fact "Elgar's key", but that he intended B♭ all along.

The most accessible of these sources are the subsequent published arrangements of *Severn Suite* material, namely Elgar's own orchestral version; Geehl's military band

Granville Bantock's *Prometheus Unbound*, the Crystal Palace test-piece in 1933.

²⁸ Geoffrey Brand, op.cit (ii), p 10

version; and Sir Ivor Atkins' edition for organ published in 1933 as *Elgar's Organ Sonata no 2*. Elgar's orchestration is in C major; however, both the military band version and the organ sonata are in B♭. E Wulstan Atkins states that his father made the organ score in consultation with Elgar from the band (whether "military" or "brass" is not specified) and orchestral scores.²⁹ He also describes the occasion when Sir Ivor played through first proofs on the Worcester Cathedral organ: "We were all in the organ loft, but as soon as it was finished Elgar wanted to hear it again from the nave, and so it received a second performance, with my mother and I sitting and Elgar roving around the cathedral...obviously delighted with the work".³⁰ There is no explanation for Atkins' having made the transcription in B♭ other than that it was the original key indicated by the composer. The unwieldy fugue in B♭ minor alone suggests the key of C would have been a more approachable alternative. (The fugue was in fact published in C minor in a separate organ arrangement by Atkins in 1932, the year *before* the complete *Organ Sonata* appeared in print.

If the original key of the work was B♭, then Elgar's apparent decision to make the orchestral version a tone higher in C major has a solid practical explanation. Not only would raising it to the higher key avoid the potential obstacle of a fugue with a five-flat key signature, it would allow him, perhaps more importantly, to make more effective use of the strings' full range by exploiting the sonority of their open bottom notes (which would correspond to the tonic and dominant of the home key). It is interesting to note that Elgar's orchestral transcription of the *Funeral March* from Chopin's B♭ minor Piano Sonata, made almost contemporaneously in 1932, is also scored in C minor, a tone higher than the original. Could the same reasoning have been employed to determine the choice of a higher key for both the Chopin transcription and the orchestral *Severn Suite*?

More compelling evidence for a B♭ scenario, which predates the brass band scores and the later published versions, is found amongst the composer's sketches. When Elgar sent off the last section of the full score to the publishers he also wrote a covering letter in which he enclosed a page of manuscript, a sketch of the opening of the work, inscribed to Herbert Whiteley. In 1939 Whiteley offered the single folio to the Elgar Birthplace Museum. In a letter addressed to Carice Elgar Blake (with whom he negotiated the deposit) Whiteley stated :

With the sketch came a letter from your father to me, dated April 16th 1930. It reads: "Dear Mr Whiteley. I sent off the final portion of the score today & when destroying my untidy MS I thought you might like to have the first recorded thought of the piece which you called into being. Yours sincerely Edward Elgar".

- You will notice the rough manuscript is in pencil, evidently written at great speed, & on the top, in ink, the following words "First sketch for Brass Band. To Herbert Whiteley April 16/30 from Edward Elgar".³¹

²⁹ E Wulstan Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship*, (London, 1984) p 450

³⁰ *ibid*, p 454

³¹ Unpublished letter dated 1 November 1939; HWRO 705: 445 9429; quotation from Elgar's letter published in J N Moore, *Edward Elgar : Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford, 1990), p 426

55/ First sketch for Brass Band to Herbert Whiteley
16th Ap 1930

The image shows a handwritten musical score on six systems of staves. The notation is dense and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The word "full" is written above the second staff, and "Tuba" is written above the third staff. The score is written in ink on aged paper, with some corrections and scribbles visible. The date "16th Ap 1930" is written in the top right corner.

British Library Add MS 63156 fo. 19v (by permission of The British Library. Not to be reproduced without permission). The sketch sent by Elgar to Herbert Whiteley. The inscription at the top of the page reads 'First sketch for Brass Band to Herbert Whiteley 16th Ap 1930 from Edward Elgar'. The indications "full" and "Tuba" elsewhere on the page may be the vestiges of a work originally planned for organ (see main text).

This undated sketch is now preserved at the British Library where it has been rebound into the sketchbook from which it had been removed.³² The music is the opening of the first movement Introduction in the key of B \flat . If Elgar's letter is accurate, then B \flat was the key in which he committed his "first recorded thought" of the *Severn Suite* to paper.

Although Elgar claimed he destroyed his "untidy MS" (which, based on his known work methods, probably consisted of a number of loose sheets which could be shuffled, altered or set to one side until the shape of the piece was finally settled), a few other *Severn Suite* sketches survive and are also preserved in the British Library. The sketchbook Add MS 63156 includes, in addition to the "Whiteley" sketch, two sketches in short score headed 'Brass C.P.' (a reference to the Crystal Palace?) of the transition passage which links the Introduction to the Toccata, the first on fo.26v and the second on fo.27. The second is the more substantial of the two, extending the opening of the Toccata for a further twenty bars. Both sketches are written in the key of B \flat . In addition, the second sketch includes some interesting marginal notes: "in C" in the top margin and "tone higher" twice elsewhere on the page. The latter refers specifically to sequential passages in the music itself, whereas "in C" seems to be a general reminder that the entire sketch should be transposed when the composer made a fair copy of the short score. The entire short score draft (minus the fugue, which was removed and is now preserved elsewhere) is also in the British Library (Add MS 58049), and has indeed been copied a tone higher "in C". But does this indicate that Elgar had a change of heart regarding the key?

An examination of the short score has revealed two pieces of evidence which suggest that whilst Elgar had switched to writing in C, he was not in fact working at concert pitch but had made a mental leap to brass band (ie. B \flat) pitch. On the *verso* of fo.31 there is a two-bar fragment on three staves of the arching two-part melodic phrase found at bars 5 and 6 of fig.32 of the published brass band score. The top staff, with a three-flat key signature and labelled 'Concert', shows the two parts in harness; below are two staves labelled 'Horn in E \flat ', the upper reproducing the top line of the staff above, and the lower the same line but transposed for E \flat horn (ie. a major sixth higher). The corresponding bars of the short score itself show this phrase in the right hand a tone higher than the staff labelled 'Concert'. A similar fragment appears several pages later on fo.41v, this time the rising phrase in thirds between horns and baritones at bar 5 of fig.51. Once again the top staff shows the two parts at concert pitch with a three-flat key signature; the two staves below separate and transpose the E \flat horn and B \flat baritone lines. Once again the corresponding bar in the short score is a tone higher.

- Whilst their precise purpose is unclear, these two fragments with their labelled staves provide a measure against which the relative pitch of the short score can be gauged, indicating that the short score was written not at concert pitch sounding in C, but at brass band pitch sounding in B \flat . By extension the same is also true of the autograph full score, made directly from the short score. This suggests then that the copyist of the 'Geehl' score misinterpreted the composer's intentions by assuming the autograph was at concert pitch and writing out the parts to sound in C.

³² British Library Add MS 63156 fo.19v

The image displays a handwritten musical score for 'The Severn Suite'. It consists of five staves. The top two staves are inked and contain a short fragment of music. The bottom three staves are a full score, with various annotations and markings. A large, handwritten 'F' is written across the middle of the score, indicating the key signature. There are also handwritten notes like 'Horn' and '29b' on the left side of the score. The notation includes notes, rests, and bar lines.

Consequently when it was finally published in B \flat , this was not to lower it to a key which the publishers believed was more suitable, but to pitch it where Elgar had intended all along.

Elgar's reason for working in the transposed key rather than at concert pitch is a matter for speculation, though experience has shown composers

British Library Add MS 58049 fo.31v (by permission of The British Library). The three-stave inked fragment which gives the clue to the relative pitch of the short score and the autograph full score (Not to be reproduced without permission)

coming fresh to the brass band medium from an orchestral background find writing for an ensemble made up almost entirely of B \flat and E \flat transposing instruments a mental hurdle which can be partially overcome by thinking in C and F, in the knowledge that the final result will sound a tone lower. Elgar's use of bass clef remains an unusual feature of his full score, and the only aspect relating to transposition referred to by Whiteley in his account in the *Daily Telegraph*, which makes no mention of written or actual keys.

In characteristically outspoken fashion, Whiteley used the same press platform to grind another axe when he criticised W H Reed for seeming "determined to create the impression...that the *Severn Suite* was some old ideas rehased for this occasion and dashed off after a first request in April [1930]",³³ a rather negative view, in Whiteley's opinion, which has unfortunately persisted to the present and is echoed in criticisms of much of Elgar's post-1920 output. In fact the only "rehashed ideas" which have been identified appear in the Minuet: an eleven-bar theme from the early wind quintet *Harmony Music* ('Shed') no 5 (1879), which is extensively reworked in its later guise; and a more substantial borrowing from another of the wind quintet pieces, the *Promenade* no 5 (1878), used for the two *scherzando* trios. The Fugue had been penned as a keyboard work in 1923, and it seems Elgar hoped it would provide the basis of an organ sonata for Sir Ivor Atkins to perform at the

³³ Letter by Herbert Whiteley to the *Daily Telegraph*, op cit

inauguration of the refurbished Worcester Cathedral organ in 1923.³⁴ Ultimately, after some delay in the completion of the restoration work, Atkins played only the fugue in 1925, though its link with the event was immortalised in the subtitle 'Cathedral' in subsequent *Severn Suite* manifestations.³⁵ That the fugue found its place in the work which later evolved into the *Organ Sonata no 2* suggests ideas for a larger scale work which were gestating over a period of years, awaiting an appropriate opportunity to emerge. That opportunity arrived in 1930 with the brass band test-piece commission, and it is to Whiteley's credit not only that he persuaded Elgar to write for brass band but that he coaxed him into composing a substantial eighteen-minute work after ten years of minimal activity. Larger composing projects suddenly came to fruition: the score of *Pomp & Circumstance March no 5* was on Leslie Boosey's desk a fortnight after Whiteley received the full score of the *Severn Suite*,³⁶ and later in 1930 the *Nursery Suite* materialised. Recent revelations have shown the extent to which the *Third Symphony* and the opera *The Spanish Lady* had formed in Elgar's mind and on paper, and it is becoming apparent that ill-health more than lack of motivation prevented their completion.

An irony in the early history of the *Severn Suite* is that in spite of their roles as prime movers, neither Whiteley nor Elgar attended the Crystal Palace event when the work received its first performance by the eighteen contesting bands. Whiteley apparently suffered a breakdown as a result of overwork shortly before the contest and never again played a prominent role in the band movement.³⁷ Elgar was still suffering from the sciatica attack which had been troubling him at the Three Choirs Festival a few weeks earlier. John Henry Iles telegraphed after the contest informing

³⁴ E Wulstan Atkins, op.cit, p 371

³⁵ The programmatic titles which Elgar gave to each movement (Worcester Castle; Tournament; Cathedral; At the Commandery) are generally associated with the orchestral version; in fact, at its first public performance at the Worcester Three Choirs Festival in 1932 Elgar reverted to the original titles of the brass band version (Introduction, Toccata, etc), stating in his programme note, "The movements at first bore some fanciful titles connected with the river after which the Suite is named". He may be referring here to an early draft of the orchestral version, which he states in an unpublished letter to Carice dated 12 February 1931 (HWRO 705: 445 338) was nearing completion, rather than the brass band version. Geehl's transcription for military band (1931) is the only occasion the programmatic titles appeared on printed musical material prior to Acuta Music's 1990 orchestral edition (Keith Prowse did not print an orchestral score). Perhaps Geehl had access to Elgar's draft orchestral score whilst making the military band version, which could account for his mention of a "skeleton orchestral score" in connection with the brass band version in his 1960 article.

³⁶ Letter from Leslie Boosey to Elgar acknowledging receipt of the score published in J N Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers: Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford, 1987) p 870

³⁷ See Alf Hailstone, *The British Bandsman Centenary Book* (Baldock, 1987) p 184

Elgar of the work's success³⁸, and the following day George Bernard Shaw wrote him a delightful and oft-quoted account of events.³⁹ Henry Geehl also wrote enthusiastically about the *Severn Suite* shortly after the contest, where he had been on the panel of adjudicators. "The *Severn Suite* is a heritage", he stated emphatically in comments published in the *British Bandsman*. "Let it be played - and played - and played again".⁴⁰ In the light of this statement it is a further irony that Geehl's subsequent comments have come to overshadow the *Severn Suite* and, by diluting Elgar's role, perhaps to inhibit a wider appreciation of a work, always held in high esteem in the world of brass bands, which marked the threshold of a final burst of composing activity in Elgar's last years.

ELGAR'S THIRD SYMPHONY

At the Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester in 1931 Elgar conducted an early performance of the *Nursery Suite*. It was his most substantial work since the *Cello Concerto* of 1919 and followed a year in which he had written not only a demanding test-piece for brass band, the *Severn Suite*, but also a fifth *Pomp & Circumstance March* worthy to bear comparison with its predecessors. Were Elgar's lean years coming to an end? The conversation at Gloucester must have touched on this subject, as some of the musicians there - among them Vaughan Williams, Billy Reed, and Herbert Sumsion - sent Elgar a packet of pencils with the following note:

You said last night that owing to the badness of the Woolworth pencils you could no longer write music.

We all want that new Symphony & the 3rd part of the Apostles.

Will these pencils of varying softness help?¹

Bernard Shaw had been pressing Elgar to write another symphony for some time. He wrote on 7 January 1932 "Why don't you make the B.B.C. order a new symphony? It can afford it"². For the next few months, rumours spread that a *Third Symphony* from Elgar was a serious possibility. However the composer was giving nothing away. In August that year, in a reply to a letter requesting details of the new work, he wrote "there is nothing to say about the mythical Symphony for some time,

³⁸ Unpublished telegram dated 27 September 1930; HWRO 705: 445 2087

³⁹ Letter dated 28 September 1930; published in J N Moore, *Edward Elgar : Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford, 1990) p 429

⁴⁰ *British Bandsman*, 4 October 1930, p 18

¹ Quoted in Moore, Jerrold Northrop: *Edward Elgar : Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford, 1990) p 440

² Young, Percy M: *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London, 1956) p 334

- probably a long time, - possibly no time, - never". The following month, at the Worcester Three Choirs, he spoke of the work as "written", but said that it would not be worth while to finish up the full score since no one wanted his music now³. This remark was reported in the *Daily Mail*, and support for such a work gained momentum. On 30 September Shaw wrote to Sir John Reith, Director General of the BBC, suggesting that the Corporation should commission it, and adding "...I know that he has the material for the first movement ready, because he has played it to me on his piano"⁴. But a fortnight later Elgar wrote to Basil Maine, whose book on the composer was nearing completion: "I fear there is nothing to say in regard to the new Symphony or anything else: things take shape without my knowing it - I am only the lead pencil & cannot foresee"⁵. But the die was now firmly cast. On 14 December, at the last of three concerts broadcast to commemorate the year of Elgar's seventy-fifth birthday, Landon Ronald announced that the BBC had commissioned the *Third Symphony*. By now, Elgar had begun work on an opera, *The Spanish Lady*, to a libretto by Barry Jackson based on a play by Ben Jonson. The two works progressed simultaneously, Elgar using material from earlier sketches, discarded pieces from completed works, and from his incidental music to *Arthur* written ten years before. Letters to Carice from the early weeks of 1933 refer to the symphony, and on 25 February Elgar wrote to Reith:

I am hoping to begin 'scoring' the work very shortly : I am satisfied with the progress made with the 'sketch' & I hope that the 'fabric' of the music is as good as anything I have done...I am doing the best I can & up to the present the Symphony is the *strongest* thing I have put on paper.⁶

The BBC was keen to première the new work in the autumn, but Elgar wanted to delay any announcement "until everything is printed"; however, on 24 April he wrote to Owen Mase of the BBC that "if nothing untoward occurs, [I] shd. be able to begin to 'feed' the publishers with M.S. shortly".⁷ Three days later he told Mase that he felt the symphony would be ready for the May Festival of 1934, and gave headings for the four movements, adding that he had not finally decided on the order for the two inner movements (Allegretto and Adagio).⁸

But spring turned to summer, and no music arrived at Keith Prowse, although Elgar played a good deal of the symphony to his visitors, among them Reed, Ivor and Wulstan Atkins, the Shaws; and Basil Maine, who later wrote: "He played

³ H C Colles, in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (4th edn, London, 1945) Supplementary volume, p 194

⁴ Quoted in Reith, *Into the Wind* (London, 1949) p 163

⁵ Quoted in Moore, Jerrold Northrop : *Edward Elgar : A Creative Life* (Oxford, 1984) p 805

⁶ Quoted in Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, p 466

⁷ Moore, op.cit. p 467

⁸ MS in possession of Raymond Monk, quoted in Moore, op cit, p 468

considerably more than was actually written down and more than has since been published in the sketches"⁹. Elgar "joyfully" announced to Fred Gaisberg on 17 August that the *Third Symphony* "was practically complete",¹⁰ and nine days later in the Music Room at Marl Bank the symphony was played to Gaisberg, who wrote in his diary :

The whole work strikes as youthful and fresh - 100% Elgar without a trace of decay. He makes not the smallest attempt to bring in any modernity. It is built on true classic lines and in a purely Elgar mould...The work is complete as far as structure & design and scoring is well advanced...

The paucity of full score in the extant sketches, and the uncertainty as to how the remaining sketches would have been developed (structurally, harmonically, or orchestrally) means that it could only have been "practically complete" in the composer's head, and that Gaisberg's final quote (above) is wishful thinking. On 7 October Elgar entered a nursing home in Worcester for an operation, and wrote to Reith :

I am not at all sure how things will turn out and have made arrangements that in case the Symphony does not materialise the sums you have paid on account shall be returned. This catastrophe came without the slightest warning as I was in the midst of scoring the work.

The operation revealed an inoperable tumour and one senses that the *Third Symphony* came to an end then and there. The BBC were anxious that it should be completed if at all possible, but Elgar said to his doctor : "If I can't complete the Third Symphony, somebody will complete it - or write a better one - in fifty or five hundred years. Viewed from the point where I am now, on the brink of eternity, that's a mere moment in time"¹¹. On 10 November Landon Ronald (who had just returned from seeing Elgar) reported to Gaisberg, who wrote in his diary: "As for the Third Sym. it was far from ready and no one could help in the matter. Only the first movement was fairly completed & scored. The rest was only sketched out".¹² Shortly afterwards, on 20 November, Elgar's condition deteriorated, and he was moving in and out of consciousness. Carice and Billy Reed kept vigil by his bed : and what happened then is best told in the latter's own words :

...It was evident that he was trying very hard to speak; and gradually and at long intervals the words came from him. "I want you...to do something for me...the symphony all bits and pieces...no one would understand...no one...no one".

A look of great anguish came over his face as he said this, and his voice died away from exhaustion. Leaning over him, I said, "What can I do for you? Try to tell me. I will do anything for you; you know that".

⁹ Maine, Basil : *The Best of Me* (London, 1937) p 196. The sketches were published by Billy Reed in *The Listener*, 28 August 1935, and also in his book *Elgar as I knew him*, published by Gollancz in the September of the following year.

¹⁰ Moore, Jerrold Northrop : *Elgar on Record* (Oxford, 1974) p 209

¹¹ Moore, *A Creative Life*, p 819

¹² Moore, *Elgar on Record*, p 219

Again a long silence; but a more peaceful expression came back into his face, and before long he drew me down again and said, "Don't let anyone tinker with it...no one could understand...no one must tinker with it".

I assured him that no one would ever tamper with it in any way, or attempt to construct what would have to be a most unsatisfactory work. In fact, it was quite impossible to bring any one of the four movements which were all "bits and pieces" into shape, even with the best intentions, without relying principally on guesswork, and inserting a very large quantity of more or less new and unauthentic stuff to bind all the genuine fragments together. A little while later he said in a whisper and with great emotion, "I think you had better burn it".

I exchanged glances with his daughter, who was now sitting on the opposite side of the bed; and I saw that she looked, as I am sure I did, a little startled at this suggestion. Then I felt that it was only a suggestion and not really a request; so I leaned over him and said, "I don't think it is necessary to burn it : it would be awful to do that. But Carice and I will remember that no one is to try to put it together. No one shall ever tinker with it : we promise you that".

Hearing this, he seemed to grow more peaceful. His strugglings and efforts to speak ceased; he lay there with his eyes open, watching us, and seemed quite content.¹³

As already mentioned, within a year or so of Elgar's death Reed published the majority of the sketches, both in the BBC's journal *The Listener*, and in his own book on the composer. In *The Sunday Times*, Ernest Newman welcomed their appearance, and his views were shared by others. However, Basil Maine took issue with Newman and wrote a reply in *Musical Opinion* for February and March 1936, reprinted here now by kind permission of the Editor of that publication.

ELGAR'S SKETCHES IN RELATION TO MUSICOLOGY

Basil Maine

When Elgar's sketches for his projected third symphony were published a question of some importance to students of music was raised. Mr Ernest Newman and the writer of an article in *The Times*, as well as some others, were of the opinion that the BBC had done the music world a great service by publishing the composer's sketches and Mr W H Reed's accompanying comments. The writer in *The Times* was grateful for the privilege of "peeping into the composer's workshop".

When the sketches first appeared, I was doubtful as to the advisability of publishing them at all. In any case, it was difficult to be reconciled to their being made public so soon after Elgar's death. Since then I have carefully followed the various articles which have been written on the subject and have carried on several debates by correspondence, with the result that my doubts have greatly increased. Mr Ernest Newman, for example, was not satisfied with "the great service" which the BBC have rendered to musicians, and proceeded to ask for the publication of a volume containing all the material relating to this symphony. Now, his skilful exposition of the very scanty material which is available convinces me that such a volume would enable him to make one more interesting contribution to musicology. I, for one, have been instructed by watching him follow the workings of the composer's mind. Also

¹³ Reed, W H : *Elgar as I knew him* (London, 1936) pp 113-5

I appreciate his point that the musicologist cannot consent to be deprived of any material, however slight, that may possibly let him into some secret of the composing mentality. As regards this particular case, however, the problem in my own mind is more nearly related to ethics than to æsthetics and can be formulated in the following questions.

First, is the "great service" which the BBC have rendered the world of music (by publishing the fragments of Elgar's projected symphony) equally a great service to the composer? We know that during his last long illness, Elgar was often fretting over that broken music of his. He implored Mr Reed not to let anyone tinker with it. "No one could understand", he whispered. "No one must tinker with it". Now, it is clear that Mr Reed interpreted his friend's message as meaning that no one should attempt to complete the work. My own belief is that Elgar meant more than that. He was also anxious that there should be no critical comment on those fragments that remained of his greatness. Was it not a natural anxiety? The sketches provide a clue here and there as to his approach to the new work, but they give very little idea of the conception. Every creative artist waits for that final moment of crisis which determines the greatness or the ordinariness of the achievement. If the work is to be great, in that moment there comes the flash which lights up all the previous processes of thought, gives them unity, and final relationship.

It is my conviction that, in this last adventure, Elgar was still waiting for that final moment. The last revealing light had not yet broken upon his mind. Or, if it had, it broke when he lacked the physical strength to set down the signs. This would explain the moody restlessness which came upon him after he had been playing some of the symphony to me, and to which Mr Reed also refers. It explains, too, Elgar's pitiful suggestion that the bits and pieces had better be burnt. I cannot believe that he would have liked them reproduced in the supplement of a weekly paper or anywhere else. And I am convinced that he would have regarded the subsequent comments and articles, however expert they may be, as tinkering with his unfinished music.

Elgar was an artist, no less sensitive than other artists. Every artist has the right to decide when he is ready to appear before the public with his work. When Elgar asked that his last sketches should be burnt, he was saying that he was far from ready for his next public appearance, least of all before a jury of musicologists.

This brings me to my second question : what shall it profit a musicologist if he should examine the bits and pieces of a work which is hardly yet begun? We know from the study of other composers' note-books that some of the bits would have been re-shaped; others would have been discarded. To compare sketches with a finished composition is often enlightening. To speculate with no final product for guidance is all but futile; for we have no knowledge of the most important element in the forming of a work of art, namely, the artist's judgment. In studying the sketches of a composition which has been left in its first stages of construction, the problem is to decide which represent fully considered ideas, and which represent passing, and perhaps idle, thoughts. Everywhere are pitfalls.

Even with the complete *Eroica Symphony* at our disposal, there is room for

conjecture and alternative interpretations in studying Nottebohm's collection of Beethoven's sketches. Nottebohm himself, for example, asserts that when the *First Great Sketch* (as he calls it) was written down, "the work was already in its advanced stage, and therefore must have been begun in another place; it is possible that what we have here is just the first connected Great Sketch for the first section, a collation of the smaller sketches made in an earlier sketch book". Mr Newman, disagreeing with this view, believes that quite possibly this First Sketch is the composer's first attempt to write down his vague conception of a symphonic movement. If, as I say, there is room for argument in a case where we have the finished work as evidence, how much more uncertainty must there be when no complete or nearly complete work exists as a basis for investigation.

Referring to Beethoven's sketches, Mr Newman writes¹: "Had the symphonies to which they belong never been written, had we only the themes themselves in a sketch-book, we would probably not give a second glance at such seemingly inexpressive and impossible fragments as the first subjects of the *Third*, *Fifth* and *Ninth Symphonies*. It is not they that make the movement; it is the movement that, when we emerge from it and look back to its starting point, gives them their stupendous significance". Agreed. The same applies to the fragments of what was to have been Elgar's *Third Symphony*. When the writer in *The Times* remarks that some of Elgar's themes for this work were not particularly distinguished, he is in danger of leading his readers into a misconception as to the essential nature of a symphony. To pass any kind of judgment, however qualified, on that thematic material without the slightest knowledge of its relationship to the context, is unfair to the composer. The inner life of those naked themes is no more apparent to us than is the inner life of a fish which has been stuffed and fixed in a glass case. Of some symphonies, particularly of Mozart, it is true that their themes are in themselves a sign of sudden afflatus, but we only have to look back on the *First Symphony*, and the *Second*, to realise that Elgar's inspiration lies chiefly in the transmuting of his themes, and in the regions of the imagination to which they unexpectedly lead us. As regards this last interrupted adventure, we have not the smallest notion of what that transmuting process would have brought forth, not even a glimpse of the country over which Elgar's mind was ranging. When he played parts of the work to me on the piano, he relied partly on the sketches (so disjointed and disordered as to be a kind of jigsaw puzzle), partly on memory, partly I imagine on extemporisation. During the improvised (or memorised) passages, it was possible to think that one was beginning to share Elgar's vision, but the experience was so clouded and so fleeting that it could not possibly be re-captured by means of the sketches alone.

I am not forgetting that Mr Newman makes quite clear that there is no question of attempting any æsthetic estimate of Elgar's projected symphony. "What Elgar's *Third Symphony* would finally have been", he writes, "is a subject upon which it is, and always will be, futile to speculate". I should think so indeed! What, then, is Mr Newman's reason for wanting these and all the attendant material published? Here is his answer: "Our main reason for wishing to have the whole of the sketches accessible for study is the hope that, in whatever small degree, they may throw

¹ The Unconscious Beethoven

some light on some of the subjects now engaging the ardent attention of musicologists everywhere - the nature of the musical mind, the processes by which the imagination of the composer realises itself in the material he has chosen, and the bearing of all this on the æsthetic of music - a science that is still in its infancy".

It is very true that every step a composer has taken towards the realisation of a work must engage the attention of all who are interested in the workings of his mind. But I fail to see what the sketches of so incomplete a conception as Elgar's last work could add to the knowledge which can be obtained by studying the finished compositions in relation to the sketches for each. The very phrase Mr Newman uses, should warn us that, in such circumstances, we are on a wild-goose chase. Is not his desire to learn more and more about "the processes by which the imagination of the composer realises itself in the material he has chosen"? Very well. But the sketches for the symphony in question will reveal nothing but what is questionable about those processes, since the composer's imagination had hardly begun to realise itself, indeed had not completed the choice of material.

So far we have left out of account the larger question as to whether the nature of the composing mind can ever be wholly comprehended. Surely, when composers themselves can tell us so little about the mysterious movings of their inner selves, we have little to hope for from outside investigation, especially when it is based upon nothing more exact than the evidence of manuscripts. For at best a manuscript is but the roughest kind of transcription of a composer's idea. Almost every composer can say with Mozart that his ideas flow best and most abundantly when he is alone and, as it were, completely himself; but no composer has any more inkling than Mozart had, of the origin of those ideas or the manner of their coming. Nor is this ignorance due to any lack of curiosity on the part of composers. The closer alliance between the creative mind and the critical mind which we have witnessed in our time, has caused composers to turn in on themselves from time to time, for the purpose either of self-explanation or of self-defence. None that I know of has ever professed to discover the Great Secret. For Pizzetti, for example, inspiration is a mystery which "a kind of reverential diffidence will scarcely permit me to attempt to unravel". Arnold Bax believes it to be a waste of time to attempt to "express states of feeling the depth of which we are temperamentally incapable of plumbing". The final moment of crisis to which I referred earlier in this article, is thus described by Arthur Bliss : "These are times of the greatest receptivity, when all the senses are alive and responsive to a marked degree. One is living in a state of inward harmony and vitality, as in a white intense light wherein objects impinge on the retina with remarkable clarity". César Franck once told a pupil that he had worked all day without finding anything to put down on paper. But he was not anxious. Experience had taught him that on the next day or the day after he would most certainly find what he was seeking. A less reassuring opinion is expressed by Eugene Goossens who suggests that, in the case of a lengthy composition, the composing mood is liable to evaporate, and then all interest in the work is lost. On this same subject, these wise words from Gustav Holst are worth remembering : "I think that every composer has more than one way of writing. Finally, a composer is usually quite

unconscious of what is going on and therefore easily deceived".² If we look back to see Beethoven's testimony, we find him asserting, in one of his letters, that in writing instrumental music he always has the whole composition in his mind; and this, it seems to me, is very like Elgar's confession that, for him, music was in the air all round and about him, and that he had merely to take as much as he wanted at any given time.

I do not read Elgar's explanation as meaning that one evening in his garden he was watching a sunset and listening to the dying sounds of the day, and suddenly discovered the *Violin Concerto* ready-made and fully scored. Whether or not that was the manner of Mozart's inspiration, we can be sure that, where a complex score for a modern orchestra is concerned, such an experience would be out of the question. We know that Elgar was not above consulting Mr Reed and drawing upon his friend's experience as a violinist before some of the solo passages of the *Violin Concerto* were finally fixed. "L'inspiration", said Baudelaire, "c'est travailler tous les jours"; and none of our contemporary composers would deny that hard work was an essential condition of inspiration - even if few would go so far as to declare that the two were identical; for the hard work, after all, is easy.

The tragedy of Elgar's last work, as I see it, lies in this: he had beheld his symphony whole, in the sense that Beethoven conceived a symphony in the mass; then at the moment he was ready to begin cutting and carving the mass and settling its lights, shadows and proportions, the moment he was preparing to *work* upon it, he was struck down by that fatal illness. Or, to adopt his own image, let us say that he had heard his symphony only in the air around him, and had seized it and lived for many months in the experience of it, and was stricken at a time when he was about to communicate his experience to the world. His restlessness and moodiness during the period before his illness were such as possess every artist who has been "visited" and who has yet to proclaim the nature of his visitation. In addition, Elgar would have been troubled by two thoughts; first, the faint warning which he had already received of an approaching illness and the fact of being, as a consequence, under doctor's orders; second, his implicit promise to have the new symphony ready for production at one of the BBC's concerts.

It is the awareness of these tragic circumstances that prompts me to protest against the musicologists when they claim the right to publish the fragments of that music. As I have already remarked, it is for the creative artist to decide when he is prepared to submit a new work to the public. Moreover, until he is prepared to do so, the preliminary processes, in so far as they exist in the form of sketches, are his private property, are, indeed, his secrets. That Elgar wished these particular sketches to remain his secrets was evident from his pathetic inquiries and requests during those last weeks of his life. When he spoke of burning the manuscripts, Mr Reed was probably right in regarding it as a suggestion and not a request. But my own knowledge of Elgar's hypersensitive spirit persuades me that, rather than have them published so soon after his death, he would have preferred to have them destroyed. Could not the musicologists have waited until 1957, the centenary of the composer's

² These confessions were the result of an inquiry conducted some time ago by Mr Frank Howes.

birth, before holding their inquest on those sad remains? What useful purpose has their publication served? Let us inquire. By far the most constructive of the essays which followed their appearance was Mr Newman's. By comparing a sketch which the composer gave to Mr Reed with another given to himself, Mr Newman establishes beyond a doubt that a certain passage was the end, not of the symphony as Mr Reed thought it possibly might be, but of the slow movement. He is also able to demonstrate which of the sketches represents the principal theme of that movement, and also to link up two passages which, in Mr Reed's sketches, were dubious. But these items, interesting as they are in themselves (and to me, personally, they have a special interest), cannot be said to be of any importance as contributions to musicology, since they relate to a work which does not exist in the sense that, say, Schubert's lesser-known unfinished symphony, that in E, exists; for in that case all four movements are so drafted that Dr Weingartner was confident that in completing the work he was merely carrying out Schubert's plan. Thus, one half of the opening movement was completely scored by the composer, and from there to the end the sequence of music is clearly indicated in the leading voices with occasional clues as to scoring. Incidentally, Dr Weingartner has proved himself so expert a Schubertian in this task that by far the most satisfying movement is that upon which Schubert worked least, namely, the Andante!

Not even the most expert Elgarian could convey so much as an echo of what the last symphony was to have been, whether by means of actual composition or critical comment. Nor are the manuscripts substantial enough to form reliable data for scientific investigation, especially where the science concerned is in its infancy. Mr Newman, I grant, has used one of the sketches (more particularly, a few words Elgar wrote thereon) as the starting point for a masterly discourse on the division, or supposed division, between poetic and pure music; but that could have been started by a chance observation of any one of the great composers from Beethoven onwards. I cannot believe that without Elgar's few scribbled words, that discourse would never have come into being.

As for "finger-prints", which is one of the main pre-occupations of musicology at its present toddling stage, the Elgar symphony sketches do but confirm what we have long known to be his habits of mind. There are examples of the seventh as a characteristic interval in his melodies; of one-bar and two-bar periods; of dotted rhythms; of sequential phrases. But with all these we are so familiar, that we should be over-sanguine to expect them to guide us towards a discovery.

It would be a charity if we all ceased to refer to those disjointed sketches as Elgar's *Third Symphony*. We are justified in speaking of Puccini's *Turandot*, of Busoni's *Doktor Faust*, of Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, even of Schubert's *Symphony in E*, which Dr Weingartner finished for him. But alas! there is no such thing as a third symphony by Edward Elgar.

For some strange reason, Carice Elgar believed that publishing the sketches would actually *deter* would-be completers. This is made clear in a letter from her to Maine in April 1939 after reading his book *The Best of Me*, in which also he had written of

the *Third Symphony*. She wrote : "I love all you say about him - and your feelings about the 3rd Symphony I do so understand. But of course the manuscript had to be given over to the BBC and it does seem to me a great safeguard for the future that the themes have been published. Perhaps I look too far ahead - but I have awful visions of people getting hold of it in about A.D. 2000! when there would be nobody left who would have known him, and trying to finish it".³

For thirty or so years after Elgar's death, as his reputation languished, there seemed to be little interest in the sketches. In the late 1960s BBC Radio attempted to make a programme based around an orchestration of the sketches by Roger Fiske, but after legal consultation it was dropped as contravening the composer's dying wishes. Ten years later the BBC (television this time) tried again, but once more it came to nothing. As Elgar's popularity recovered, and works which had been out of favour for years were taken up and re-evaluated, it was perhaps inevitable that the *Third Symphony* sketches should arouse attention. The celebrated Elgar scholar, Christopher Kent, wrote a doctoral thesis for the University of London in 1978 about Elgar's compositional methods as revealed in his sketches, including extensive research into those for the *Third Symphony*. In December of that same year Humphrey Burton addressed the Royal Society of Arts on the subject 'Elgar and the BBC (with particular reference to the unfinished Third Symphony)'. In the ensuing discussion several speakers, including Jerrold Northrop Moore (who read a message from Sir Adrian Boult), Christopher Kent, and Wulstan Atkins all spoke of the impossibility of completing the symphony from the sketches. Then in 1995 Anthony Payne gave a radio talk on the symphony illustrated by orchestral extracts played by the BBC Philharmonic and short score sketches played by Keith Swallow on the piano. The talk was later released on CD [together with Percy Young's realisation of *The Spanish Lady*] in the *BBC Music Magazine*.

Anthony Payne, in his talk to the London Branch in December last, gave the news that he was in the process of "completing" the symphony, with the blessing of the Elgar family, for a proposed performance in the 1998 season of Promenade concerts. This staggering turn of events eventually made the front pages of the national press in March. The *Daily Telegraph* quoted Payne as saying : "I find it ridiculous of great artists to say that they want their work burned. If that is what Elgar intended, he should have burned it himself...It is nonsense to say that it is impossible to complete. All the basic material is there but it is a bit of a mess. You could say that it is like a jigsaw puzzle. Most of the shapes are there but I need to fill in some cement to piece it together...Where I have to write, it will be as close to him as it is possible to be. It is the symphony that he was going to write. It would be silly to think of it as anything else".

Jerrold Northrop Moore has protested to the family about their decision to allow such a scheme to proceed. "It can't be Elgar's symphony. I would love to say it will be a masterpiece but it will be Mr Payne's style and arrangement. Elgar left behind not a note of development for the symphony and Mr Payne will have to make considerable guesswork".

In *The Times*, Richard Morrison wrote : "With almost his last breath, Elgar forbade 'tinkering' with his *Third Symphony* sketches. Anyone who has examined them,

³ Quoted in Maine, *Twang with our music* (London, 1957) p 107

and has any knowledge of Elgar's complex and intuitive way of working out his symphonic thoughts, will understand why. They are an incoherent jumble of raw ideas, barely formed...No wonder that, on his deathbed, he suddenly gabbled that 'no one would understand' the sketches. The truth is, there is all too little to understand...Such exercises [as completing unfinished musical works] will always hold a fascination, especially for the many music-lovers who are much more excited by the past than the present. Here are ordinary minds struggling to fathom the logic of genius; sleuths sifting through clues on dead men's desks. What does that squiggle signify? Is that a minim or an ink-blot? But there is something unconvincing about this latest Elgar wheeze...I do not know what Anthony Payne's invention will be like, but I do not know that his claim that it will be 'pure Elgar' is pure piffle. And outrageous presumption. And possibly prosecutable under the Trade Descriptions Act".

Not all press reaction was unfavourable. In a leader entitled 'Elgar's Finished' the *Telegraph* said: "Elgar may have genuinely sought to persuade his friends not to allow the work to be finished, but even if that had been his fervent wish, we would be the poorer if such demands were honoured. Dying artists are prone to dramatic gestures, as their last despairing kick against the light....There comes a point when a major artistic creation becomes larger than its creator; he may destroy his work before this point is reached, but rather as publication gives a book a life of its own, so death releases artistic work from the bonds of its creator".

Andrew Clements in *The Guardian* wrote: "No one, least of all Payne himself, is going to claim that by some peculiar osmosis he can absorb the complete essence of Elgar's musical scheme, and bring to life the score just as the composer would have done himself. But he can make some best guesses about the way in which the themes would have been used and the shape of the work evolved, based upon the indications in Elgar's notes and knowledge of the rest of his output, and above all produce something which is a viable concert piece. Not authentic Elgar, but a work with real, solid musicological credentials...The outlines of the first three movements...can be more or less established from the surviving material...but it is the work on the finale that is likely to be the most speculative. There is practically nothing to go on save a clutch of themes...which seem to have been associated in Elgar's mind with ideas of chivalry. Making sense of these is an imposing task for Payne, but then the whole project is a brave one. There will be plenty of people waiting to catch him out, to demonstrate that something in his final score is not idiomatic and that therefore the idea was arrogant and impossibly presumptuous from the start. But Payne knows this already, and the possible gains to our knowledge of Elgar in the final, rather melancholy years of his life, more than outweigh the risk of such cheapshot dismissals".

Michael Kennedy was quoted as saying: "I am very concerned and a lot of Elgar worshippers think it shouldn't be done. Mr Payne will be taking on the mantle of a genius and it is going to be very controversial. But I don't see how anybody who loves Elgar will be anything but fascinated. This exercise would not be worth doing if it was some minor composer, but Elgar is Elgar and I think what we hear may be very significant".

The role of the Elgar family is clearly a very important one, and some very harsh things have been said about them. Richard Morrison called them "a bunch of second-

generation acolytes"; others accused them of seeking financial gain in approving the completion of the symphony. Paul Grafton, Elgar's great-nephew, was until recently a member of the General Committee of the Elgar Society, and he makes out the family's case below.

ELGAR'S UNFINISHED SYMPHONY - THE FINAL ENIGMA

Paul Grafton

Elgar Society members will generally be aware from a variety of newspaper articles that, with the agreement of the Elgar family, the Sir Edward Elgar Will Trust has commissioned the composer Anthony Payne to produce what is intended to be the definitive realisation of the sketches for Elgar's *Third Symphony*.

Members will also be aware of the circumstances in which the dying Sir Edward decreed that no-one should tinker with the sketches - and was given an express assurance to that effect, by his daughter Carice Blake and his close friend W H Reed. They may therefore wish to know why this "tinkering" has been sanctioned, in contravention of Elgar's wishes.

The Elgar Will Trust faces a dilemma which has its origins in the agreement which Carice Blake signed with BBC Chairman Sir John Reith in July 1934, soon after Sir Edward's death. Carice evidently felt that the BBC was entitled to have the incomplete sketches, having paid Sir Edward a substantial part of the commissioning fee for the *Third Symphony* - but, in accordance with the promise which she and Billy Reed had given Elgar, the terms of her gift to the BBC included the clause :

The Corporation for itself its successors and assigns hereby undertakes and agrees that none of the said manuscripts shall ever be published either in whole or in part and that they will not permit any person whatever to have access to the said manuscripts for the purpose of finishing or completing or making any alteration...

Thus far, all perfectly clear and sensible. But this clause is then effectively negated by the following perplexing rider :

PROVIDED ALWAYS that nothing herein contained shall be construed as preventing the Corporation from publishing an article in 'The Listener' relative to the said manuscripts in which some of the themes or other significant passages may be quoted.

Herein lies the final enigma : why did Carice allow the BBC to include that extraordinary rider, completely undermining the aim of the Agreement? And why did Billy Reed - who with Carice had promised the dying Elgar that "no-one shall ever tinker with it" - then include so much of the manuscript material in his *Listener* article published in August 1935, and in his book published in 1936?

Some 95% of the manuscript material was published in *The Listener*, placing the sketches firmly in the public domain. Would-be exploiters therefore had no need to

resort to the actual manuscripts : exploitation could proceed [subject only to copyright restrictions] without infringing the agreement signed between Carice Blake and Sir John Reith.

The copyright period has recently been extended from 50 to 70 years after the composer's death. Because of a ruling in the European Court of Justice, copyright in Elgar's works has been revived throughout the European Community for the balance of the 70-year period; ie, until the end of 2004. Although there were apparently no attempts to exploit the sketches between the original cessation of copyright in 1984 and its restoration in 1996 under the new EC directive, the Elgar Will Trust received expert advice that a number of new circumstances increased the likelihood of unauthorised "tinkering" after 2004 :

- the widespread upsurge in attempts by minor composers to build reputations (and more) by loosely basing new compositions on the incomplete works of major "names";
- the increasing role of the Internet in instant global intercommunication; and
- the widespread interest stimulated by Anthony Payne's acclaimed Radio 3 documentary on the *Third Symphony* in 1995.

The Elgar Will Trust therefore took the view that the best way of deterring unauthorised exploitation would be to remove any incentive to "tinkering", by commissioning a work based on the *Third Symphony* sketches by a widely respected composer such as Anthony Payne, and by promoting this as the sole, definitive and approved exploitation of the Elgar material. The new work clearly cannot be the "completion" of Elgar's *Third Symphony* but, in addition to demonstrating the required skill and integrity, Mr Payne has made a lifelong study of the symphony, and has been almost universally acknowledged to be the best candidate for this most sensitive task.

One cannot be certain that this will provide watertight protection from unseemly exploitation, but it was deemed to be better than doing nothing, thereby allowing a virtual free-for-all after 2004. The Elgar family was persuaded to abandon its previous implacable opposition to any exploitation of the sketches, but requested that all royalties from performances of the new work should fund a composing scholarship.

There will inevitably be some opposition to this difficult and controversial decision, but the motives of those concerned should not be judged any more harshly than the motives of those closest to the dying Elgar, whose participation in the publication of the sketches has precipitated the present-day dilemma.

THE NIGHTMARE OF GERONTIUS

The Story Behind A Famous Recording

Carl Newton

That the 1945 Sargent-Nash issue of *The Dream of Gerontius* is a milestone in the history of recording is a commonplace of Elgar commentary. The acclamation commenced with issue and has continued ever since :

one of the most important happenings in the history of recorded music.¹

... has yet to be equalled on record.²

Certain assumptions have also been made about the participants and organisers :

For the choral part the Huddersfield Choral Society was the obvious first choice...and for that reason the first choice for conductor was Dr Malcolm Sargent.³

His Masters Voice and the British Council combined resources to present Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*.... They could not have chosen better. *Gerontius*...must memorably have gathered and shaped the mood of the hour...the Huddersfield Choir closed up their depleted ranks and set to work with a team of recording engineers headed by Walter Legge. The chosen conductor was Malcolm Sargent...⁴

Perhaps the wartime community spirit entered into the hearts of the Huddersfield singers...⁵

These comments from different writers are representative of the received views of the last fifty years but the archives reveal that the outcome was largely a matter of coincidence. Only by chance was the performance attuned to the 'mood of the hour.' It had been two years in gestation and had been postponed several times. Sargent was not the conductor originally chosen but a relatively late arrival and a minority candidate. Three of the soloists were second, if not third, choices for their roles (one of them signed the contract only four days before the recording date). The Huddersfield singers were not the 'obvious first choice' and it was not only community spirit which infused them, but just as likely anger at the slights that they believed they had received, for their 'depletion' was by order, not circumstance.

¹ *The Gramophone*, June 1945 issue announcing HMV C 3435/46.

² Knowles, J : *Elgar's Interpreters on Record* (Thames, London, 2nd edn., 1985) p 20

³ W McNaught in *The Musical Times*, vol 8 (1945) p 208

⁴ Notes by J N Moore to the 1975 re-issue on LP (RLS 709) reprinted in 1993 with the Testament CD re-make (SBT 2025).

⁵ Additional notes to SBT 2025 by A Blyth

And Legge and HMV had little to do with the final outcome, the former having played a highly ambiguous and disruptive role throughout, and the latter having made minimal commitment to the entire project.

The extraordinary story is revealed in the archives at the Public Record Office, the British Council and the BBC Written Archives. Much of it now seems to be of the nature of those Ealing comedies with which, indeed, it was a near contemporary. If amusement is our main reaction to this saga of intrigue and incompetence, there are more serious implications in what it tells us of attitudes to Elgar and British music and the cultural politics and social mores of the time. Some reputations are dented, some enhanced, and there are one or two unsung heroes and heroines who deserve to emerge from the shadows.

The British Council was set up in 1934 with the express role of combating Fascist cultural propaganda. In typically British fashion no programme was clearly set out by which this laudable aim might be achieved. The Council operated mainly through specialist departments with the policy decisions being based on the recommendations of advisory committees, each dealing with a branch of the arts and sciences or with education. The committees were serviced by Council staff but consisted essentially of the 'great and good' from the appropriate disciplines. The Treasury provided basic funding but commercial type activities were permissible, provided they covered their costs, or nearly so. Major items of expenditure required Finance Committee approval, but otherwise the advisory committees seem to have been left very much to their own devices. It does not require much perceptiveness to guess what would happen if a group of distinguished, articulate, and self-opinionated persons were provided with access to public funds.

One of the first committees to be set up was the Music Advisory Committee. By 1942 the Chairman was Ernest Makower, with Pamela Henn-Collins, Director of the Council's Music Department, as Secretary. Ernest Samuel Makower was a businessman who had sponsored a series of concerts at the London Museum, of which he was a Trustee, in 1929-32. The other members were; the composer, Arthur Bliss; the critics and musicologists Ernest Dent and Henry Cope Colles; Lesley Boosey of the music publishers; Myra Hess, then in the midst of the fame of her National Gallery concerts; academics Jack Westrup and Victor Hely-Hutchinson; Adrian Boult; Phillip Godlee; and Lord Glentanar. Godlee was a Manchester textile manufacturer who was Chairman of the Halle Society and Treasurer of the Royal Manchester College of Music. It was he who was instrumental in bringing Barbirolli back from the USA. Thomas Coats, 2nd Baron Glentanar, seems to have been the statutory Scotsman. A member of the famous textile family of Paisley, he lived at Aboyne and never attended a meeting. A somewhat mixed team with which to challenge the formidable Dr Goebbels.

Bliss, it should be noted, was also at this time Director of Music at the BBC, a post he had held from July 1941. He was to give this up on 31 March 1944 when an interregnum occurred during which Boult acted in the capacity. Hely-Hutchinson then took over as official appointee in September 1944. Colles died on 25 March 1943 and was replaced on the Committee by William Walton. These changes have some bearing on what follows.

It was in 1942 that the idea of subsidising recordings was first mooted. The evidence suggests that this was entirely the idea of Walter Legge, who was not a member of the Committee. He proposed on behalf of his employers, HMV, that the Council should go 50/50 on the costs and guarantee HMV a sale of 500 copies. Each recording was supposed to cost £1,000 to produce, but it was anticipated that the publishers of the recorded music would contribute. The idea was discussed at the meeting of 10 February 1942 and the Committee then turned to the thorny problem of what should be recorded. Miss Henn-Collins recommended that the records should be of major 'modern' (undefined) British works and madrigals⁶. Madrigals and lute music, indeed, became something of an obsession with the Committee. Objections were immediately raised on the grounds that this ignored young composers (?because they did not write major works). It would cause professional jealousy among living composers and was not in accord with the Council's mission. The latter was indeed a valid point and it will be seen that this remained throughout a largely unresolved issue.

By April the Council had agreed Legge's terms but insisted, understandably, that there should be a return to the taxpayer in the form of a 6% royalty, publishers of the works recorded receiving 4%. They also made the interesting condition that the BBC orchestras should always be used and that, to avoid rehearsal costs, the chosen works should always be broadcast. The first work proposed was Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* to be followed by Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* and Ireland's *Second Violin Sonata*. As the Finance Committee would only allow a budget of £1,500 for the recordings this was as far as the programme for the first year could go. By now, however, the Committee members had the bit well and truly between their teeth.

A whole string of works were put forward, argued over, rejected, taken up again and discarded a second time. This process continued with great vigour, and not much positive outcome, until the meeting of 13 April 1943, when *Gerontius* was first added to the, by now, much bruised list. Unfortunately we do not know who made the proposal. It had some strange bedfellows, being linked with Rawsthorne's *Piano Concerto*, Rubbra's *Third Symphony* and Britten's *Les Illuminations*. These were all relatively recent works compared to the Elgar, and by composers two generations younger. Also, significantly, they were less than half the length of *Gerontius* and much easier and less costly to produce. The really critical meeting was held on 11 May. According to the minutes, "after long and exhaustive discussion" it was decided to record for the 1943-4 programme Bax's *Third Symphony* and Vaughan Williams' *Flos Campi*. However it was agreed that if any funds were left there might be room for *Gerontius*⁷. In this rather back-handed and unenthusiastic fashion the Council, at least officially, paved the way for "one of the most important happenings in the history of recorded music."

The attendance at this critical meeting should be noted. In addition to the Chairman

⁶ British Council Archives MIN 35

⁷ British Council Archives MIN 36. In the event *Flos Campi* was not included in the programme and this may be the reason why funds were available for *Gerontius*.

and Secretary only Bliss, Boosey, Hely-Hutchinson and Westrup attended. One is entitled to suspect that some of the absences were diplomatic. There is no doubt that the decision was contentious, for a variety of reasons. In the files at the Public Record Office there is a remarkable letter from Makower to Henn-Collins. It reveals that she had expressed concerns arising from the attitude of some of the members about the wisdom of proceeding with the Elgar. In the course of the letter he states that the proposed recording :

...is one of long term policy with the object of presenting to other countries the best of modern compositions and such great British classics as have not been recorded owing to the fact that they have not a commercial value

Having made such a breathtakingly casual extension of the Council's objectives, Makower went on to say :

The Dream of Gerontius is perhaps the greatest work...of what may be termed...modern British composition. It has special appeal in Roman Catholic countries and the fact of the great cost involved should be no deterrent.⁸

The Council subsidy, he goes on, is to enable it to record works commercial companies would find unprofitable. Anyway, Elgar, Bax, and Vaughan Williams are 'older generation' composers. The confusions behind this letter need not be commented.. Bax would certainly have been surprised to find that he belonged to the same generation as Elgar, particularly as he had recently been invited to a Huddersfield concert as a representative of the younger generation of composers. At this date he was 59!

The news that the Council were to support a complete recording of *Gerontius* seems to have spread rapidly and they were bombarded with suggestions as to performers. This was probably the result of an inspired leak by Legge (perhaps through Boulton). There are letters to Legge on the same file asking him, politely, to keep his mouth shut. They seem to have had little effect.

Someone realised that the Elgar Trustees should be informed. A letter was sent to Carice Elgar Blake, then at Woodend, Broadheath, asking her approval to the recording and telling her that the performers would be chosen by listening 'blind' to various recordings. This appears to have been a device to avoid entering into discussion with Carice, as no one had suggested this curious proceeding. Another letter went to Novello, publishers of *The Dream of Gerontius*, asking for a contribution. The reply was decisive. Novello's funds were reserved for works needing them⁹. Rebuffed in no uncertain manner the Committee put aside further consideration of the project for the moment. Nevertheless by the summer of 1943 Pamela Henn-Collins must have thought that her troubles in this respect were at an end. They were just beginning.

⁸ Public Record Office (PRO) BW2/178 (24 May 1943)

⁹ loc. cit (7 June 1943)

It will not have escaped notice from the above account that, despite what had been said to Carice, no steps had been taken to find the necessary forces to make the recording. Nor was there any real idea, therefore, of the likely costs. There seems to have been a vague assumption that the BBC would provide the orchestra and Boult would conduct, not so much because of his connection with Elgar as that he was on the spot and a member of the Committee. The Huddersfield Choral Society had been mentioned as possible participants. Matters drifted on for more than a year before any positive steps were taken.

The assiduous Legge was clearly leaking like a sieve about the project. On 26 June 1944 Kenneth Wright, BBC Deputy Director of Music, wrote to Henn-Collins to say that he had picked up rumours, but that the BBC Symphony would not be available for the recording until the spring of 1945 when :

...as a matter of practical convenience it could be linked with Sir Adrian's performance on Good Friday of the work, but this would be in Bedford with the Luton Choral Society...¹⁰

The BBC had, apparently, earmarked Heddle Nash for the title role for this performance. This seems to be the first indication that he might be involved in the recording and his ultimate inclusion was therefore, at least in part, a matter of chance rather than any special affinity he might be supposed to have with the role. It is also important to remember the original constraints regarding the use of performers. According to Wright, Boult was pressing the claims of the Luton singers and hints that he (Boult) had an aversion to Huddersfield - whether to the town or its choir is unclear. By this time the realities of budgets had begun to impinge and much of the subsequent discussion was coloured by the need to come up with the most economical solution. That this made nonsense of the original decision to do *Gerontius* anyway no one seems to have noticed. Not everyone was in favour of economy. From his northern fastness, Lord Glentanar now made his only contribution on 10 July, writing to urge that no expense be spared¹¹. This might be thought an odd sentiment for someone charged with the use of public funds during a major war.

Matters were reaching an *impasse*. On the 13 July 1944 Makower sent a telegram to every member of the Committee calling an emergency meeting at his country house near Henley. The wording was stark :

Dream Problems- Committee Unable To Choose Conductor, Orchestra or Choir.¹²

There is evidence, however, that a short-list existed. Pencilled on the Wright letter of 26 June is a set of names that had presumably been given to him or his assistant over the telephone. The list is intriguing:- Nash, Ferrier/Ripley, Tom Williams, Walker, Boult/Wood. Wright reported to his superior that the Council choice was for

¹⁰ BBC Written Archives WAC R 46/74/1

¹¹ PRO BW2/178

¹² loc.cit.

Nash, Ferrier, Williams as the Priest, and Walker as the Angel of the Agony. It was agreed that the idea of having two basses was "a break with tradition" but the proposal met with the approval of Steuart Wilson¹³. Wilson, a former notable singer of Gerontius himself, was at this time the BBC Overseas Music Director and a person who might be supposed to have good knowledge of foreign tastes. Tantalisingly, Wright refers to the "person" making the recommendation for two basses without disclosing their name.

Prompted by receipt of the dramatic telegram, two major musical figures now entered the lists. Arthur Bliss loosed off a broadside to the, by now, increasingly unhappy Henn-Collins on 15 July :

I was lukewarm about the recording - not to say cold. Elgar is sufficiently well known anyway and recording the Dream of Gerontius will not add to his admirers. Novellos tell me they could not believe that recording Gerontius at this late date will materially add to performances abroad. It would be like a Franco-Belgian Council deciding now to record Cesar Franck's Beatitudes.¹⁴

Bliss's own preferences were for Dowland's Lute Music, Byrd's *Great Mass* and Delius's *Song of the High Hills*,

...or coming to what I personally consider our first aim, the spreading of living composers' music.

It need hardly be said that there was nothing in the Council's charter or stated objectives that justified the latter assertion. Could it be co-incidence that Bliss was himself a living composer?

Two days later William Walton made his contribution in characteristically non-nonsense style;

(Gerontius) should be done as soon as possible with Malcolm Sargent, the Liverpool Philharmonic and the Huddersfield Choir...I think the fact of having the Huddersfield Choir outweighs every[thing] that might be said for Adrian Boult with the BBC Orc[hestra] and the Luton Choir.¹⁵

Having chosen the winning team so far as the supporting roles were concerned Walton then recommended Robert Easton and Roy Henderson as the bass soloists. He did, however admit that he knew very little about singers. It should be said that Walton was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the same forces had just produced a highly acclaimed recording, also Council subsidised, of his own

¹³ BBC Written Archives loc.cit. It is important to stress, in view of some comments which have been made, that the idea was entirely that of the British Council, prompted perhaps by the BBC. Neither Legge nor Sargent had anything to do with it.

¹⁴ PRO BW2/178

¹⁵ loc.cit. 17 July 1944

*Belshazzar's Feast*¹⁶.

The crisis meeting took place on 25 July. Eleven days previously the BBC dropped a bombshell. The Secretary General of the British Council, A J White, had written to William Haley, Director General of the BBC to ask, formally, for the use of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Boult. White had been contacted by "a Mr Nicholls" (Basil Nichols, Controller Programmes). The file note to this conversation records that Nichols had declared that the BBC :

...did not really think that the orchestral aspect formed such an outstanding part of the music as to justify them in releasing their orchestra.¹⁷

A memo which Wright sent to Boult on 11 July states that Miss Henn-Collins and Miss Wingate [sic but more likely Whinyates, who succeeded Henn-Collins] from the British Council have been shown the film of the *Gerontius* performance. Wright and Steuart Wilson acted as their hosts. The verdict was that the Luton Choir "frequently lacked the attack and bite the work demands". Neither Wright nor Wilson believed that the Luton would make "an adequate substitute for the Huddersfield for a really first class recording". However they did not express their doubts to the Council's representatives¹⁸. Boult replied to Wright :

...I feel more and more strongly that we should be most unwise from the policy point of view as well as absolutely wrong morally to take a narrow view about sending the Orchestra up to Huddersfield if the British Council plump for Malcolm...I think Mrs Elgar Blake would come down pretty heavily on our side...¹⁹

Boult, despite the fact that he was by now Acting Director of Music, clearly failed to make any impression on the BBC or did not seek to make one. Moreover no one had consulted Carice for over a year. It is not clear which 'side' Boult imagined he was promoting.

The Music Advisory Committee therefore met in a situation of total disarray over the project on 25 July. It is interesting that Legge was an invitee at this meeting. The news regarding the BBC bombshell was reported and in consequence it was decided, with some reluctance, to ask Sargent, the Liverpool Philharmonic and the

¹⁶ Edwards, R A : *And the Glory* (Wm Maney, Leeds, n d) p 108. The recording was made in January 1943. This work also draws attention (p 110) to Henn-Collins being invited to be present at a special play-back of this recording in Huddersfield. There is only a passing reference to the *Gerontius*; Mr Edwards tells me that the Society did not even have a copy of the recording in their archives.

¹⁷ PRO BW2/178

¹⁸ BBC Written Archives, loc.cit. This is an intriguing reference. If a film with sound track had been made of an entire performance, by definition it, and *not* the Sargent/Nash would be the first-ever complete recording of the work. Certainly Wright's memo implies this.

¹⁹ loc.cit. Boult to Wright (14 July 1944)

Huddersfield Choral Society to participate. To what extent this was the result of Makower rail-roading the Committee in the light of Walton's firm views cannot now be determined.

As soloists the Committee agreed that Nash should sing Gerontius and Walker The Priest. The initial choice for Angel fell on Kathleen Ferrier with Gladys Ripley as reserve. A decision on the fourth soloist (there was no suggestion there should only be three) and their role was left to Westrup and Legge, who were also to make the final choice between Ferrier and Ripley²⁰. That Legge was not even a member seems to have been disregarded. It soon became obvious that he was pursuing his own agenda.

On the file is a manuscript letter from Pamela Henn-Collins to Makower dated 6 September 1944. It contains some remarkable information about the machinations now in full progress :

Though he pretends to have done so, Walter Legge has not yet asked for formal approval of the decision taken at the Committee meeting. He is quietly determined to make us change our minds on the strength of the Elgar 2nd Symphony recording he has just made with Boult.²¹

She then goes on to produce a polling list of the members, indicating their preferences for conductor. Only Walton, Boosey and Makower were for Sargent, all the rest wanted Boult, except Bliss, who was against doing any Elgar at all.

The decision is a fearful responsibility and if Walter - who is very pally with Boult - can really make him do what he wants we may be wrong in choosing Malcolm and passing over the name the world expects...I think it possible Walter has been too clever for us.²²

In a despairing *cri de coeur* to Leslie Boosey of the same date, the unfortunate secretary confessed that she heartily wished that Elgar had never written *The Dream of Gerontius*.

By the 22nd of that month Legge was publicly professing to have accepted the Committee decision totally. The value to be placed on such protestations is demonstrated by the fact that in the same letter in which he states this he goes on to praise Boult's performance of the Elgar *Second Symphony*. He also disparages the Liverpool orchestra :

Holst has broken with it and David Wise's promotion means the second violins are very

²⁰ British Council Archives MIN 36.

²¹ PRO BW2/178. The recording mentioned was DB 6190/5, issued in January 1945.

²² loc.cit.

weak.²³

This is a strange statement in view of the fact that several writers have expressed the opinion that the Liverpool was at this time one of the strongest orchestras in Britain²⁴. Legge announced in the same letter that 1 to 10 January 1945 had been chosen as the dates for recording. Once again it seemed as if the project was through into open water. Enter the Huddersfield Choral Society.

The Society was approached formally, for the first time since the whole affair had begun, on 18 October 1944 by letter to Frank Netherwood its President. Intriguingly the letter states that neither orchestra nor soloists had yet been decided. It goes on:

The Dream of Gerontius is perhaps the greatest English choral work there is and it is of the utmost importance that the recording of it should be the best that human endeavour can produce.²⁵

Because of this fact the Council and HMV (in effect Legge) claimed the right to decide which members of the choir should actually take part.

Had it been announced that no Yorkshireman would in future be picked for the England Test Team the outrage of the White Rose County could not have been more forcefully expressed. Netherwood replied in no uncertain terms that; a) The Huddersfield was not at the beck and call of the British Council. The Society could not consider recording before April 1945 at the earliest; and b) the Society and no one else would select the choir. He also pointed out that as *Gerontius* was a well-loved work in Huddersfield all the members would expect to sing in it²⁶. Henn-Collins wrote to Legge on 14 November reporting this. To overcome Netherwood's objection she made the amazing proposal that Legge should put the weaker singers at the back :

...where they would be out of range of the microphones²⁷.

²³ loc.cit. Henry Holst, Danish-born Leader of the Berlin Philharmonic, and Leader of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra 1931-1944.

²⁴ See for example, Reid, C : *Malcolm Sargent* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1968) p 290, which draws attention to the fact that the Liverpool was in a particularly favourable situation to recruit outstanding players. Reference should also be made to Schwarzkopf, E : *On and Off the Record* (Faber & Faber, London, 1982) p 92, where Legge states that he was placing his own candidates in the Liverpool at this time, in anticipation of recruiting them for his proposed Philharmonia Orchestra.

²⁵ PRO BW2/178 (Henn-Collins to Netherwood)

²⁶ loc.cit (Netherwood to Henn-Collins 25/10/44 and 4/11/44). He probably overstates the case. If the choir were enthusiasts for *Gerontius* the Huddersfield public was not. When next performed there (in 1947) only £4/15/- was taken in ticket sales.

²⁷ loc.cit. (Henn-Collins to Legge 14/11/44).

She also revealed that Thomas Russell, Chairman of the London Philharmonic, had been approached for the use of that orchestra. Russell, however, was too practised a hand. He realised that the recording was essentially a commercial venture and that his orchestra should therefore be paid proper royalties for their services. Legge had no intention of allowing any diminution of HMV profits and told Henn-Collins to refuse Russell's request.

He also announced that Sargent had decreed that only 100 voices would be needed in the choir. There is no proof that this was the case. Indeed the evidence of the Choral Society archives leads to the supposition that it may have originated from Legge himself. The *Belsazzar's Feast* record had been made with only 100 singers after a meeting between Netherwood and Legge²⁸. No doubt it was assumed that the same arrangement would apply again, but it seems to have been forgotten that, whereas *Belshazzar* had been recorded in Liverpool, *Gerontius* was to be on the Choral Society's home ground. Moreover there was no question of the choir being in a depleted state on account of the exigences of war. In the 1944-5 season the Society had 347 singing members of whom only 16 were On His Majesty's Service²⁹. It should also be said that the Huddersfield was not an obvious choice for the work as their practical knowledge of it must have been minimal. They had performed it only three times in 17 years.

No decision had yet been made about the fourth soloist. By now it seems to have been assumed that Walker would sing the Angel of The Agony. It was Henn-Collins who suggested that Dennis Noble should be invited to sing that role. (In the upshot he sang The Priest and Walker The Angel). It also emerged that Legge had omitted to tell Nash and Ripley, probably deliberately, that the Council were involved! He had also written privately to Sargent telling him that he (Sargent) was free to choose the orchestra. This was clearly untrue. It required a face to face meeting between Legge, Sargent and Henn-Collins to put this straight on 1 February 1945, only eight weeks before the recording, rescheduled as a result of Huddersfield insistence, was due to take place. At this stage Pamela Henn-Collins, no doubt feeling the strain, departed for South America and did not return until after the event³⁰.

Her place was taken by her deputy, Evelyn Donald, who was not to be spared some of the problems experienced by her superior. The Huddersfield people were still seething at their treatment at the hands of upstart southerners and were on the warpath again. First they requested a further postponement of the sessions (refused). Then they raised a demand that Herbert Bardgett's name must appear on the record label (reluctantly agreed). Finally they demanded to know precisely how much they

²⁸ West Yorkshire Archives Service (Kirklees) KC 200 1/1/11. (Huddersfield Choral Society Executive Minutes 4/12/42)

²⁹ West Yorkshire Archives Service (Kirklees) KC 200 3/8. (Huddersfield Choral Society Annual Report for 1944-5).

³⁰ That she was subjected to further propaganda before she left is revealed by a letter from Ann Chapman, Sargent's personal secretary, referring to her attendance by invitation at a Sargent performance of *Gerontius* (PRO BW2/137).

were going to be paid before they would agree to participate³¹.

At the last minute Carice Elgar Blake was remembered. She was invited to attend the sessions only in March. The lateness of the invitation made it difficult for her to find accommodation. The 'George', the main hotel in Huddersfield, was booked up by people connected with the recording. In the end she had to commute from Halifax to the sessions in Huddersfield Town Hall.

In view of the nature of the story it could be expected that a last minute crisis would arise. It did. On 5 March the Secretary of the Liverpool Philharmonic wrote refusing their participation on the grounds that the terms offered would result in their losing money. Frenzied last minute negotiation resulted in a compromise, but the final event in the saga did not take place until 4 April when Noble signed the contract to sing four days later. One wonders if it was only then that he was told what part he was to perform!

The recording itself is, as they say, history. It received instant plaudits from the musical press and a leader in the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*³². Complimentary copies were sent to Carice Elgar Blake, Birmingham Oratory, and Toscanini. Special playings (on the new high fidelity equipment) were organised by the Council at its provincial offices.

If the recording is history the balance sheet is not, until now. In truth the enterprise was a financial disaster for the Council and the taxpayer. The fees paid to the participants were:-

Sargent	£240
Nash/Ripley	£125
Walker/Noble	£30
Choir	£300
Leader	£5
Principals	£3
Orchestra each	£2/10/-

In addition expenses appear to have been paid to choir members (£1 each) and there were costs related to the hire of Huddersfield Town Hall. The total outlay on the recording was £3,606. As no contribution had been made by Novello the Council received the full 10% royalty. The initial selling price was three guineas for the 12-record set. The recording stayed in the catalogues until 1955. In those ten years it sold a maximum of 3,000 copies, probably many fewer, since the exact figure cannot be calculated because of price changes over the period³³. The royalty received left

³¹ PRO BW2/178 Crawshaw to Donald [27 February 1945]. David Crawshaw JP was Secretary of the Choral Society.

³² Issue of 14 April 1945.

³³ This should be compared with the 83,000 copies sold of Sargent's 1946 recording of *Messiah* (Reid, *op.cit.*, p 345). The Council-sponsored recording of *Belshazzar's Feast* sold 4,750 copies in the UK and 356 abroad, (PRO BW80/1).

the Council with a loss of £2,562. (A multiple of about 25 is needed to translate this into money of today). This is the largest loss, in real terms, ever made by the Council on a subsidised work. HMV, on the other hand, received over £9,000 for virtually zero outlay³⁴. Legge had done his work well.

There is a curious tailpiece. On 28 October 1945 Carice wrote to Miss Seymour Whinyates (Henn-Collins' successor as Director of the Music Department) implying that Evelyn Donald had suggested donating the proceeds from the sales to the Elgar Birthplace³⁵. On the face of it this was preposterous, but there is a memo on file from Donald to Kennedy Cooke, the Council's Director of Production, which contains the statement :

Efforts are being made by the Elgar Birthplace trustees to raise funds for gathering material together for the birthplace...as a shrine to Elgar. It is expected to become an attraction to tourists³⁶.

Rather more modestly than Carice had implied, she suggests a 1% donation from royalties. A quick and decisive negative reply was received, rightly pointing out that this would be an unauthorised diversion of public funds. As a final twist to the story Donald reveals that she had suggested the holding of an Elgar Festival in order to raise money for the Birthplace. It would thus appear that it was from the Council, not Adrian Boult, that the idea originated from which subsequent Elgar Malvern Festivals sprang.

What questions are raised by this extraordinary and sometimes, comic, tale? The first and most obvious is - why *Gerontius*?

The small number of persons who remembered the objectives of the British Council seemed to believe, with Makower, that the work would be good propaganda in Roman Catholic countries. There are two problems with this view. It is debatable to what extent *Gerontius* is a strictly Catholic work and it is certainly not of a kind which would have been instantly acceptable in a traditionalist Catholic nation. In this context Byrd's *Great Mass* or Tallis's *Spem In Alium* would surely have been more immediately assimilable. The second problem relates to the realities of the situation. In 1943 Portugal was the only Catholic country in Europe not under Fascist domination or influence. It would have been impossible to have used the recording anywhere where it might be supposed to matter. True, the neutral Catholic nations outside Europe might have received it, but even they were few and far between in 1943. Remembering that even in England *Gerontius* had been criticised on religious grounds, it would surely have been more sensible to choose a less provocative work with wider appeal. Moreover, at precisely the time the Committee were deciding, by default, to do *Gerontius* the Warsaw Rising was being bloodily crushed. Perhaps *Polonia* might have been a better expression of solidarity

³⁴ British Council Archives MIN 39 (Report on subsidised recordings 24/10/69).

³⁵ PRO BW2/178

³⁶ loc.cit. Donald to Kennedy Cooke (15 July 1946)

with our Allies.

It would certainly have been cheaper and easier to produce. It is strange that, setting aside the points made above, the Committee paid no heed to the evidence which was being fed back by British cultural representatives overseas. In 1942 Sargent had made a Scandinavian tour which had been an outstanding success, particularly as it was in direct comparison with a similar tour undertaken by Furtwangler and the Berlin Philharmonic. Reports indicate that the Elgar works which received specially favourable response were *Enigma Variations* and *Introduction and Allegro for Strings*³⁷. These would have been excellent choices with wide appeal at the time. True, no complete commercially available recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* existed then, but this aspect was not mentioned at any time in the discussions and producing such should not have been the primary objective. The overseas promotion of existing Elgar recordings might well have been seen as more relevant and having more impact. The Committee used public funds in a laudable, but essentially self-serving, project.

This leads to the conclusion that the Committee, and presumably the British musical establishment generally, either did not see Elgar as a powerful enough weapon in a propaganda war or were not interested in such a war at all. Their opponents were not so inhibited. Hitler himself had made a direct challenge on 9 November 1939 when he referred to Beethoven as single-handedly achieving more than all English composers put together³⁸. The extent of Hitler's knowledge of English composers is uncertain. What is not is that there was a major Nazi drive to promote Beethoven, Wagner, and Bruckner. Even minor works by Beethoven were resurrected. Ironically on 11 April 1945, while the Huddersfield sessions were in progress, a concert of music by, what Prof Dennis has called "the three honoured members of the Nazi Valhalla" was held in the already besieged Berlin³⁹. Yet no one doubted then, or does now, that Beethoven, Wagner, and Bruckner are cultural world citizens. Producing *Gerontius* so laboriously, and in this manner, unfortunately helped to condemn Elgar to be seen for another generation as an English provincial musician, producing works of Victorian religiosity for home consumption. A great opportunity was missed and the poor sales demonstrate that, despite any artistic quality, it did not make a breakthrough for Elgar, as indeed Bliss and Novello had, for their own reasons, predicted.

This brings us to the roles played by the respective participants. Whatever he may afterwards have claimed, for example in his autobiography⁴⁰, Bliss emerges as virulently anti-Elgar. Given that he was for much of the critical time Director of Music at the BBC it cannot be believed that that organisation could state that the

³⁷ PRO BW2/137 (Report on Sargent's Scandinavian Tour). See also Scholes, P A : *Mirror of Music* (Novello & OUP, London, 1947) p 897

³⁸ Dennis, D B : *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870-1989* (Yale Univ Press, London, 1996) p 167

³⁹ *ibid*, p 173

⁴⁰ Bliss, A : *As I Remember* (Thames, London, 1989) pp 93-4

orchestral part was insignificant without consulting him, even more so as he was a member of the group proposing the recording in the first place. His contemptuous comparison of Elgar with Cesar Franck speaks volumes. Was this revenge for Elgar's criticism of him in his youth?⁴¹.

If it was not Bliss who denied the orchestral significance of *Gerontius* the suspicion must fall on Boult. Indeed, despite his subsequent reputation as an Elgarian, Boult is someone whose actions are hard to follow. While appearing to approve the project he also contrived to be very subdued in his support for it. His attendance at the Committee was erratic, understandably given the nature of his commitments, but at no point does he seem to have made a decisive intervention, as did Walton, to ensure success. Having urged that the Luton choir should be involved he seems to have been glad of an escape clause. His letter to Wright is strange. Why was it a moral issue to send the BBC Symphony to Huddersfield? Was Boult temperamentally or religiously out of sympathy with *Gerontius*? Did he believe that association with it would not further his reputation? It may be significant that he made only one recording of it in his career and that 30 years after the events recounted here. It is also relevant to draw attention to his preface to the notes for his 1969 recording of *The Kingdom*, expressing his view that that work was far superior to *Gerontius*⁴².

If Boult was low-key the same certainly cannot be said for Legge. Legge had joined HMV in 1927, his first job being to write record labels and notes⁴³. Elgar criticised him for inaccuracies in notes to *Beau Brummel*. From this he worked himself up to supervising sessions and editing the HMV house magazine. He wrote to Elgar on 4 August 1932 to ask if he could interview him on whether there really was a 3rd Symphony⁴⁴. Unfortunately this meeting does not seem to have taken place. His next approach was on 19 September 1933, through Gaisberg, who asked Elgar if Legge could have tea with him, as he is "a great admirer of your music"⁴⁵. This was surely hyperbole as Legge never showed any special interest in Elgar's music at any time in his career, being mainly concerned with lieder, opera and instrumentalists⁴⁶. We do not seem to have any evidence if he actually made the proposed visit.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² EMI (HMV) Angel Series SAN 244/245.

⁴³ A useful summary of Legge's early career is given in Pettit, S J : *Philharmonia Orchestra* (Robert Hale, London, 1985) p 17ff. See also Schwarzkopf, E, *op.cit.*

⁴⁴ Letter published in Moore, J N : *Elgar on Record* (OUP, London, 1974) pp 180-1.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p 217

⁴⁶ Legge later claimed that he admired Elgar but could not get anyone interested in playing him because of critical objection to his music (Schwarzkopf, *op.cit.*, p 105). This statement, appearing as it does, considerably *ex post facto* and in an obviously laudatory work, must be treated with some caution.

By this time HMV had merged with Columbia to form EMI. The reason was the disastrous effects of the Depression on the recording industry; HMV profits had, indeed, virtually disappeared. On the outbreak of war Legge had secured appointment as Music Director of the Entertainments National Services Association (ENSA), but this was obviously not going to be a permanent job. The situation was not much better in 1942 when Legge enters our story. By then he was the only remaining record producer in the company and clearly had to justify his existence. Since recording foreign artists was practically impossible then, he targeted the BBC Symphony Orchestra as a source of work. Whatever they did Legge would record and it was in his interest to try and ensure that Boult and the BBC did as much as possible. This is surely the reason for his strong campaign on their behalf over *Gerontius* and also for his entrepreneurial proposal to the British Council in early 1942. By the spring of 1944 he was in a particularly difficult situation. His high-handed methods had angered many people in ENSA and there was a move afoot to get him dismissed. Association with a high profile project was to his benefit and he must have found the Council's reserve about premature publicity especially galling⁴⁷. One feels that if the work had been *Pop Goes The Weasel* Legge would not have worried, provided he was able to get his name on the label and maximise HMV profits.

We are left with the intriguing question - who suggested *Gerontius*? The only candidates who seem reasonable are Colles and Walton. We have no way of determining the answer but most of the other members are ruled out, either by the evidence of the archives, or by what we know of their views from other sources. Colles was an assiduous attender and may have made the original suggestion but it was Walton who played a decisive role, despite having become a member only just before the critical meeting of 13 April 1943. He was obviously a powerful pro-Elgar influence. It may be significant that on 21 December 1942, in a newspaper interview while rehearsing the Huddersfield Chorus for the *Belsazzar's Feast* recording, he said :

I have unbounded admiration for Elgar...There's no other English composer to touch him...He's becoming bigger all the time...⁴⁸

Whoever made the suggestion the recording, however distinguished artistically, and even more historically, was put together in a remarkably 'hand-to-mouth' fashion and the result was more good luck than judgement or planning. The performers, no doubt, gave of their best on the day, but it was the persistence of Ernest Makower, the indefatigable Pamela Henn-Collins and her Deputy, Evelyn Donald, which brought it all to fruition against a positive sea of difficulties. They, perhaps more than anyone else in the sorry saga, had the right to say, as Elgar himself, "this was the best of me".

⁴⁷ Schwarzkopf, op.cit, reveals (p 256) that Legge and HMV made only three records in 1942, none in 1943 and one in 1944. No reference is made to any connection with the British Council or any of their recordings. This curious reticence is shared with Boult and Bliss and one can only speculate on the reasons.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Kennedy, M : *Portrait of Walton* (OUP, Oxford, 1989) p 38

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his thanks to the following, without whose co-operation the research for the above article would not have been possible:

Bob Steedman, Head of Office Services, British Council

Monica Scott, Records Manager, British Council;

Jacqueline Kavanagh, Written Archivist, British Broadcasting Corporation, who identified several important documents in the BBC files on my behalf;

Antony Lewis-Crosby, Chief Executive, and Vincent Tyndall, Archivist, Liverpool Philharmonic Society;

Robert Edwards, Archivist, Royal Huddersfield Choral Society, who personally acted as a guide to the archives in Huddersfield

Suzanne Lewis, Senior Archive Assistant, EMI Archives

Nicholas Cox, Director of Modern Records, Public Record Office, who drew my attention to the 'Sargent File'

Note On Sources

There are two series of minutes of the British Council Music Advisory Committee. The approved and signed series are still in the custody of the Council, but the Public Record Office has an unsigned series (PRO BW 80) which includes agendas and some presented papers. I have used the signed series as the definitive copy and refer them in the above text, but consulted the PRO series for additional data.

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BOOK REVIEW

Rethinking Dvořák : views from five countries, edited by David R Beveridge

Clarendon Press, 1996 £35

In September of 1884 Worcester was in the grip of Dvořák fever. The forty-year-old Czech composer was visiting England for the second time in just six months, and he had arrived there to conduct two of his works at the Three Choirs Festival. "We have no desire to herald in a Dvořák mania", the *Pall Mall Gazette* had declared earlier that year, "Still, if each season must have a musical lion, we might go further and fare worse". Now the High Street shops in Worcester were selling photographs of the composer, and people everywhere stopped him to ask for autographs.

Twenty-seven-year-old Edward Elgar was too shy to approach the composer himself, but he was keenly interested. Elgar at the time was a local violinist and bandmaster at Powick Asylum. Later he recalled seeing Dvořák's "fierce peasant jowl...amongst those placidly polite English faces". He told his friend Rosa Burley that Dvořák "seemed almost as out of place in Worcester as did his Slavonic music when heard amidst the sedate hymn-tunes of the cantatas then being written for the festivals by English composers". For Elgar, who had dreams of becoming a composer himself, Dvořák's visit would be an unforgettable experience.

Graham Melville-Mason has written a well-researched account of Dvořák's effect on Elgar. His article, 'Dvořák and Elgar', appears in this collection of papers from the 1991 Dvořák Sesquicentennial Conference and Festival in New Orleans, an international effort to reassess Dvořák's place in late Romantic music. Edited and introduced by American scholar David R Beveridge, the book includes contributions from the United States, the Czech Republic, Britain, Germany and Croatia.

Melville-Mason gathers together many of the facts about the Dvořák-Elgar connection and offers some valuable musical analysis. In particular, he shows a previously unnoticed similarity between Dvořák's *Symphonic Variations* and the *Enigma Variations*. However, he leaves the reasons for Elgar's fascination with Dvořák unexplored, and, because of that, he may have underestimated the role the Bohemian composer played in Elgar's development.

Dvořák entered Elgar's life at a crucial time. In the summer of 1883 he was a young musician who had just known the thrill of having his first work performed in London - *Sevillana*. That achievement, however, was overshadowed when his fiancée Helen Weaver broke off their engagement. The loss of Weaver hurt Elgar deeply, and a further blow came when he recognised that he would never become a concert violinist. "My prospects are worse than ever", Elgar wrote to his friend Charles Buck in late July. "[And] to crown my miseries my engagement is broken. off & I am lonely". This was Elgar's state of mind as Dvořák's visit approached. As Melville-Mason explains, Elgar already knew some of Dvořák's music. We can hear echoes of it - along with traces of Schumann and Delibes - in the orchestral pieces he composed during the early 1880s. At the festival, Elgar would get an unusual opportunity to observe the composer close-up. He would be playing among the first violins.

On 11 September, Dvořák conducted his *Stabat Mater* in the morning and the *Sixth Symphony* in the evening. At the evening concert there was enthusiastic applause after the first three movements, and a thunderous ovation at the end. Elgar was enthralled. Writing to Buck a few days afterwards, he wrote: "I wish you could hear Dvořák's music. It is simply ravishing, so tuneful & clever & the orchestration is wonderful; no matter how few instruments he uses it never sounds thin. I cannot describe it: it must be heard".

Melville-Mason quotes E Wulstan Atkins as saying that in his last years Elgar was still speaking of the effect Dvořák's visit had had on him. But what was that effect exactly? Melville-Mason writes about Dvořák's influence as if Elgar were pre-ordained to become a composer. On the contrary, Elgar was slow to recognise his vocation, and part of the reason may have been a lack of what we would call "role models". It was exhilarating for Elgar to see a great composer celebrated in his own city. The fact that he was self-taught must have been encouraging. And to play under his direction must have been inspiring for a young man who wanted to be a composer but seems to have had trouble imagining himself as one. Just one month after the festival, Elgar resigned his post as bandmaster at Powick Asylum and began devoting more time to composing. A few months later he reported to Buck that he had just finished a "lakes overture" and had "a big work in tow". Elgar's encounter with Dvořák's visit had helped Elgar see where his future lay.

Melville-Mason's account is valuable, but it seems unfair to imply, as he does, that other writers have overlooked Dvořák's impact on Elgar. Reed, Young, Kennedy and Moore have all addressed this issue, and Melville-Mason includes quotes from all of them. (It is interesting to note that the first time an orchestra outside the Worcester area played an Elgar work - it was *Intermezzo mauresque* in Birmingham in December 1883 - a reviewer remarked that the main theme was more "Slavonic than Arabic". It seems likely that "Slavonic influence" was Dvořák's).

The author does have interesting things to say about the music. He cites many Elgar works which show Dvořák's influence, from *Froissart* to the *Cello Concerto*, and one of these is surprising. Dvořák wrote a set of *Symphonic Variations* in 1877, and many Elgarians know that Elgar originally planned to use the same title for his own *Variations* in 1899. But, as far as I know, Melville-Mason is the first to find a structural similarity in the two works. Midway through both of them (with Elgar, in the tenth variation), their composers expand the main theme to open the way to further development, culminating in triumphant codas. Melville-Mason also shows that Elgar's admiration for Dvořák continued. He has compiled an impressive list of the Dvořák works that Elgar conducted, including all four symphonies published in his lifetime and many of the choral works and symphonic poems. Few, if any, of today's non-Czech conductors have played so much.

Because there are few books about Dvořák in English, many scholars and libraries will want to have *Rethinking Dvořák*. Its articles cover an array of topics, many of which have only been addressed in Czech or German until now. But why do we need to "rethink" Dvořák? As with Elgar, Dvořák's international reputation rests on a fraction of his total work. His early symphonies, five symphonic poems, eleven operas and more than a hundred songs are seldom heard outside the Czech

Republic. The aim of this collection is to focus attention on that lesser-known music. Jarmila Gabrielová discusses the early symphonies; Jan Smaczny describes the writing of Dvořák's last opera, *Armida*; and Jarmil Burghauser, the dean of Dvořák scholars, contributes an essay on how the composer's reputation has changed through the years. A useful appendix presents two interviews with Dvořák from British newspapers during the 1880s. Unfortunately, many of the articles suffer from the ponderous style that plagues academic writing today, so the collection as a whole lacks the excitement of *Dvořák in America: 1892-95* (Amadeus Press, 1993), edited by John C Tibbetts. While Tibbetts' book focuses mainly on Dvořák's years in the United States, it provides a better introduction to the composer and his work.

Three years after the 1883 festival, Elgar played under Dvořák's direction again at Birmingham. A few days before that performance, Dvořák gave one of the interviews reprinted here, and he made a shrewd observation. "With regard to music it is with the English as it is with the Slavs in politics -they are young, very young, but there is great hope for the future". Elgar must have read that, but he can hardly have guessed the role that he would play in bringing those hopes to life.

Frank Beck

RECORD REVIEWS

'Elgar on Record': Volume 1. Vocal & Dramatic Music.

Various artists. Dutton Laboratories for the Elgar Society CDAX 8019

In 1980 the Society produced an LP of 'Elgar's Interpreters on Record' which was a compilation of transfers from 78 rpm records, almost all of which were produced in Elgar's lifetime. Seventeen years have passed, and now the Society presents a new selection of early recordings, this time on CD. Two items survive from the LP, but newly transferred. These are the rarely heard *Crown of India March* from Elgar's 1912 masque of the same name. The new transfer brings a crispness and immediacy which was not apparent in the LP version, and one has to remind oneself that we are listening to a recording made at Hayes in 1912! When the original LP came out one critic wrote rather scornfully that the players were "obviously sight-reading". Well, of course they were! In those early years almost all recordings would have been sight-read, except for prestige recordings made by important artists. The Black Diamonds Band was a Gramophone Company pseudonym for a house band, who probably made at least half a dozen recordings in any one day, which could range from an operatic to a musical comedy selection, or to the latest dance craze. Little time for rehearsal, budgets did not run to it, and we should be glad that they took time to record this work for it does not appear in the published Suite from *The Crown of India*. The other survivor from the earlier disc is a quite startling performance of the dramatic aria from *King Olaf*, 'And King Olaf heard the cry'. This is sung by that splendid British tenor Tudor Davies, recorded in 1923. Mike Dutton, who has made all the transfers on this CD, has produced really amazing sound from the acoustic original. The rather reduced orchestral accompaniment, by the nature of the acoustic recording process, is conducted with sympathy and energy by the young Eugene Goossens.

It is good to have on CD at last the four excerpts from *Gerontius* made by Dame Clara Butt and Maurice d'Oisly, with Henry Wood conducting, all recorded in London in April 1916. Clara Butt gave a number of performances, usually for charity, of the oratorio during the war years, and her interpretation is interesting for it is in a style which today is almost lost. Such performances must, however, have been familiar to Elgar. It is indeed strangely moving. However much one may smile at the many sentimental ballads which Dame Clara recorded for an adoring public, she always sang with complete sincerity. These excerpts show her to have been in fine voice - and what a remarkable voice it was. D'Oisly makes an acceptable *Gerontius* - he was an accomplished opera singer, giving many performances on stage for the Beecham Opera Company, and later for the British National Opera. His wife Rosina Buckman also had a considerable career on the operatic stage. D'Oisly makes few concessions to a dramatic oratorio performance here, preferring to treat it as straightforward opera singing, very much in the British-trained school. The voices blend well, though Clara Butt's rich tones tend to dominate the duet passages.

In 1927 Columbia got together a number of their contract singers, with the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Hamilton Harty, to sing a seven-minute excerpt from *The Apostles*. It remained the only excerpt from Elgar's masterly contribution to the oratorio until the LP complete performance under Adrian Boult in the 1970s. A contemporary critic, welcoming the excerpt, expressed the hope that complete recordings of the Elgar oratorios would follow before too much time passed. He had a long wait! Again the transfer is excellent, the voices, which included Dora Labbette, Hubert Eisdell, and Dennis Noble, coming over with surprising clarity.

Nellie Melba, never one to waste a compliment, once said to an enquirer that if you wanted to know how to sing you should go and listen to Peter Dawson. That remarkable man, who could make an ordinary ballad sound like a work of art, recorded two extracts from *Caractacus*, with an orchestra conducted by a young John Barbirolli. The two were 'Sword Song' and the lament 'O my warriors'. Both are given fine performances, and again the sound does not date. Budding, and experienced, singers would do well to listen to Dawson's superb phrasing and beautiful tone. In the mid-1930s HMV recorded five items from *The Starlight Express*. These were sung by Stuart Robertson and Alice Moxon, and were sympathetically performed, with an excellent accompaniment by an unnamed orchestra. Modern technology has produced the best from these discs and they still make attractive listening. Elgar's many songs are performed today less than they deserve, but in his lifetime performances were quite frequent. Quite why the skilled light music composer Haydn Wood chose to transcribe some of them for orchestra I do not know, but it works surprisingly well. Accepting Wood's skill it is interesting to listen to the purely orchestral version, if only because the affinity to Elgar's salon pieces for orchestra is so marked. Four are recorded here from originals made by the Light Symphony Orchestra (another HMV house organisation) conducted by the arranger, and although the original 78 rpm sound was not of the highest quality Mike Dutton has brought out a remarkably acceptable sound for 1997 ears.

The penultimate track is a little gem, being a test made by Kathleen Ferrier, accompanied by Gerald Moore, of two short excerpts from *Gerontius*. This test was

made at Abbey Road in June 1944, and was unpublished. Its presence here is an undoubted bonus for all Elgarians, and listening to that beautiful voice once more reminds one of what a tragedy it was for music when Kathleen Ferrier was lost to us. The disc ends with the famous Glasgow Orpheus Choir, under its founder Hugh Robertson, singing Elgar's short part-song, *The Shower*. It is only brief, but charmingly performed.

The Society is to be congratulated on bringing a number of performances back into circulation, and the hopeful 'Volume 1' on the sleeve is an indication, we trust, that there is more to follow from the deep mine of classic recordings, spanning nearly forty years of recording, with skill and sympathy. We hope for more from the collaboration.

Ronald Taylor

Falstaff, Op.69. Nursery Suite. Dream Children, Op 43. Bach Fantasia & Fugue,
Op 86.
London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult
(recorded 1949-1955)
Testament SBT 1106

Symphony no 2 in E♭, Op 63. Cockaigne, Op 40. Dream Children, Op 43, no 1.
Hallé Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli (recorded 1950, 1954)
EMI CDM 566399-2

Falstaff, Op 69. Enigma Variations, Op 36.
Hallé and Philharmonia Orchestras conducted by Sir John Barbirolli
(recorded 1962, 1964)
EMI CDM 566322-2

Pomp & Circumstance Marches, Op 39. Froissart, Op 19. Cockaigne, Op 40.
Philharmonia and New Philharmonia Orchestras
conducted by Sir John Barbirolli
(recorded 1962, 1966)
EMI CDM 566323-2

These four CDs give a very useful sample of some of the most significant Elgar recordings of the fifties and early sixties. New Elgar records were not exactly two a penny in those days and the choice was usually between Boult and Barbirolli. The days are, I hope, long gone when anyone would want to assert that one was "better" than the other. As these discs show, there is a difference in style, but great music can withstand and be enhanced by a variety of interpretations.

It is the Boult performances on the Testament disc that are probably the least familiar. In the main, they were included in a four-LP/cassette box that appeared in 1983 shortly after the conductor's death. Although the recordings of *Falstaff* and the third *Pomp & Circumstance* March first appeared as 78s and Alan Sanders' Boult discography gives matrix numbers with variant takes suggesting that waxes were cut directly at the sessions, the Testament booklet states that all items were

transferred from original tape masters. There was a time when both systems were regularly employed. One suspects that there were some experienced engineers who might have preferred to put their trust in the old faithful recording methods in preference to the new-fangled magnetic tape.

Boult's was only the second recording of *Falstaff* - it was less than two decades since the composer had made his own in the same studio. I was glad to hear it again. It has plenty of energy and communicates in a very direct and straightforward way. I particularly enjoyed the 'Scarecrow Army' section. The music making is less gutsy than on the composer's records, more refined and controlled. The ear adjusts to the sound quality very quickly and it comes over very well. Unlike the records of the *First Symphony* made a year earlier, it was not issued on LP at the time. One suspects that there was not much demand for it. Anthony Collins' Decca disc appeared in 1954 and Boult himself recorded the piece again in 1956, this time for Pye-Nixa.

At the last of the sessions for the *First Symphony* in 1949, Boult recorded the Harty arrangement of Handel's *Water Music* and also the Elgar-Bach transcription which is now making its first appearance. Although 78 matrix numbers are listed, the *Fantasia* at 4'56" would have made a long 12" side which might have posed technical problems. It could have filled up a space on an LP but as it was, the first LP of the Bach transcription came rather surprisingly from Ormandy and the Philadelphia, released by Philips in 1957, a record I have never seen (does anyone have a copy?). The opening phrases from the oboe and clarinet sound rather arched with each note detached from its neighbour, as if to make some special point. There is a firm solid bass line but the persistent drum beats make very little impact. The drums on Elgar's 1926 recording produce a much more menacing effect, perhaps helped by a slightly faster basic pulse, around which the music is moulded rather more elastically. It is obviously not just an effect of the recorded sound as the drums are also rather reticent in Boult's 1973 stereo account. The 1949 sound is not as good as others on the CD. It is probably a question of balance. The violins are too forward, producing a rather harsh, upfront sort of sound with the wind somewhat recessed. In the *Fugue*, the playing is very clean with phrases clipped so as to ensure that each voice is clearly heard. It is very effective in its way but for me the brass are just a little too well-behaved!

The *Nursery Suite* was recorded in 1955 and was coupled with *In the South*, a record which judging by how rarely it comes up second-hand, obviously did not sell very well! It is Boult's only recording of the Suite. The review in *The Gramophone* enthused over the recording quality, judging it markedly better than that produced two years earlier by Columbia for Collingwood. It is a beautifully controlled performance with some especially fine woodwind playing in 'The Serious Doll'. Elsewhere, I think the playing could have had a little more of the riotous fun that is apparent in the composer's recording.

In 1955 Boult and the LPO made the first integral set of the *Pomp & Circumstance Marches* and these were issued in the 4-LP set mentioned above. Two years earlier they had recorded number 3, probably the least played of the set - it was only its fourth recording. This was issued on 78 and EP at the time but has not until now

been available since then. It is a splendid record. There is plenty of swagger and the brass here sound as though they are really enjoying themselves.

This Testament disc, issued in association with the Society and the Foundation, is a valuable addition to the catalogue. The interpretations and style of playing in their poise and correctness are very much of their era : these were, after all, the days when bank managers were bold enough to don tweed jackets for Saturday morning opening in place of their more usual dark suits!

Boult made his wonderful first recording of the *Second Symphony* in 1944 and so presumably by 1954, HMV felt that a new recording was needed to take advantage of the technical developments. It did not in fact appear until 1957, one of a number of issues to mark the Centenary, as did Boult's second recording (for Nixa). It was re-issued by the Barbirolli Society in 1978 and I remember writing enthusiastically about it in the JOURNAL at the time. This was music that was very special to Barbirolli and by 1954 he had been conducting it regularly for over a quarter of a century. It is not a performance that I would want to closely analyse but just sit back and enjoy. Barbirolli senses intuitively the ebb and flow of the music and captures above all its mysterious qualities. This warm-blooded, warm-hearted account is JB at his best, without the excesses of the stereo version he made a decade later (a performance I used to reject, but now on the right occasion, really rather enjoy).

That second recording was so slow in places that it could not originally be accommodated on two LP sides, so *Falstaff* made up the remaining side and a half of a two-disc set. The *Falstaff* performance has always been widely admired even by those who are not otherwise ardent Barbirolli fans. It has been reissued many times and the current incarnation is just a re-badging of a previous mid-price CD with the glowing 1962 *Enigma* (the one whose original LP sleeve had a still from the Ken Russell film) as companion.

Its previous coupling, *Cockaigne* comes on another EMI mid-price release and it is fascinating to compare that with the earlier, rather more energetic, Hallé account which partners the *Second Symphony*. I must apologise to readers of my Discography that for some reason I did not list separately the 1949-50 78s and the 1954 10" LP. They are different recordings and it is the latter which appears here.

With the 1962 *Cockaigne* come the equally celebrated and oft-reissued accounts of *Froissart* and the *Pomp & Circumstance Marches* about which more than enough has been written over the years.

John Knowles

Enigma Variations, Op 36. With works by Kodály and Blacher.

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Georg Solti
Decca 452 853-2

The recordings of Elgar which Sir Georg Solti made with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the 1970s are now largely available again to new audiences. Some of them remain important documents, and form, by my reckoning, a valuable part of

any Elgarian's discography. Opinion may be divided over some of Sir Georg's interpretative points, but there is no gainsaying his commitment and fervour, and the beautiful sounds he extracts from the orchestra. I would be reluctant to give up his recordings of the two symphonies as they represent Decca's analogue recording at its finest, and are performances of great stature. If you are doubtful just listen to the slow movement of the *Ab Symphony*, for example. It is a deeply moving interpretation, with a sense of forward impetus at no time detracting from Elgar's heartfelt music. From fig 104 to the end of the movement is as penetrating a musical experience as you are likely to hear. It must have been this sort of performance which Frank Schuster heard before writing to Elgar in wartime London : "As long as I have *your music* I can bear my losses, although I thought when I went into the hall today that I *couldn't*. I felt then as I never have but as you, I fear, sometimes do - that life was not worth the living & I would not be sorry to lose it. Then came your symphony - and in a moment I knew I was wrong. In it is *all love* - and love makes life possible".

So now Solti has recorded Elgar again. It is right that we should welcome a great conductor born into the middle European tradition, giving us his latest view of works like the *Enigma Variations*. Sir Georg's touching acceptance of our request that he should allow his name to go forward as a Vice-President of the Elgar Society at this year's AGM adds to the welcome we should all give this disc. Its imperfections do not lie in Sir Georg's hands, for his performance (recorded live in the Musikverein) is committed and resolute. My complaints relate to the recording and the feeling that this music does not yet lie naturally beneath the fingers of this wonderful orchestra.

The recording seems a little dull, and is not up to Decca's highest standards. This dullness is not apparent in the other two works, the Blacher *Variations* (on the famous 24th Caprice of Paganini) and the delectable *Peacock Variations* of Kodály. This is unfortunate, for many unfamiliar with Elgar's music may well buy the disc as it commemorates Sir Georg's remarkable fifty years with Decca. The music is selected as a tribute to the land of his birth (Hungary) and those countries where he made his home (Germany and Britain). My concerns become clear at points where brilliance or clarity is essential, for example in 'WMB' and the 'Romanza' where the drum fails to give the subtle impact essential if the point of the variation is to come over.

The unfamiliarity of the work to the players comes over in, for example, 'Troyte' where the attack is a little restrained. But these are minor cavils for Sir Georg's attention to detail is remarkable, and this is a performance well worth having as an example of his involvement in this music and as a celebration of our newest Vice-President. I hope though that Sir Georg will perform and record more Elgar with the Vienna Philharmonic; the symphonies should be in their repertoire, and we could do with a *Der Traum des Gerontius*, now couldn't we?

Andrew Neill

Bassoon Romance, Op 62. With works by Berwald, Kalliwoda, Kreutzer, David and Crusell.

*Klaus Thunemann (bassoon), Academy of St Martin in the Fields
conducted by Sir Neville Marriner
Philips 446 096-2*

The title of this disc, 'Romantic Bassoon Rarities' begs the old question of when we begin to date the Romantic era. The truth is that all but the Elgar are early Romantic pieces, written well before he was born; in fact three of the other five composers had died before 1857. Not surprisingly, and despite its relative brevity, the *Romance* sounds positively opulent in such company; Thunemann plays it with great affection and expression, and Sir Neville is his usual supportive and sensitive self. (He is no newcomer to the piece, of course, having accompanied Michael Chapman in the premier recording in 1970 [CDM 565593-2, reviewed JOURNAL 11/96]). The rest of the pieces are no less enjoyable; well-crafted, tuneful works, beautifully played and recorded. The disc is a delight, and deserves to be heard.

Piano Quintet, Op 84. String Quartet, Op 83.

*Aura Ensemble
Discover International DICD 920485*

Elgar's chamber works have been graced with some outstanding recordings in recent years, and the field is now very competitive indeed. It is intensely gratifying to see that ensembles from abroad are taking them up. Just over a year ago I reviewed the *Quintet* played by a Finnish group [EDA 004-2], and now the super-budget label Discover have released the *Quartet* and *Quintet* played by the young Swiss-based Aura Ensemble, whose aim is "to keep alive the neglected piano quintet and quartet repertoires". Thus there are no problems in ensemble, unlike some quintet performances which are played by a quartet with a pianist "tacked on". The members come from Poland, Australia and Switzerland, and are based at Basel. The recording was made at Riehen in Switzerland last year, and is attractive if for no other reason than that the two works are not otherwise available together on a budget price disc.

But what of the performances? Though I enjoyed them very much, I have to say that the whole is somewhat less than the sum of the parts. I think it is partly lack of experience of the Elgarian idiom; I would love to know how much the players know of Elgar's other music. I certainly have never subscribed to the view that only British players can interpret Elgar; but in several places here opportunities are lost. This is particularly so in those passages where Elgar "muses" - where the music turns in on itself, and the listener almost feels that he is intruding. The Aura Ensemble are full of passion, and it is the faster, louder passages which come off the best; which is not to say that they do not play sensitively elsewhere. They will obviously improve, and are a name to watch; if they are still playing the works in twenty years (which I hope they will!) I would love to hear them then!

As I said earlier, the competition is stiff; if these are not the finest interpretations available, they are still very acceptable, and if affording full-price records is a problem for you, these are well worth the money.

The Editor

CD Round-up

The Decca budget label Belart has brought out some classic recordings in its latest batch of releases. Most important are the Boult LPO recordings from the 1950s in its 'Boult Historic Collection'. "On the Banks of Green Willow" [sic] contains the title track and *A Shropshire Lad* by Butterworth; Bax's *Tintagel*; ballet music from Holst (*The Perfect Fool*) and Vaughan Williams (*Old King Cole*); and Elgar's two *Chansons* (461 354-2). "The Wise Virgins" is the title of Walton's Bach arrangements (again for the ballet), and this disc also contains his *Siesta*, *Portsmouth Point*, and *Scapino*; Arnold's two sets of *English Dances*, and Elgar's *Three Bavarian Dances* (461 359-2). Boult accompanies Campoli in Elgar's *Violin Concerto*, and the disc is completed by Bliss's *Theme and Cadenza* played by the same soloist, conducted by the composer, and his *Introduction & Allegro* (461 353-2). Boult's complete Vaughan Williams' Symphonies (ie. nos 1-8, no 9 not having then been written) are in a 5 CD set, and for around £20 outstanding value. The final Belart disc is of Vaughan Williams, Delius, and Elgar (the *Introduction & Allegro* and *Serenade for Strings*) conducted by Anthony Collins. I commented favourably on Collins' Elgar when these works appeared on the Beulah label a short time ago, and he is equally effective when conducting the other two composers (461 362-2). The transfers are excellent, and I suspect that for many, as for me, well-worn LPs will be set aside to hear these great performances in their new format.

More re-issues from Decca appear on a 'Double Decca' (two for the price of one) which contains 2½ hours of English music from the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields conducted by (Sir) Neville Marriner. Much if not all of this music has appeared on budget-price Decca labels over recent years, but it is good to have it all together here. All the Elgar string music which first appeared on Argo ZRG 573 almost thirty years ago is here, and the performances and recording quality are of a uniformly high standard. Iona Brown's version of *The Lark Ascending* does not have quite the poignancy of Hugh Bean's recording, but it is still extremely good. And the rest of the discs - VW, Delius, Butterworth, and Warlock - will not fail to satisfy (452 707-2).

As one who has enjoyed singing Stanford's music for almost as long as he can remember, I nevertheless subscribe to the commonly-held view (which infuriates Stanfordians) that he was less successful on larger canvases. The motets, canticle settings, part-songs and songs (his *Sailing at Dawn* is one of my very favourites) represent some of the finest British music of the period. I have tried to become enthusiastic about the symphonies but after many hearings their greatness (if present) still eludes me. However, I am happy to recommend quite unreservedly a new recording from the enterprising Marco Polo label of Stanford's *Requiem*, a work of some 80 minutes premièred at the Birmingham Festival in 1897, and here given (for the first time on disc) by Irish forces under that Marco Polo/Naxos stalwart, Adrian Leaper (8.223580-1). It seems that setting for voices brought out the best in Stanford; there is an assurance in the writing which is very dramatic, almost operatic in style. An extra interest for Elgarians may be the opening of the 'Benedictus' which bears more than a passing resemblance to the 'Enigma' theme, as Raymond Leppard pointed out some years ago. Some extracts from Stanford's first opera, *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan* (1879) complete this two-CD set.

One positive aspect of the blurring of musical edges of late has been the reappraisal of "light music"; once again Marco Polo have blazed trails in this area. Hyperion joined them last year with their "British Light Music Classics" from the New London Orchestra under Ronald Corp, the success of which has led to a Volume 2 (CDA 66968). All the familiar names are here - Coates, Binge, Vinter, Farnon, Curzon, Charles Williams - and the disc is an aural delight, undemanding perhaps, but a veritable treasure-chest of lovely tunes, beautifully played. Elgar's *Carissima* sounds like an aristocrat of such pieces. His mastery of the genre is evident from first note to last, in complete contrast to say, Ketèlby's *Sanctuary of the Heart*. A beautiful tune [surely second cousin of the main theme from *Sursum Corda*], but one is overpowered from the outset by thick orchestration, and relentless emotional devices like throbbing triplets in the accompaniment. The essence of light music is surely subtlety; Ketèlby would have done well to study Elgar's methods in *Carissima* and similar pieces. However, this disc is a must, especially for those of my generation, brought up on radio, and will re-ignite many memories.

In their 'Ovation' series, Decca have re-issued several recent recordings of English vocal and choral music. Five years ago, the late Gareth Lewis gave a warm welcome to Charles Mackerras' recording of the songs from *The Starlight Express*, sung by Alison Hagley and Bryn Terfel. He felt that they were all the better for being sung "straight", but for the same reason I found them rather cold and lacking in characterisation. Songs from a stage play for children surely require a different approach from Wolf lieder. Nonetheless, there is much to admire, as all the performers are experienced operatic practitioners, and their musicianship is superb. The most effective piece is the Finale ("Hearts must be soft-shiny dressed"). From the same 1992 record we have *Dream Children* - good, but a little *too* dreamy for me. The other major Elgar piece on this disc is Della Jones' *Sea Pictures* which was the "fill-up" to Mackerras' recording of the *Second Symphony*. She has an interesting voice, powerful and expressive, although there is a raw edge to the sound occasionally (as at "chanting congregations" and "the surfs that comb"). The most successful songs are the outer ones where there is passion and allure a-plenty; she is less successful as the faithful spouse and the grieving emigrant, in the second and third songs respectively. However, this could be put down to the somewhat fast speeds in these two movements; the *grandioso* close of the latter song, "He shall assist me to look higher" (a marvellous moment in the Baker/Barbirolli account) rather goes for nothing here. The final work on this well-filled disc is Lambert's *Rio Grande* conducted by Barry Wordsworth, where Della Jones is again the soloist (452 324-2).

For those not possessing Kyung Wha Chung's 1977 account of the *Violin Concerto*, accompanied by Solti, it is available again coupled with the same artistes' version of the Berg concerto. It originally came out in the wake of Zukerman's first recording the previous year, and probably never got the appreciation it deserved. It is certainly a beautiful performance, and a first-rate recording (452 696-2).

The Editor

LETTERS

From: R H Darlaston

You are much too hard on Classic FM! Many are grateful for its varied diet of worthwhile classical music. It's not all three tenors and Four Seasons. There is a fair sprinkling of Elgar and music ranging from Haydn Quartets to Shostakovitch symphonies. I suggest criticism would be better directed at the "dumbing down" of Radio 3. Where is the intellectual rigour we remember from the lamented Third Programme? Radio 3 tries to imitate Classic FM but lacks the panache. We get confusing programmes where Mozart is followed by pop, or Bach by African jungle drums, introduced by presenters whose enthusiasm grates and whose delivery owes nothing to the measured tones of Alvar Lidell, Patricia Hughes or Richard Baker

Time was when Radio 3 was almost a permanent feature of our life at home and in the car : today, it is seldom heard. CDs reign at home and Classic FM in the car.

From : Andrea Preston

I was introduced to Classic FM by friends in 1993, and was immediately struck by the freshness of its approach and the breadth of its range. Music is presented as exciting, a medium with universal appeal, not an entity to which we should touch our forelocks and feel inferior. I love the element of surprise and if I don't care for one broadcast work the next could well be something I have loved for years. If someone derives more pleasure from listening to one movement than from hearing a whole work who has the right to say they should not do this? Is music here to be enjoyed or endured?

I still listen to Radio 3, particularly the evening concerts; until now I have found the approach of the presenters stilted and hardly removed from the over-formality of the 1950s but recently I have noticed a much more relaxed attitude which I welcome and which I suggest has been brought about by healthy competition. When I hear people whose experience of music has been restricted to patronising school "music appreciation" classes, and who have consequently abandoned "classical" music altogether, suddenly talking about Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Shostakovitch and Bach thanks to Classic FM, and appreciating what I have enthused over for more than thirty years, how can I not maintain that the station has had a beneficial effect? Some may even be Elgar Society members in the making.

From : John Knowles

Knowing how much I relied on the information gleaned from back issues of the Gramophone when preparing my Elgar Discography, it is disappointing to find significant factual errors in the fascinating EMI Centenary Supplement that came with the January issue.

Hence, to set matters right for future discographers, I wrote to the Editor of the Gramophone challenging the assertion that all three LP reissues of the 1932

Menuhin recording of the Elgar Violin Concerto originate from the same transfer. The letter has not been published so perhaps you can find space for my comments so that at least readers of the Elgar Society JOURNAL will have the facts. Although the original shells were used for the 1957 Elgar Centenary issue (ALP 1456, 7/57), it was the practice of EMI at that time to destroy such metalwork as soon as a recording had been transferred to tape for issue on LP. Hence although Anthony Griffith used vinyl pressings taken from the original shells for most of the items in the 'Images of Elgar' box (RLS 708, 12/72), he had to resort to commercial pressings for the Violin Concerto. The transfer is clearer than the 1957 one but there is inevitably more surface noise. It is this transfer that was then used both for the HMV Treasury LP (HLM 7107, 4/77) and the first appearance of this celebrated recording on CD (CDH 769786-2, 11/89). However, for Volume 2 of the complete 'Elgar Edition' (CDS 754564-2, 2/93), sponsored by the Elgar Society, Andrew Walter was able to use vinyl copies made from a set of shells that had been sent to America for RCA Victor. This transfer is the one also used for the more recent single CD issue (CDC 555221-2).

From : Peter Lymbery

I wish to express my great consternation at the review by Christopher Fifield in the latest JOURNAL of the recording of the Enigma Variations under Rolf Kleinert. Reviewers are of course there to be shot at, and variations of taste in performance are inevitable. I had in fact heard this recording already, and it has also been reviewed in the Gramophone. This is fortunate, as I would otherwise not have recognised it from Fifield's description.

No one will claim that either the recording or the playing are highly refined, but nor are they as bad as he states, and the "retakes" to which he refers are not audible to my ears, even on rehearing. He calls the tempi "sluggish", but the overall timing is only marginally above average, and he also objects to a "too fast" tempo for 'Nimrod' (the Gramophone applauds this tempo, and I agree). What he totally misses, and what makes this performance as interesting a version as has appeared for some time, is its spontaneity and involvement - no doubt the result of the German orchestra's being less familiar with the score than English orchestras inevitably are. I would far rather have an exciting, committed version like this than the bland, conventional products of many British conductors - including, in more than one version, Sir Adrian.

I can only hope your readers will not be put off a valuable issue by Fifield's intemperate and one-sided review.

100 YEARS AGO...

In the summer of 1897 Elgar's star was firmly in the ascendancy. The previous year had seen two important festival premières - *King Olaf* at Hanley and *The Light of Life* at Worcester. Now in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee he had written an *Imperial March*, first performed at Crystal Palace on 19 April; and a choral work, *The Banner of St George*, given on 18 May also in London. His works were being taken up by choral societies throughout the land; and his friend George Sinclair, the Hereford organist, had commissioned a setting of the *Te Deum & Benedictus* for the Three Choirs Festival that year. It was to be performed at the opening service with orchestral accompaniment. He began to compose it in May and by 15 June it was finished and sent off to Novello. They offered 15 guineas, which he accepted. Proofs of the vocal score began arriving in July, by which time Elgar was busy orchestrating the work. He completed this on 2 August, and two days later received a positive reaction from Novello's publishing manager, a young German musician. Alice's diary for 4 August reads: "E. heard from Mr. Jaeger - quite as enthusiastic as he shd. be over E's music for Hereford". So began one of the most rewarding relationships of Elgar's career.

Yet as usual with Elgar joy and despair were never too far apart. Even in some of his earliest letters to Jaeger he expresses his "down" side in a very open and candid way. The Crystal Palace performance of *King Olaf* on 3 April - his biggest London event thus far - was an artistic success, but had left Elgar having to pay the shortfall of £37. He asked Novello to send details of this to "'The Club' Malvern" as "I do not wish to worry my wife". His financial circumstances meant that he was still burdened by the drudgery of teaching; "E to the Mount" is a common diary entry for the Malvern years; sometimes followed by "& the Links" as he unwound by playing a round of golf. Another hobby to appear at this time is kite-flying. On 20 June "Dr East came & talked kites to E". The next day "tried to fly kite". On 25 June "After tea E & A to the North Hill prospecting kite flying". Other people were also involved, including a young architect friend, Troyte Griffith. 22 June was the Jubilee Day; the royal procession in London was, said the *Daily Mail*, "a pageant which for splendour of appearance...has never been paralleled in the history of the world". The Elgars went out on to the Common after dinner to see the celebratory bonfires.

On 9 July the Elgars went to Wolverhampton to stay with the Pennys, and visited Boscobel House, several miles north-west of the town, where Charles II hid from his pursuers in an oak tree. They flew kites in the field there with Alice's friend 'Minnie' and her stepdaughter, Dora. It was during this visit that Dora began to dance while Elgar was playing some of his *Bavarian Highlands* music on the piano. This gave him great pleasure, and subsequently Dorabella "was called upon to 'come and dance Hammersbach' on several occasions at Malvern".

The end of July found Elgar completing the orchestration of the works for Hereford, during very hot oppressive weather, and suffering from eye trouble. On 4 August Edward and Alice walked over the hills to Colwall to visit Elgar's mother who was staying there. She later wrote of the visit to her daughter Polly: "On going out we stood at the door looking along the back of the Hills - the Beacon was in full view - I said Oh! Ed. Look at the lovely old Hill. Can't we write some *tale* about it[?] I quite long to have something worked up about it; so full of interest and so much historical interest".

Thus was born Elgar's next major project.