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A READING OF CARACTACUS

Patrick Little

It is a curious fact that while most critics and commentators have agreed that *Caractacus* is a flawed work, they have not always agreed on what the flaws actually are. Michael Kennedy, for example, writes "The `Sword Song', the description of morning by the Severn, the British Camp at night, the exquisite love music, the `Triumphal march' : all these are colourful and picturesque";[1] Ernest Newman, on the other hand, claims that "as usual in his love-duets, Elgar falls much below the general level of his music",[2] and E A Baughan finds that the `Triumphal March' suggests "a mob of Imperial Roman soldiers headed by a brass band",[3] in a context which implies that he considers this inadequate and unsuitable. Baughan also disliked Caractacus's lament : "Possibly, Mr Elgar had purposely written the music so that it should emphasize the spent feebleness of the warrior after his long day's fight. That would be artistically sound enough, but in no way does such an intention excuse the cut-and-dried character of the melody".[4] This is the same melody which Jerrold Northrop Moore describes as "superbly combining the `Rome' and `Britain' themes",[5] and which Newman calls "a powerful and veracious piece of writing"[6].

Examples could be multiplied; but there is one matter about which almost (though not quite) all the critics are agreed : the conclusion of the work. Newman says it is "a serious blot on the dramatic scheme...based on one of the most banal themes in the whole work".[7] Thomas Dunhill claims that "the crowning incongruity...is reserved for the final chorus", based on a theme (Moore's `Britain' theme) which is "insufferable when it is enlarged into crotchets and minims and blazoned forth by the whole chorus at the end of the cantata".[8] Basil Maine complains that "the dramatic purpose of the choral epilogue [cannot] be easily discovered. Here the librettist unnecessarily drags in a narration of the passing of Rome's glory and the ascendancy of Britain. No verse, of whatever grandeur and

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[1] Michael Kennedy : *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford, 1968) p 49

[2] Ernest Newman : *Elgar* (London, 1906) pp 39-40

[3] E A Baughan, review of the first performance, in *An Elgar Companion*, ed Christopher Redwood (Ashbourne, 1982) p 22

[4] loc cit, p 24

[5] Jerrold Northrop Moore : *Edward Elgar : A Creative Life* (Oxford, 1984) p 235

[6] Newman, op cit, p 40

[7] Newman, op cit, pp 43-4

[8] Thomas F Dunhill : *Sir Edward Elgar* (London, 1938) pp 55-6

dignity, could carry off so incongruous a sentiment in this context".[9] In the opinion of Robert Anderson, "what more than anything vitiates the scheme of the work is the manufactured conclusion in which the Roman Empire, having `crumbled into clay', gives place to its greater successor, that of Britain. The dedication to Queen Victoria sets the seal on a protracted and inappropriate burst of patriotism".[10]

It will be noted that Maine has included the librettist in his criticism. Anderson does the same, when he writes of the final chorus "It is difficult to be unmoved by Elgar's conviction, but equally difficult not to shudder at the words he set". Dunhill had also complained of the libretto, in general terms : "What [he asks]... can a serious composer be expected to do with such stuff as this? -

> `My heart is bright as morning light,
> And tender is the flower,
> For here I rove to meet my love
> In this, the chosen hour'"[11]

Certainly it is not the greatest of Poetry; but the complaint in general is not a valid one, because the answer to Dunhill's question is clear : Elgar could be expected to do with Acworth's verse much the same as what (for example) Purcell managed to do with such stuff as

> `Ah, Belinda, I am press'd
> With torment not to be confess'd.
> Peace and I are strangers grown,
> I languish till my grief is known,
> Yet would not have it guess'd'.

It is quite true that H A Acworth's libretto is not particularly good - certainly not as good as Nahum Tate's much and unfairly maligned libretto for *Dido and Aeneas* just quoted - but it is not noticeably worse than many similar works, and the composer was not after all compelled to set it without question. Elgar himself omitted several passages (not, *pace* Anderson,[12] because they were particularly bad, but because they were superfluous to his needs); and he wrote to Jaeger, "by all means I will ask Acworth to eliminate the truculent `note' in the lines".[13] Obviously the composer felt able to ask his librettist to change his words. Whether in this case he did or not is not clear - the original text could conceivably have been even more intensely patriotic, though the expression "jealous cohorts", which it seems particularly offended Jaeger, still stands; but in any case the responsibility in the end must be Elgar's own, and his comment to Jaeger a

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[9] Basil Maine : *Elgar : His Life and Works* (London, 1933) vol ii, p 32

[10] Robert Anderson : *Elgar (The Master Musicians)*, (London, 1993) p 188

[11] Dunhill, op cit, pp 54-5

[12] Anderson, op cit, p 188

[13] Letter of 21 June 1898, in Percy M Young, ed : *Letters to Nimrod* (London, 1965), p 13

month or so later, "I knew you wd laugh at my librettist's patriotism (& mine) never mind: England for the English is all I say - hands off! There's nothing apologetic about me",[14] is perhaps more honest than his attempt in the earlier letter to put the blame on Acworth, when he writes, "I *did* suggest that we should dabble in patriotism in the Finale, when lo! the *worder* (that's good!) instead of merely paddling his feet goes and gets naked and wallows in it".
It might be instructive to consider the words which Acworth wrote for this finale, without the distraction of Elgar's setting :

The clang of arms is over,
Abide in peace and brood
On glorious ages coming,
And Kings of British blood.
The light descends from heaven,
The centuries roll away,
The empire of the Roman
Is crumbled into clay;
The eagle's flight is ended,
His weary wings are furl'd;
The oak has grown and shadow'd
The shores of all the world.
Britons, alert! and fear not,
Tho' round your path of power,
Opposing cohorts gather,
And jealous tyrants lower;
On - though the world desert you,
On - so your cause be right;
Britons, alert! and fear not,
But gird your loins for fight.
And ever your dominion
From age to age shall grow
O'er peoples undiscovered,
In lands we cannot know;
And where the flag of Britain
Its triple crosses rears,
No slave shall be for subject,
No trophy wet with tears;
But folk shall bless the banner,
And bless the crosses twin'd,
That bear the gift of freedom
On every blowing wind;
Nor shall her might diminish
While firm she holds the faith
Of equal law to all men -
And holds it to the death;
For all the world shall learn it -
Though long the task shall be -
The text of Britain's teaching
The message of the free;
And when at last they find it,
The nations all shall stand
And hymn the praise of Britain,
Like brothers, hand in hand.

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[14] loc cit, p 16

We hardly need reminding that Elgar was born in 1857, and so was a thorough Victorian. As a result, he shared all the Victorian assumptions about the world and Britain's place in it. Some of the sentiments of this text may raise a somewhat cynical smile, for example lines like

> And where the flag of Britain
> Its triple crosses rears,
> No slave shall be for subject,
> No trophy wet with tears;

but that is at least partly because these days we tend to concentrate our attention on the way in which the Empire suppressed the indigenous cultures of its provinces, rather ignoring the indisputable fact that those cultures quite often included elements like ritual murder, suttee, cannibalism and slavery. I do not mean to attempt a wholesale defence of the British Empire, only to suggest that it may not have been wholly corrupt and evil, and that its subjects might well have thought it to be quite a good thing. The notion was by no means restricted to the Victorians : it seems to me almost certain that Acworth knew William Cowper's slightly awful *Boadicea : an Ode*, which was written in 1780 :

> Rome, for empire far renown'd,
> Tramples on a thousand states;
> Soon her pride shall kiss the ground -
> Hark! the Gaul is at her gates!

The Herefordshire Beacon, or British Camp, 1115 feet (340 m) ; one of the finest earthworks in Britain, and traditional (but unlikely) site of Caractacus's defeat by the Romans (photo: Gordon Lee)

Then the progeny that springs
From the forests of our land,
Arm'd with thunder, clad with wings,
Shall a wider world command.

Regions Caesar never knew
Thy posterity shall sway,
Where his eagles never flew,
None invincible as they.

But of course Acworth's views were by no means unusual for the 1890s. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The White Company* includes a sort of prophecy of the British Empire as seen by a fourteenth-century visionary :

> The lady sat with parted lips, and her breath came quick and fast. "My God!" she cried, "what is this that is shown me? Whence come they, these peoples, these lordly nations, these mighty countries which rise up before me? I look beyond, and others rise, and yet others, far and farther to the shores of the uttermost waters. They crowd! They swarm! the world is given to them, and it resounds with the clang of their hammers and the ringing of their church bells. They call them many names, and they rule them this way or that, but they are all English, for I can hear the voices of the people. On I go, and onwards over seas where man hath never yet sailed, and I see a great land under new stars and a stranger sky, and still the land is England. Where have her children not gone? What have they not done? Her banner is planted on ice. Her banner is scorched in the sun. She lies athwart the lands, and her shadow is over the seas. Bertrand, Bertrand! we are undone, for the buds of her bud are even as our choicest flower!" Her voice rose into a wild cry, and throwing up her arms she sank back white and nerveless into the deep oaken chair.
> "It is over", said Du Guesclin moodily, as he raised her drooping head with his strong brown hand. "Wine for the lady, squire! The blessed hour of sight hath passed".[15]

The similarity between the novel and the cantata leads one to wonder whether Acworth had read Conan Doyle, as well as Cowper. Anyway, so the late Victorians; but things are different now. Significantly, Anthony Burgess in his introduction to the Pan edition (1975) of *The White Company* refers as a matter of course to "outworn properties like honour and patriotism". Whether this is an accurate reflection of late twentieth-century assumptions or not, one cannot imagine either Conan Doyle or Elgar subscribing to it. They belong to a different era, and it is pointless to judge them by any but their own standards. As Michael Kennedy suggests, "this final chorus...today, surely, can be regarded as a period-piece like the texts of Purcell's *Welcome Odes*".[16] Perhaps we are far enough away from the nineteenth century now for complaints against Elgar for his patriotism to be as pointless, if not quite as silly, as complaints against *Romeo and Juliet* for its "heterosexism".

The criticism of the conclusion of *Caractacus* on moral or political grounds may then reasonably be set aside. There remains the far more serious question of its artistic justification. Kennedy claims that it would be "unthinkable" for a dramatic

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[15] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle : *The White Company* (London, 1891) chapter 29

[16] Michael Kennedy : notes to Chandos recording of *Caractacus*, 1993.

cantata like *Caractacus* to end without a chorus "which Elgar so obviously tacked on [says Kennedy] for the benefit of national sentiment".[17] Newman says it is "a serious blot on the dramatic scheme".[18] Anderson calls it "a manufactured conclusion".[19] Maine writes "Nor can the dramatic purpose of the choral epilogue be easily discovered. Here the librettist unnecessarily drags in a narration of the passing of Rome's glory and the ascendancy of Britain".[20] Only Baughan differs, with his opinion that Caractacus's 'Heap torment upon torment' "with its following chorus, is Elgar at his best". The majority view may of course be right - certainly it cannot be ignored; but it is the intention of this article to suggest an alternative reading.

The source of the story of *Caractacus* was history and local folklore, and this is followed fairly closely, though it seems probable that the historical Caractacus was captured in Yorkshire after betrayal by Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, while the cantata suggests nothing but a military defeat. Acworth's elaboration of the simple plot is unremarkable enough in its introduction of Caractacus's daughter Eigen and her druid lover Orbin; but difficulties begin with the figure of the Arch-Druid, and the pagan religious element generally. It will be useful here to consider what Acworth (and Elgar) actually knew about the Druids; and the immediate answer is certainly, not very much. Almost all that is known of the religion comes from the epic poem generally known as the *Pharsalia* by Lucan (AD 39 - 65), and this was no doubt Acworth's source. There are two relevant references, both of which are worth quoting. In the first, we have not only the specific naming of the Druids, but also the name of their god :

> [The treviri rejoiced that Caesar's troops were withdrawn from Gaul, as did the Ligurians] and those who propitiate with horrid victims ruthless Teutates, and Esus whose savage shrine makes men shudder, and Taranis,[21] whose altar is no more benign than that of Scythian Diana. The Bards, also, who by the praises of their verse transmit to distant ages the fame of heroes slain in battle, poured forth at ease their lays in abundance. And the Druids, laying down their arms, went back to the barbarous rites and weird ceremonies of their worship. To them alone is granted knowledge - or ignorance, it may be - of gods and celestial powers; they dwell in deep forests with sequestered groves; they teach that the soul does not descend to the silent land of Erebus and the sunless realm of Dis below, but that the same breath still governs the limbs in a different scene. If their tale be true, death is but a point in the midst of continuous life. Truly the nations on whom the Pole star looks down are happily deceived; for they are free from that king of terrors, the fear of death. This gives the warrior his eagerness to rush upon the steel, his courage to face death, and

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[17] Michael Kennedy : notes to EMI recording of *Caractacus*, 1978.

[18] Newman, op cit, p 43

[19] Anderson, op cit, p 188

[20] Maine, op cit, p 32

[21] The Romans identified Teutates, Esus, and Taranis with their own Mars, Mercury, and Jupiter (translator's note).

his conviction that it is cowardly to be careful of a life that will come back to him again.[22]

The second extract does not refer explicitly to the Druids, but it seems clear enough that it is they to whom the poet refers :

> A grove there was [near Massalia/Marseilles], untouched by men's hands from ancient times, whose interlacing boughs enclosed a space of darkness and cold shade, and banished the sunlight far above. No rural Pan dwelt there, no Silvanus, ruler of the woods, no Nymphs; but gods were worshipped there with savage rites, the altars were heaped with hideous offerings, and every tree was sprinkled with human gore. On those boughs - if antiquity, reverential of the gods, deserves any credit - birds feared to perch; in those coverts wild beasts would not lie down; no wind ever bore down upon that wood, nor thunderbolt hurled from black clouds; the trees, even when they spread their leaves to no breeze, rustled of themselves. Water, also, fell there in abundance from dark springs. The images of the gods, grim and rude, were uncouth blocks formed of felled tree-trunks. Their mere antiquity and the ghastly hue of their rotten timber struck terror; men feel less awe of deities worshipped under familiar forms; so much does it increase their sense of fear, not to know the gods whom they dread. Legend also told that often the subterranean hollows quaked and bellowed, that yew-trees fell down and rose again, that the glare of conflagration came from trees that were not on fire, and that serpents twined and glided round the stems. The people never resorted thither to worship at close quarters, but left the place to the gods. For, when the sun is in mid-heaven or dark night fills the sky, the priest himself dreads their approach and fears to surprise the lord of the grove.[23]

This passage is particularly interesting in that it demonstrates the dark aspect of the trees of which Elgar was so fond. "I made old Caractacus stop as if broken down on p.168 & choke & say `woodlands' again because I'm so madly devoted to my woods", he wrote to Jaeger;[24] but the sacred grove described by Lucan is something else again. Druidism must have been a particularly nasty religion. As a rule the Romans were extremely liberal in religious matters, and were happy to assimilate foreign deities into their own pantheon. (The crime of the Christians was not that they worshipped a foreign god but that they refused to worship the emperor). But there were two famous exceptions to this rule : the worship of Moloch was wiped out with Carthage in 164 BC, and the Druids and their rites were similarly obliterated from the empire two hundred years later, their last stand being in Anglesey in 61 AD. Liberal in religion the Romans might have been, but human sacrifice was one thing they would not stand for.

Acworth and Elgar must have known all this, and indeed the libretto makes it quite explicit. On the one hand we have the apparent innocence of :

> Come! Beneath our woodland bow'rs,
> Wreathe our hallow'd wreaths of flowers,
> Priestly crowns of crimson hue,
> Opening roses bright with dew,

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[22] Lucan : *Pharsalia* I, 444-462, translated by J D Duff (London, 1928) pp 34-37

[23] Op cit, III, 399-425; Duff, pp 142-5.

[24] Quoted in Moore, op cit, p 238

Come!
Scatter bud and blossom round you on the way,
Till the tender greensward blushes like the day;

but on the other hand,

Thrice the sacrificial knife
Reddens with the victim's life,
Thrice the mystic dance is led
Round the altar where they bled.

One can only wonder at the music which the composer gave to his Druids : was the charm of the sacred dance in Scene II, and the Sullivanesque chorus of youths and maidens in Scene III, deliberately intended as an ironic juxtaposition with the bloody altar? If so, the irony is not entirely successful, though it comes nearest success when the innocent charm is juxtaposed with the Invocation to Taranis. But whether deliberate or not, this ambiguity contributes to the more general sense of unease which is quite often apparent in *Caractacus*. This unease is surely born ultimately of an ambivalence in the nature of the cantata's subject matter which should be obvious enough. The hero is a Briton, and the British are (presumably) "our" side; yet our side, in comparison with the invader, is primitive and barbarous, with a savage religion. Our side is heroic, but the other side is victorious, and generous in victory. Our side is defeated, but assimilated into the Empire of the other side, to our ultimate benefit. We need only remember that Acworth spent his working life in the Indian Civil Service, to see what surely must have been obvious, at least to the more thoughtful, in 1898 : ancient Britain was to Rome much as India was to the British Empire. The whole of *Caractacus* can be seen as being directly parallel to the Raj, and so it is not only in the Finale that the chorus becomes the voice of the nineteenth-century British Empire : in a sense, it has been all along. From this perspective the final chorus is not at all a "crowning incongruity", or a "manufactured conclusion". It simply makes explicit what has been implicit throughout.

But there is an artistic as well as a political fitness which must be considered. So we come back to ancient Britain, and turn finally to the mystifying character of Arch-Druid. He is mystifying (rather than mysterious) because we are given no clear indication of what he thinks he is doing by giving Caractacus false information. If he believes his own religion, he presumably believes its auguries, from which it should follow that whatever he does, the British will be defeated. Why, therefore, promise them a victory he knows is impossible? He may on the other hand be a complete religious fraud, though there is nothing to support that interpretation. All this is very unsatisfactory, and a serious flaw in Acworth's work. But from a strictly structural point of view, none of it is important ; what matters is the pronouncement which he actually makes :

Go forth, O king, to conquer,
And all the land shall know
When falls thy charmèd sword edge,
In thunder on the foe.

And the chorus confirms, *molto grandioso e sostenuto*, in the most striking statement of the `Britain' motive we have yet heard,

> Go forth, O king to conquer,
> In thunder on the foe.

The Arch-Druid is making a prophecy, and its significance is underlined by the chorus and by the music - the fact that he and we know it to be false is for the moment beside the point. It is a prophecy; and whatever we may believe in reality, when we are presented with a prophecy in a work of art, we expect it to be somehow fulfilled. A simple fulfilment is good, an unexpected one is better. Best of all perhaps is the paradox which is caused when the prophecy is fulfilled as a result of attempts to thwart it - as in the classic case of the Oedipus myth. Moreover, the status of the prophet is irrelevant to the literary effect. Indeed, the artistic result may be the more powerful if the prophet is known to be false. So in John's Gospel, when Caiaphas tells the Sanhedrin "It is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish",[25] he thinks he is speaking of merely political expediency; and when John goes on to explain that because he was High Priest that year Caiaphas necessarily prophesied truly despite himself, though it was in a sense which he neither intended nor indeed would not even have understood, then the sensitive reader, whether a believer or not, must surely from a purely literary point of view experience a sort of numinous *frisson*.

So here : the Arch-Druid prophesies victory over Rome and all her legions for Caractacus - or perhaps one should rather say, for the king of the Britons. In its immediate and literal sense the prophecy is false; but the final chorus shows Caractacus its fulfilment, in the vision of `Kings of British blood'.

> But Rome and all her legions
> Shall shudder at the stroke,
> The weapon of the war-god,
> The shadow of the oak,

prophesies the Arch-Druid.

> The empire of the Roman
> Is crumbled into clay...
> The oak has grown and shadow'd
> The shores of all the world.

Confirms the final chorus. This is not the "serious blot on the dramatic scheme" which Newman claimed, and *pace* Maine, the dramatic purpose of the choral epilogue can be discovered after all. The librettist does not "unnecessarily drag in a narration of the passing of Rome's glory and the ascendancy of Britain"; neither is the Finale "tacked on for the benefit of national sentiment", as Kennedy said. On the contrary, it is totally necessary to the whole dramatic and musical scheme that the Finale should be as it is.

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[25] John 12: 50

I do not wish to overstate the case. If this reading of *Caractacus* is what Elgar and Acworth intended, it has to be admitted that they largely failed. If they had succeeded, Newman, Maine, Kennedy, Anderson and the rest would have seen the point, and this article would have been superfluous. But perhaps Elgar's sense of form did not desert him here quite as much as it might seem; perhaps he was right in finally declining (as it seems) to take too much notice of Jaeger's advice over the Finale; and perhaps H A Acworth was not quite so hopelessly inadequate to his task after all.

ELGAR IN BELFAST

David Greer

In 1874 two Belfast music societies, the Classical Harmonists' Society and the Belfast Music Society, amalgamated to form the Belfast Philharmonic Society, the objectives of which were to be 'the practice of Choral and Instrumental music and the promotion of a taste therefore by means of such practice and by public performance'. Although its remit embraced instrumental and vocal music of all kinds, in Belfast as elsewhere it was choral music that most found favour with audiences. For its inaugural concert the Society performed Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and thereafter that work and Handel's *Messiah* formed the corner-stones of the Philharmonic's repertory.[1]

The early conductors of the Philharmonic were mainly of continental origin – Henry Stiehl, Adolf Beyschlag and Francis Kœller. But in 1912 the committee appointed as successor to Kœller a musician from England, E Godfrey Brown. Brown was born in 1874 in Ulverston. He studied violin, piano, and organ for four years at the Royal College of Music, and became a member of the D'Oyly Carte orchestra at the age of sixteen. A few years later he was appointed organist and choirmaster at Grange-over-Sands, and became a prominent figure in the musical life of the northwest of England, where at one time he rehearsed four choirs and an operatic society on different nights of the week. Brown was to remain conductor of the Belfast Philharmonic from 1912 until 1950, during which time he conducted the Society in over 250 concerts. At first this appointment was held in conjunction with a teaching post at Methodist College, Belfast, but in 1924 he gave this up to become the first Director of Music at the newly-established Belfast station of the BBC. From 1924 to 1937 he combined the BBC post with the conductorship of the Philharmonic. For his services to music he was made an Associate of the Royal College of Music in 1934 and was appointed OBE in 1936.

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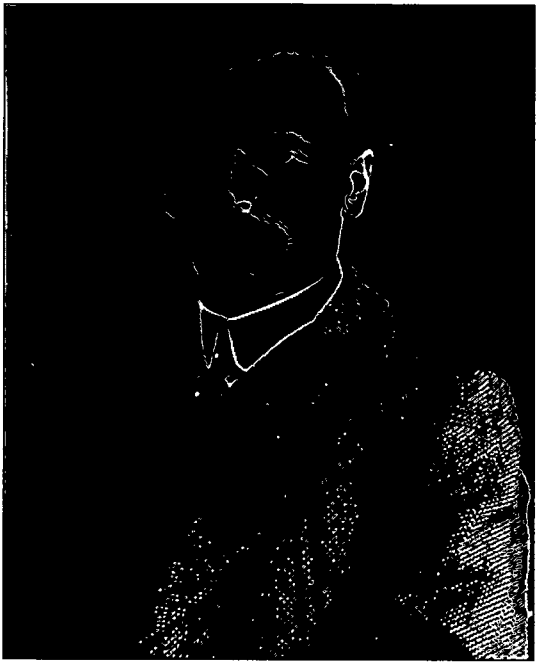
[1] Malcolm Ruthven, *Belfast Philharmonic Society 1874-1974: A Short History* (Belfast, 1973). I am also much indebted to Dr Edgar Boucher and Dr Roy Johnston for information.



E Godfrey Brown, Conductor of the Belfast Philharmonic Society 1912-50

He died in 1955.

In 1905 the Philharmonic performed *The Dream of Gerontius* for the first time in Northern Ireland, and thereafter this work had a regular place in the repertory of the Society. For its 1932-33 season the committee decided to invite the composer to conduct the work.[2] The Society had performed *Gerontius* as recently as March 1931 and so the music was still fresh in the minds of the choir and orchestra. It was Brown who corresponded with Elgar over the arrangements, and Elgar's replies are still in the possession of the Brown family. They were first shown to me by Godfrey Brown's son, the late Michael Brown OBE, who also kindly provided me with photocopies. I am grateful to Mrs Rosemary Brown for allowing me to print them here.[3]

1. In Elgar's hand. Letterhead: From Sir EDWARD ELGAR, Bart., O.M., K.C.V.O., Master of the King's Musick; Lord Chamberlain's Office, St. James's Palace, London, S.W.1.

15 June 1932
Marl Bank,
Rainbow Hill,
Worcester.

Dear Mr. Godfrey Brown:

Thank you for your letter: I sent a telegram saying that the date you kindly propose is possible: the terms you name are of course low, but I suppose these times must make things very difficult. Without going into the question of a proposed programme conclusively I think Gerontius & the Variations wd. be best: Falstaff is too long to go with Gerontius.
As to soloists in the absence of Mr. Steuart Wilson Mr. F. Titterton is singing the work at Worcester

[2] The concert and E. Godfrey Brown are mentioned by Ronald Taylor in 'Music in the Air: Elgar and the BBC', in *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, ed. Raymond Monk (Aldershot, 1993), 333, 335, 338, 341, 345, 347.

[3] The original spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and paragraphing have been retained.

Festivil [sic]. I do not know if Count John McCormack will be in Ireland[.] you might think of the possibility & enquire. For the contralto part Miss Astra Desmond or Miss Olga Haley or Miss Betty Bannerman not the singer you suggest. For the Bass there are several artists.
I write very shortly (just touching on the main points of your letter), so as to catch the post.

Believe me to be
Yours very truly
Edward Elgar

Godfrey Brown esq:
Belfast

The date proposed for the concert was Friday 21 October 1932. The mention of John McCormack as a possible soloist reminds us that it was only in 1932 that the composer and the singer had become reconciled. McCormack had long harboured ill feelings towards Elgar since the occasion in 1912 when the composer had been openly scornful of a performance of the Verdi Requiem in which McCormack had taken part.[4] However, it was Steuart Wilson who was engaged to sing the part of Gerontius in Belfast.

Soon after Elgar's initial response, however, there was a hitch. Brown informed Elgar that the concert was to be broadcast, and the composer – reflecting on the modest fee that he had been offered – wrote back as follows:

2. In Elgar's hand. Letterhead: Marl Bank, Rainbow Hill, Worcester. Telephone: Worcester, 924. Telegraph: Elgar, Worcester.

20th July 1932

Dear Mr. Godfrey Brown:
I am only just back t[o] find your letter of the 8th. You now tell me that the Concert is t[o] be Broadcast: this is quite a different matter from an ordinary Concert. I shall be glad therefore if you will cancel the concert. as the matter must be considered closed

Believe me t[o] b[e]
Yours very truly
Edward Elgar

But the matter was soon resolved, and in the next three letters we see the arrangements gradually taking shape.

3. Typewritten. Letterhead as no. 1.

Marl Bank,
Rainbow Hill,
Worcester.
28th July 1932.

Dear Mr Godfrey Brown,
I am sorry for the delay. I have your letter of the 25th and have sent a telegram at the earliest opportunity accepting the new terms.
This is only to say that I cordially agree to the arrangements proposed and note that the rehearsal is on Thursday October 20th and the Concert on the following day.

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[4] Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford, 1984), 640, 798

Believe me to be,
Yours sincerely,
Edward Elgar

E. Godfrey Brown, Esq.

4. In Elgar's hand. Letterhead: Marl Bank, Worcester.

2nd Augt 1932

Dear Mr. Godfrey Brown:
By all means open the Concert with the Handel Overture: I forget if you conduct this or if I do. I have not your first - letter referring to this here so please settle it as you like
Yours sincerely
Edward Elgar

5. Typewritten. Letterhead as no. 1.

Marl Bank,
Worcester.
15th September 1932.

Dear Mr Godfrey Brown,
I am sorry your letter has remained unanswered owing to the business of the festival here.
I note that you have engaged Mr Victor Harding.
I am sorry that I had no opportunity to meet Dr Norman Hay except quite casually for a moment: I understand his work was a great success and shall be glad to make his acquaintance.
Kind regards,
Yours sincerely,
Edward Elgar

P.S.- I have just received your letter of the 14th;- thank you for your enquiry about entertainment; I shall have my valet with me. I leave it to you to decide the best thing to do: naturally I get heated and have to avoid draughts, etc.- is the hotel near the Hall? I eat and drink very little and should be small trouble to anyone but on the whole perhaps the hotel would be best.
I understand that Sir Ivor[5] will be with you on some other occasion.
All right about the Contra Fagotto and thank you for the prospectus. Elg

E. Godfrey Brown, Esq.

Several points in Letter 5 require elucidation. Victor Harding was the bass soloist (the mezzo-soprano was Astra Desmond). Dr Norman Hay (1889-1943) was an Ulster composer whose *Pæan* was featured in the Three Choirs Festival at Worcester that summer. As 'Rathcol' he was also the music critic of *The Belfast Telegraph* and will feature again in this story. The final point about the contra fagotto is easily explained : Brown had to break it to Elgar that this instrument would not be available.

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[5] Sir Ivor Atkins, Organist of Worcester Cathedral. Atkins was no stranger to Belfast: in September 1926 he had conducted a broadcast performance of the *'Enigma' Variations* and Elgar's transcription of the *Handel Overture in D minor* from Belfast.

Elgar on the ferry to Belfast, October 1932. (photo courtesy of Raymond Monk).

We now come to the visit itself. It is said that one of Elgar's first remarks on being met off the boat was 'Is there any racing?'. Another detail is that he was greeted by a telegram from his spaniel Marco, sent by his daughter Carice. Elgar arrived at the rehearsal in a wheelchair. Shortly after beginning the rehearsal he brought the chorus to a halt and told Brown that the performance was so well prepared that no further rehearsal would be necessary. But Brown insisted that the rehearsal should continue, and Elgar took up the baton again. At one point Elgar asked where the semi-chorus of angels was located. On seeing a waving of hands from high up he said, 'I might have known'. During the break, the composer was presented with an Irish blackthorn walking stick and some linen handkerchiefs. He then asked Brown to take the remainder of the rehearsal and sat down at the front of the hall. When Brown joined him at the end of the rehearsal he found him in tears. [6]
The concert itself was fully reported in *The Belfast Telegraph*. Under the heading 'Big Belfast Event. Elgar Conducts His "Gerontius", 'Rathcol' wrote :

> The first visit of Sir Edward Elgar to Belfast has afforded the musical public of the city the double privilege of doing honour to the most eminent British composer of our day and of forming a critical assessment of two of his works under the advantage of his personal direction—works already well-known to us through the good offices of the Philharmonic Society and the B.B.C. popular concerts. ...
> The first-named of the privileges accorded to us by Sir Edward's visit was taken advantage of in no uncertain fashion in the Ulster Hall last evening, when an overflowing audience, which

[6] Ruthven, op. cit., 34-5

included the Governor and Her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn, gave the veteran composer a hearty and vociferous Ulster welcome. ...

Sir Edward Elgar was delighted with the performance, and this memorable occasion may be said to crown triumphantly Mr. Godfrey Brown's labours for the society and for the advance of music in this city during the twenty-one years of his conductorship. Having heard the work beautifully done six weeks ago, also under the composer's baton, in the more inspiring surroundings of Worcester Cathedral, I can safely assert that the Belfast choral work was in nearly every respect superior to that of the Three Choirs at Worcester, while the brilliance of the orchestra last evening quite overshadowed, both in technique and in interpretation, the L.S.O. standard at Worcester. I pay this tribute to Mr. Brown and his disciples the more readily because they are ours; but, quite apart from sentiment, I do it in all sincerity as a carefully considered judgment. ...

Towards the end of the concert the rendering was perhaps not so steady or controlled as in the excellent performance under Mr. Brown last March, and any loss of steadiness must be put down to Sir Edward's tendency in Part II.—especially in the magnificent "Praise to the Holiest" chorus—to hurry the tempo somewhat unduly. This tendency raises an interesting psychological point: was it due to a pardonable fatigue or was the composer himself led on by the extraordinarily exuberant response of the chorus? Be that as it may, any slight loss of control was amply compensated for by the vividly rhythmic procession of this mighty chorus—singing which surpassed any past effort in its compelling rhythm and vivid colouring. ... Sir Edward is an unorthodox and therefore difficult conductor, and in niceties of attack and unanimity the chorus could have benefited by a longer acquaintance with his baton; but he is a magnetic and inspiring conductor, with whom rhythm and phrase live and move and have their being, and the singers and players responded to his spiritual demands very movingly.

'Rathcol' then writes warmly of the orchestral playing and the contribution of the three soloists before turning briefly to the earlier part of the programme :

Preceding "Gerontius" we had two orchestral works: Elgar's orchestration of a Handel overture and the "Enigma" variations. Much as I decry modernising the classics, I fully appreciate that the Handel has been done not only with all the Elgar mastery but also with more discretion than are some re-scorings we know.[7] ... A very good performance of the "Enigma" followed, save that there was some unsteadiness in No. V. and in the "Dorabella" variation—due, it must be said, to Sir Edward's mercurial beat. I noted gladly that his tempo for the great "Nimrod" variations coincides with Mr. Brown's idea and my own, thus finally negativing the ultra-slow ponderous reading we once experienced here. The "Enigma" is actually two years older than "The Dream"; and once more one marvelled at the maturity of the music, which never once descends to bathos. All in all it may be regarded, along with the symphonies and the violin concerto, as the greatest and, in the best sense, most personally Elgarian of all the works of its great creator.[8]

This was not the end of Elgar's Belfast visit, for the following evening Brown conducted a BBC concert in the Wellington Hall and the composer went along to hear it. The programme included Delius's *Violin Concerto*, Butterworth's *The Banks of Green Willow*, Brahms's *Tragic Overture* and Elgar's second *Wand of Youth* suite. But as Hay reported in his 'Rathcol' column, Elgar was not on view to the public :

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[7] This seems to be a dig at the popular Handel arrangements of Hay's fellow countryman Hamilton Harty.

[8] *The Belfast Telegraph*, 22 October 1932

The "Telegraph's" exclusive announcement that Sir Edward Elgar would attend the symphony concert in the Wellington Hall, Belfast, on Saturday night was well founded. He was there, but the audience did not see him. The great composer found his way to the ante-room, and apart from the gaze of a largely filled hall, where necks were strained to identify a figure that could not be located, he remained until it was time for him to leave, which was shortly before the interval.`According to the little coterie who kept Sir Edward company, he was greatly delighted by the B.B.C. Orchestra and with the solo artists. But he never once discarded his mantle of reserve and departed as shyly as he came.[9]

Elgar alludes to his early departure in his next letter :

6. In Elgar's hand. Letterhead as no.1.

Worcester. 24th Oct. 1932

Dear Godfrey Brown; I am very exceedingly sorry I did not see you just before leaving - but a small internal trouble made me vanish: I enjoyed the Brahms over[ture]: & thought the orch. very good indeed - the weaker points you know better than I but the whole ensemble is praiseworthy.
I do not know how t[o] express my thanks for all the kind care & trouble you have taken over my visit: I thoroughly enjoyed it & hope your efforts were not wasted. I thought things went exceptionally well, the chorus was elastic & enthusiastic & all credit is due to you for their singing and a [*sic*] the excellent orchestra[l] playing: I have seen nothing & heard nothing except a sentence or two at the luncheon, so I (as usual) am entirely ignorant of the effect as recorded by the press - I have read nothing since 1900 & have got so into the way of it that I resent - or something like that - any knowledge.
Please give my kind regard[s] to Mrs. Brown & with the greatest gratitude to you

Believe me t[o] b[e]
Yours very sincerely
Edward Elgar

Marco sends hearty greetings to Peter[10]

Elgar's next two letters reveal that plans for a repeat visit were taking shape :

7. In Elgar's hand. Letterhead as no.1

Worcester 11th August 1933

Dear Godfrey Brown:
Many thanks for your letter: I am glad you are having a restful time in the country.
My engagements have not yet disentangled themselves. I fear that by the time the Trilogy might be completed no choral society will be in existence: they are dying fast[11]

Kind regards
Yours sincerely
Edward Elgar

8. In Elgar's hand. Letterhead as no.1. This letter bears a handwritten note by Brown at the top: `Car & bed rooms ordered Aug 29th. [then?] to write to Sir Es.'

[9] *The Belfast Telegraph*, 24 October 1932

[10] Peter was the Brown's dog

[11] Moore, op. cit., 761, 772

[illegible] rooms ordered Aug 29 [illegible]

From Sir EDWARD ELGAR, Bart., O.M., G.C.V.O.,
Master of the King's Musick ; Lord Chamberlain's Office,
St. James's Palace, London, S.W. 1.

Worcester 27th Aug 33

Dear Godfrey Brown: Thanks for your letter: I send a short & hasty reply as I am just off to London for festival rehearsals: In haste, please, just arrange the programme as you think best, — your selection is so rich — perhaps the Nursery suite in place of the Wand of Youth — all else as you have it.

I will write later about the journey: I could come whichever. Thursday — can I get the night boat after the Concert? I hope!

Kind regards
Yrs Ed Elgar

Yes: please book the rooms for me & Dick as before.

Elgar's letter of 27 August 1933

Worcester 28$7^{th}$. Augt 1933

Dear Godfrey Brown: Thank you for your letter: I send a short & hasty reply as I am just off to London for festival rehearsals & am pressed, plaguily, for time: Just arrange the programme as you think best, your selections will do well - perhaps the Nursery suite in place of the Wand of Youth - all else as you have it
I will write later about the journey: I could leave here on Thursday - can I get the night boat after the concert?

I[n] haste!
Kind regards
Elg

Yes: please book rooms for me & Dick[12] as before.

But the visit was not to be. His health had been going downhill for some time, and even as he made plans for the return to Belfast he was a sick man. Between the two letters he conducted the Second Symphony at the Queen's Hall and people were shocked by his appearance – his weak voice, trembling hands, and loss of weight. 'He seemed to have shrunk to half the size.'[13] On 8 October he had an operation, and what had previously been described as lumbago or sciatica proved to be inoperable cancer.[14] His next communication with Godfrey Brown was a postcard from the Nursing Home in Worcester :

9. Handwritten by Mary Clifford, Elgar's secretary. Heading: *From* SIR EDWARD ELGAR, BART., O.M., G.C.V.O. *Telephone:* Worcester, 924. *Telegraph*: Elgar, Worcester. ~~MARL BANK,~~ Nursing Home, WORCESTER. Addressed on reverse to E. Godfrey Brown, Esq: B.B.C., Linenhall Street, Belfast.

Dictated Dec: 6th. 1933.

My dear Godfrey Brown,
I send just an enquiry hoping M^{rs}. Brown & you all are well. I have not heard much news lately = Atkins has been up 2 or 3 time & of course I have seen several passing musicians. Let me have a line sometime.

With kindest regards,
Yours sincerely,
Signed:- Edward Elgar

His last letter to Brown was dictated to Mary Clifford on 22 December 1933. The fiction of the sciatica is still maintained. Above all, the letter shows how the memories of Belfast, and the friends that he had made there, were a comfort to the dying man.

10. Handwritten by Mary Clifford. Heading: ~~Marl Bank,~~ Nursing Home, Worcester. Telephone: Worcester 924.

Dictated Dec: 22nd. 1933.

My dear Godfrey Brown,

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[12] Richard Mountford, his valet

[13] Obituary, *The Evening Standard*, 23 February 1934

[14] Moore, op. cit., 818

I delighted in your letter of Dec: 7th. full of news and general optimism.
The announcement that I had gone home was unfortunately premature; I shall be here for some time yet owing to this wretched sciatica. Things, of course, go very slowly; Atkins comes up occasionally and, as usual with him we get good talk.
I often think of my time in Belfast & wish it could happen again.
With kindest regards to Mrs. Godfrey Brown & you, & friendly messages & good wishes to all those I had the pleasure to meet in Belfast.

Believe me to be,
Yours very sincerely,
Signed:- Edward Elgar

ELGAR AND LIGHT MUSIC

Philip Scowcroft

We think primarily of Elgar as a "serious" composer and, whether listening, reading or writing, concentrate on his major choral, chamber and orchestral works. Even the present writer in his recently published *British Light Music: A Personal Gallery of 20th Century Composers* (Thames Publishing, 1997), the first ever substantial survey of the subject across the board, took much the same view, feeling that a serious composer had no place in his thirty major biographical chapters and that to include a short entry on Elgar in the Appendix, briefly summarising his lighter output might be taken as an insult to our premier composer. (Much the same considerations governed the omissions of Holst, Delius, Vaughan Williams, and Britten).

Some might regard this as a craven evasion of the issue; if so, I hope they will regard the following fugitive remarks as a reparation, if not a recantation. For a substantial part of Elgar's output was of course light music. But what is light music? I have - though without any expectation of everyone agreeing with me - said that it can include: orchestral music which is primarily for entertainment - pictorial suites and genre movements - and its more domestic counterpart for solo instruments or small groups like the piano trio (often there were arrangements, formal and informal, between the two); the lighter end of the song repertoire, familiarly called ballads; much film and TV music; the lighter end of music for the theatre, operetta, musicals and much incidental and ballet music; and a great deal of band music, military and brass.

Elgar contributed to most of these sub-genres. He wrote no film music; although if he had lived a few more years he may well have done so - Arthur Bliss's fine music for *Things to Come* in 1935 was perhaps a watershed for major symphonic composers writing for the screen - and he would surely have enjoyed coping with its special problems and disciplines. He is known to the military band world only through transcriptions, although some of these like, for example, the *Crown of India March* (by Frank Winterbottom), the *Severn Suite* (by Henry Geehl) and others we mention later, were by notable figures in that field. Elgar wrote no

operetta, although *The Starlight Express* is something more than incidental music (perhaps we may dub it a "musical"?), and he certainly composed for the ballet (*The Sanguine Fan* and perhaps *The Crown of India*, described as a "masque") and incidental music for the theatre: *Grania and Diarmid*, the source of one of his finer marches; *Arthur*, whose music he was later to dust down when essaying his *Third Symphony*; and *Beau Brummell*, which inspired an elegant pastiche minuet (so many British light music composers have been adept at writing period pastiches), although none of Elgar's theatre scores attained the popularity of the incidental music of Edward German, or Norman O'Neill or even, in their day, Alfred Reynolds.

Nearly all of Elgar's solo songs - I except the *Sea Pictures*, of course, and perhaps also the Opus 59 and 60 songs - are classifiable as ballads, with lyrics which are at best second-rate poetry but which do not get in the way of a good, indeed often a characteristically Elgarian, tune. It is surprising that of them only the *Shepherd's Song* and maybe *Pleading* have achieved anything like the popularity of "classics" of the ballad genre like *Roses of Picardy* (Haydn Wood), *Sing Joyous Bird* (Montague Phillips), *Until* and *Friend o' Mine* (Wilfrid Sanderson), *The Floral Dance* (Katie Moss), and *Green Hills of Somerset* (Eric Coates), to name but a few.

And so we come to Elgar's orchestral and instrumental light music. Much light music can be related to music written for children and other amateurs, even music avowedly for teaching purposes, because of its simplicity and directness of appeal. One thinks of the output of W H Squire, W H Reed, Harry Farjeon, and Thomas Dunhill, for instance. Many of Elgar's shorter early pieces were for violin and piano and were clearly by-products of his days as a violin teacher. All are light music, although not all achieved wide popularity in public concerts, possibly because only some were orchestrated. The popular titles I can think of are *Chanson de Matin, Chanson de Nuit, Salut d'Amour* (which may have been a piano, rather than a violin and piano, original), *Mot d'Amour* (but Arthur Wood's orchestration was never *very* popular) and, with Henry Geehl doing the honours, the *Idylle* from Opus 4. Only *La Capricieuse* has remained relatively more popular in its original form over the whole period since it was written; nowadays we do sometimes hear the others in their original guise.

Elgar's most famous examples of the light concert suite are the two *Wand of Youth Suites* which appeared when he was around fifty but in part drew on music conceived in childhood. They are not the only pieces of Elgar light - or for that matter, any - music to use tunes from his childhood or adolescence; the *Nursery Suite* is another example. There are of course other Elgar concert suites : the *Three Bavarian Dances*, selected from a collection of six choral songs (one assumes that the other three were not similarly arranged because three, perhaps four, movements were usual for the light concert suite and rarely did it have as many as six); the *Three Characteristic Pieces* (Suite in D), Opus 10; *Crown of India*, of course, which curiously did not include the *Crown of India March*, already mentioned; the *Dream Children*, perhaps, for all, their wistfulness; the *Severn Suite*, originally for brass band; and the *Serenade for Strings*. One may have doubts, on account of the profundity of its central Larghetto, in describing

the latter as a "light concert suite", but had Elgar given the movements descriptive titles, as he so easily could have done, would we hesitate to do so?

The march, whether written by Mozart, Sousa or whoever, is a light form. Elgar penned many between 1897 (*Imperial March*) and 1930 when the fifth and last in the *Pomp and Circumstance* canon appeared, and he undoubtedly inspired many other British composers to compose marches for the concert hall even if some of them, like Eric Coates with his characteristic rhythms, wrote marches which sound very different from the Elgarian mould. The overture, to a considerable degree, is also a lighter musical form. Of Elgar's examples, *In the South* is too long to be reckoned a true overture and is in effect a symphonic poem which challenges, and to my mind at least equals, Richard Strauss on his home ground. *Froissart* is an early effort and was considered to be a serious composition when it first appeared; but *Cockaigne* is surely one of the earlier examples of the light, bright, often comic, English concert overture of which we may instance Walton's *Scapino*, Malcolm Arnold's *Beckus the Dandipratt*, Alan Rawsthorne's *Street Corner*, Frederic Curzon's *Punchinello*, Montague Phillips' *Revelry* and Eric Coates' *The Merrymakers* from among literally hundreds of examples.

Light music needs little in the way of musical analysis and it will receive none here. As the late Andrew Gold, head of the BBC's Light Music Unit between 1965 and 1969 once said, "Light music is music where the tune is more important than what you do with it". But one or two general observations may be proffered. In Elgar's day light music was exceptionally popular, and to remain so until at least the 1950s; and there was a long tradition, stretching back to perhaps the promenade concerts promoted by Louis Jullien in the 1840s and 1850s, of combining light music, even dance music, with classical symphonies and opera in the same programme. Thus Elgar would think nothing of including movements from *The Wand of Youth* in the same programme as his *First Symphony* as he did, for example, when he brought the London Symphony Orchestra to play in Doncaster Corn Exchange on 28 October 1909. Modern conductors and concert promoters are much less anxious to mix "serious" and "light". Some years ago I wrote to the *Musical Times*, pointing out how few overtures (which we have just suggested is basically a light music form) appeared in the programmes of the BBC Proms in that particular season. Matters are not that different in 1997! Concerts nowadays must be 100% serious (or sometimes 100% light) in their content, it seems. The result of this "ghettoisation" is that we rarely hear *Wand of Youth* or any other Elgar light music in the Proms or for that matter in any other series of symphony concerts. Surely we are the poorer for this?

Second, it is said, as a generalisation, that Elgar wrote, or at any rate, completed, nothing after producing the *Cello Concerto* in 1919. But as we have seen, he composed a considerable amount of light music in the years 1919-34: *Arthur; Beau Brummell;* the orchestrated version of *May Song; Pomp & Circumstance no 5; Severn Suite; Nursery Suite; Mina* - all gorgeously tuneful and all beautifully scored. (The *Spanish Lady* dances are similarly tuneful but Elgar did not have time to score them fully). The inter-war years were the heyday of British light music, most of it gorgeously tuneful and beautifully scored, not to mention British

light music institutions. Who can say that Elgar did not make substantial contributions to it, and them, during that heyday?

What can we say about Elgar's views on, and his relations with, other contemporary British composers of light music? Information is inevitably patchy. We know that he admired Edward German's music and told him so. But German produced many serious compositions, symphonies and the like, and like Sullivan before him, aspired to be a serious composer even though he was fated to be better known for his lighter work. Was it the serious or the light Edward German that Elgar admired? I suspect that it was the German of the operettas and the incidental music as these were then so much more accessible, as they are still.

A surprisingly large number of significant British light music composers made transcriptions or arrangements of Elgar's music which enhanced his (and their) reputations. We may cite a few examples of this. Haydn Wood (1882-1959), who composed many ballads and more light suites than Eric Coates, arranged four Elgar songs (*Queen Mary's Song, Like to the Damask Rose, Rondel,* and *Shepherd's Song*) for orchestra and so cunningly chosen are the songs that, were it not that one knows the tunes of the songs, the arrangements could almost be one of Wood's own perfectly balanced, satisfyingly contrasted, suites. Wood's own *Variations on a Once Popular Humorous Song*, incidentally, have some very Elgarian moments. Another Wood, Arthur (1875-1953) of *Barwick Green* ("The Archers" signature tune) fame, arranged the violin piece *Mot d'Amour* for orchestra. What became of this transcription? Montague Phillips (1885-1969), remembered as the composer of the operetta *The Rebel Maid* and many songs and orchestral pieces, arranged in 1935 several Elgar solo songs (coincidentally the same ones as Haydn Wood, plus *A Poet's Life*) for female choir. The concert organist Edwin Lemare (1865-1934), remembered for his Andantino in D flat (*Moonlight and Roses* in its vocal version), arranged for organ the violin pieces *Idylle* and *Gavotte, Sursum Corda, Salut d'Amour, Pomp & Circumstance no 1* and the *Caractacus* march, all no doubt for his own recitals which took him worldwide.

We have already mentioned Henry Geehl (1881-1961) as the arranger for orchestra of *Idylle* (plus *Adieu* and *Serenade*) and for military band of the *Severn Suite*. It is often said that Geehl helped Elgar with the original brass version of the *Severn Suite*, but a recent article in this JOURNAL has suggested that this assistance may have been of the slightest. Another man particularly associated with brass bands, Denis Wright (1895-1967), arranged many of Elgar's shorter compositions for brass and these remain popular. Percy Fletcher (1879-1932), another known for his light orchestral works, arranged *Carillon* for military band; though probably the largest number of Elgar compositions arranged for military band came from the various members of the Godfrey family. Finally, Albert Ketèlbey (1875-1959), of *In a Monastery Garden* fame, prepared in 1916 a suite of six movements from *The Starlight Express* for solo piano, having also arranged *Carillon* for piano. Ketèlbey was himself a pianist and many of his original compositions, including the first version of *In a Monastery Garden*, were for piano solo.

We can, I think, assume and in some cases - notably Denis Wright and Haydn Wood - we know that there was mutual regard between Elgar and all these masters of light music (all younger than he was, incidentally), even if Geehl was a prickly individual, as Elgar himself could be. Notice too that with insignificant exceptions the Elgar pieces they arranged came from his corpus of light music, as I have defined the term. Many of them were capable conductors; some of them conducted in London theatres where opportunities for promoting Elgar's music were limited, but others, like the ballad composer Wilfrid Sanderson (1878-1935), who as Conductor of the Doncaster Musical Society performed *Gerontius* twice and *King Olaf* once in nine seasons between 1912 and 1924, and conductors associated with the seaside resorts, ever bastions of light music - Dan Godfrey and Julius Harrison - contributed notably to the sum of Elgar performances.

Light music, and its practitioners, bulked large in Elgar's life and music and we would do well to remember this. It is interesting to notice that many of his lighter pieces have (in common with the rest of his output) made a comeback in the past generation at a time when British light music generally was in decline. However, this is enjoying something of a revival currently, so it is possible to see Elgar's lighter effusions in their true context.

ELGAR AND `TITLE' MUSIC

As a pendant to the above I would like to offer a few observations on the use of Elgar's music as incidental to films and to TV and radio features. During the 1940s and 1950s, indeed later, much of this, particularly on the TV and radio side, was drawn from publishers' recorded "mood music" libraries (Paxton's, Francis Day & Hunter, Boosey & Hawkes, and most famously, Chappell's). These libraries consisted primarily of light "genre" music, but despite his contributions to light music one cannot readily imagine a figure as eminent as Elgar being a "library" composer. In any event he died before television became a commercial proposition, and before composers were commissioned to write scores for talking films, while radio broadcasting was less than twelve years old in February 1934.

I feel, though, that in view of his success in writing incidental music for the live theatre that he would have welcomed the challenge of writing for the new media like talking feature films (he was actually involved in a brief "documentary"), radio and TV and it is entirely appropriate that his music has been appropriated for all three. Most notable among feature films making use of his music was Young Winston *(1972) (although the film's musical score is credited to Alfred Ralston). Its opening scenes, which showed Churchill on the North West Frontier, resounded to the strains of the Triumphal march from* Caractacus, *while later on the* Imperial March, Pomp & Circumstance 4 *and* Nimrod *also figured, to considerable effect. The* Caractacus *march was also used as title music to BBC TV's Victorian military "soap",* The Regiment, *again entirely appropriately, as the events of* The Regiment *were almost contemporaneous with* Caractacus. *More surprisingly the same march was for*

about four weeks the music introducing Julian Herbage and Anna Instone's well-loved Music Magazine radio feature when this began in 1944 until the long-lasting piano version of Schubert's To Music took over.

John Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga was in the mid-1960s adapted for TV and, less famously and in no fewer than forty-eight half-hour episodes, for radio. The title music for the TV adaptation was of course by Eric Coates (the opening movement, `Halcyon Days', of his Three Elizabeths Suite), but I recall hearing bits of the Introduction & Allegro as incidental music for the final, twenty-sixth, episode, and I have a feeling that Elgar's music was drawn on to accompany other episodes as well. The radio adaptation used for its title music a snatch of `W.N.', the eighth of the Enigma Variations, about as different an introduction from the TV version as could be imagined. Elgar's music is surely appropriate for the Saga, which spans the years 1886 to 1926, virtually the whole of the composer's creative life.

Not that Elgar's music is appropriate only for adaptations set during his own lifetime. I recall `The Serious Doll' (from the Nursery Suite) being adapted as title music for a TV dramatisation of Charles Dickens' David Copperfield during the 1970s and finding its wistfulness rather moving.

The above handful of examples are, I am sure, just a few of the occasions Elgar's music has been drawn on for radio, film and television. The very variety of our few examples show that Sir Edward was indeed a composer for all seasons. I must have missed many other instances and I will of course be delighted to hear from readers chiding me for such lacunae.

LOOKING AFTER ELGAR'S BELOVED COUNTRY

Andy Maginnis

Much of Elgar's life was spent in the countryside of South Worcestershire - a part of the country which, in many respects, has changed little since his death. Today, much of this countryside is managed by the Countryside and Conservation Service of Hereford and Worcester County Council.

The Countryside and Conservation Service South Worcestershire team is based at Worcester Woods Country Park, just 2 miles north-east of Worcester city centre. From here the team manages three country parks, twelve picnic places and 80 miles of the Worcestershire Way and Severn Way regional walking routes.

Of particular interest to Elgar Society members are Tank Quarry Picnic Place near Malvern and Ankerdine Common near Knightwick.

Tank Quarry
Tank Quarry is situated on the West Malvern road at the north-eastern extremity of the Malvern Hills so beloved by Elgar. The site is set in a spectacular disused quarry which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its fascinating geological features. These features are explained in a "*geology trail*" which leads visitors around the site.

The quarry has ample parking facilities and a number of picnic tables, besides an information shelter offering advice about public footpaths, local attractions and the Malvern Hills which are designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Visitors can gain access to three different levels in the quarry, two of which afford spectacular views over the Worcestershire Plain to Worcester Cathedral and the Severn Valley. More adventurous visitors may wish to use the quarry as a base from which to explore the Malvern Hills or some of the local footpaths.

Ankerdine Common
Ankerdine Common is situated seven miles west of Worcester in the Teme Valley. The small hamlet of Knightwick at the foot of Ankerdine Hill on the River Teme is said to be where Elgar composed much of the *Dream of Gerontius*. Apparently, Elgar cycled here frequently when he stayed at nearby Storridge. Indeed, annotated cycle route planners belonging to Elgar and showing his favourite routes can be seen to this day in the Elgar Birthplace only 6 miles distant at Lower Broadheath.

Ankerdine Common itself is only a mile from the Talbot Inn at Knightwick. The Common has two small picnic areas and parking spaces for a number of cars, together with an information shelter. Although the site is mostly covered by oak woodland there are some fine views of the Teme Valley and the Bromyard Downs beyond. Perhaps the main change to the landscape since Elgar's day is the loss of the once extensive hop yards - although many of the distinctive drying kilns (oast houses) are still to be seen in the surrounding countryside.

Ankerdine Common is designated as a Local Nature Reserve and has a wide range of fascinating flora and fauna. The Common is large enough to accommodate its own way marked "*Fox Trail*" which visitors can follow on a 3/4 mile circuit of the site and it makes an ideal place to visit following a trip to the Elgar Birthplace Museum.

Walks and Events

A map showing all of the South Worcestershire sites is included in the quarterly programme of walks and events which is published by the Countryside and Conservation Service. Included in the most recent programme were guided walks around the estate of Witley Court (where Elgar's father tuned the pianos of the dowager Queen Adelaide) and a walk jointly led by Countryside and Conservation Service officers and Walter Cullis (an Elgar Society member) in the Teme Valley and which was supported by the Elgar Birthplace Museum. This latter walk was promoted as "*A Ramble in Elgar's Country*" and walkers were told anecdotes about Elgar's life and his love for the Teme Valley and about local history, landscape and wildlife. Walkers were particularly delighted to hear that, as a young girl, Walter's wife had actually seen Elgar on one of his forays into the Worcester branch of Woolworth!

The Worcestershire Way

The Worcestershire Way is considered by experienced walkers to be one of the finest regional walking routes in the country. Approximately 50 miles in length, it runs from Kingsford Country Park in North Worcestershire to Hollybush at the southern end of the Malvern Hills. Taking in some of Worcestershire's finest scenery, including much of the Teme Valley, the route is meticulously way marked. The Worcestershire Way also has a number of circular walks leaving the main route and tackling the route, or parts of it, is forming an increasingly popular basis for a walking holiday in the County. Fortunately, Worcestershire is blessed with a wealth of attractive B&Bs, hotels and guest houses, the proprietors of which are usually only too happy to accommodate walkers. Certainly, walking the Worcestershire Way and staying in local accommodation really allows you to begin to understand why Elgar so loved his home county.

Further Information

For further information about the Worcestershire Way Map Pack, walking and accommodation in South Worcestershire or any of the South Worcestershire Countryside and Conservation Service sites, please write to The Information Officer, Worcester Countryside Centre, Wildwood Drive, Worcester WR5 2LG or telephone (01905) 766493. Should you wish your name to be included on the mailing list for the *Walks and Events* programme, please write to the address above.

TASMIN LITTLE TALKS ABOUT PLAYING THE ELGAR VIOLIN CONCERTO

"I think the Elgar *Violin Concerto* is wonderful. People feel that Elgar epitomises the essence of being English, the stiff upper lip, and so on; and yet, ironically, this concerto is such an incredibly passionate and introspective work. It also has, of course, its contrasting extrovert nobilmente elements - expressing what I might call the older finer feelings that one had for one's country.

"It is so easy to lose the shape of the Elgar Concerto, particularly in the last movement with the placing of the accompanied cadenza. The whole work is a marathon for the soloist; you don't get many rests. There aren't that many major tuttis; the one at the start of the work is probably the biggest, then you get a bit of a break about half-way through that movement, but you are playing pretty solidly throughout. The last movement is exceedingly demanding, technically. Certain passages have to be tossed off as if they were easy... Then there is the question of pace. Albert Sammons, for instance, in his recording, takes some passages at a tremendous speed. Some have argued that this speed was adopted to fit the sides of the old 78 rpm records, but I am not sure I believe that. It's interesting to compare the various timings of different recordings of the Concerto. The Sammons reading lasts forty-five minutes. Conversely, Kennedy takes nearly an hour. There can be that much difference. Just because the duration of a piece is shorter or longer it does not necessarily make it any better or worse, so long as the shape is firm. If you take a work very slowly you must be able to control it; you have to visualise and maintain a very good line in the front of your mind. If you don't, you risk allowing the piece to simply die inside; but if your phrase keeps its structure, then there should be no problem.

"I think, in general, tempos have become slower as our century has progressed. People abroad often associate English music with a rather turgid sense of tempo - all pastoral, delicate and a bit precious. I find this view somewhat frustrating. When I was in Venezuela, I played the Elgar *Violin Concerto* with a very fine Caracas orchestra. The players started the rehearsal sitting well back in their chairs playing slowly and somewhat half-heartedly; it was rather dull and I thought, 'Oh dear; we'll have to do something about this'. But by the time they reached the passionate tutti towards the end of the first section in which the solo violinist plays, they were sitting bolt upright and looking at this music as if their lives depended on it.

"I have an uncle who has lived in Australia for 35 years so there are family ties there. He was delighted to see me when I went out there in 1996. I played the Elgar Concerto in Brisbane with a fabulous orchestra with Vernon Handley as conductor. 'Tod' knows this piece very well and he is a marvellous accompanist. We both have similar views about the work so it worked like a dream. In New Zealand I played the Elgar Concerto with Barry Wordsworth who had never performed it before; but he took it very much on board, and so did the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. But the concert halls in Australia there are wonderful and the audiences are so appreciative; we received standing ovations, so people are not inhibited in letting you know how they feel. They really enjoyed our music".

(Interviewed by Ian Lace: part of a longer interview appearing in British Music Society News © Ian Lace 1998)

RECORD AND MUSIC REVIEW

Sketches for Elgar's Symphony no 3 elaborated by Anthony Payne.
BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis NMC DO 53
Commentary by Anthony Payne, with David Owen Norris (pianoforte), Robert Gibbs (violin) NMC DO 52
Full score, published by Boosey & Hawkes.

After all the heart-searching, the wrestling with consciences, here it is. No point now in worrying whether Elgar's death-bed wish - "don't let anyone tinker with it...No one would understand...no one...Better burn it" - should have been respected for ever. It has been done, a *fait accompli*. The spectre of the end of copyright in 2004 was the deciding factor - anyone can 'tinker' then and what might be the result? In any case, W H Reed, to whom Elgar made his poignant remarks, published a number of the sketches of the unfinished *Third Symphony* in *The Listener* shortly after Elgar's death and in his book *Elgar As I Knew Him*. By doing so, he effectively undermined Carice Elgar Blake's instruction, when she gave all the 130-odd pages of the sketches to the British Museum (now Library), that no one should work on them.

And, as it happened, Elgar was wrong. Someone did understand. Whatever views one may have on his "realisation" of the sketches, Anthony Payne conclusively proves that he had the sensitivity and the integrity to enter Elgar's mind posthumously. His work is the result of 26 years of pondering on the sketches and discovering that, far from being the incoherent jumble most of those who saw them had declared them to be, there were many significant clues to what was intended; and where there were not, Payne has let his Elgarian instinct guide him to solutions that most listeners will find convincing and acceptable. The symphony sounds like Elgar, with the exception of no more than a very few passages where Mahler comes to mind.

NMC Recordings Ltd, who have issued the first recording of this work so promptly, have wisely also recorded a talk by Anthony Payne in which he shows exactly what he had to contend with. This fascinating exposition is illustrated from the short score (played on the piano by David Owen Norris), by the violin and piano sketches which Elgar wrote out for Reed to play while they worked together in 1933 (played on Reed's violin by Robert Gibbs, with Norris) and by extracts from the BBC Symphony Orchestra recording. Also pinpointed are the only four parts of the symphony which Elgar fully scored - three passages in the first movement (including the splendid opening) and the start of the Finale. These four crucial passages saved Mr Payne from one puzzle : at least he knew the exact forces for which Elgar was scoring (triple woodwind, four horns, three trumpets and trombone, two harps and percussion including triangle, tambourine, tam-tam, cymbals and bass and side drums). In only one place - in the development section of the first movement - has Mr Payne invented a theme. Elsewhere what he has "composed" was always based on Elgar's material, most copiously in the third (Adagio solenne) and fourth movements, He had very few "certainties" on which to work, not many probabilities, mostly possibilities. The sketches show Elgar's "jigsaw" method of composition. He left it until the final stage to put the

pieces together. Mr Payne has had to be a detective, follow clues and, where there are none, make inspired guesses. A few of the sketches have found no place in the symphony. Would Elgar have used them all? No one can know, just as no one can know what he might have added, discarded and changed and what new ideas might have occurred to him. So we can never know what Elgar's *Third Symphony* would have been. What Mr Payne gives us is an assemblage of the sketches which at least tells us what it might have been. He had a more difficult task than Deryck Cooke who, in working on Mahler's *Tenth Symphony*, discovered that the work was in fact finished and required no thematic invention.

The greatest tribute I can pay to Mr Payne is to say that, after many hearings already, the work has grown on me so that I can't imagine being without it. Parts of it are indescribably beautiful, truly Elgarian. The second subject of the first movement, for example, inspired by Elgar's autumnal passion for Vera Hockman, belongs among those Elgar melodies which haunt the mind forever - just imagine, we might never have heard it at all! That in itself almost justifies this enterprise. The opening of the symphony is full-blown Elgar - no one but he could have composed this driving, thrusting passage. It shows that the fires were still burning, even though I do feel that generally there is a tiredness, a kind of resigned weariness, in some of the themes (like the *Cello Concerto*). The second movement, no more a conventional Scherzo than those in the other symphonies, is Elgar in his most delightful, Spanish-flavoured light vein. The Adagio begins like the Angel of the Agony's solo and there is a serene middle section, but this is the movement where, for all My Payne's skill, I feel most keenly the loss of Elgar's genius - he would, surely, have done something special here which would have lifted the movement to the skies. Referring to the opening of this movement, Elgar said to Ernest Newman : "I am fond enough to believe that the first two bars (with the F sharp in the bass) open some vast bronze doors into something strangely unfamiliar". Only Elgar could have shown us what lay behind those bronze doors. In the same letter, Elgar wrote : "I also have added the four final bars of this movement. I think and hope you may like the unresolved *estinto* of the viola solo". This is the passage Elgar wrote out for Reed, saying "Billy, this is the end". Reed believed he meant the end of the symphony, but the letter to Newman proves that he was mistaken and that Mr Payne has correctly placed this very moving passage at the end of the Adagio.

Mr Payne's toughest task was with the Finale, of which he has written over half. The initial fanfare (in Elgar's full scoring) launches the movement in ceremonial style. Would Elgar have returned to this style at the end? He left no clues as to how the symphony would end. Mr Payne's solution came to him from 'The Wagon Passes' movement of the *Nursery Suite*(1931), a crescendo and diminuendo derived from the Finale's main theme, a ghostly reference to the opening of the symphony and a final quiet but hollow sound from gong and harp. It is certainly an Elgarian idea. But would it have been Elgar's solution? He wrote to Newman: "I send you my stately sorrow (*adagio*). Naturally what follows brings hope". Is Mr Payne's ending hopeful? Maybe.

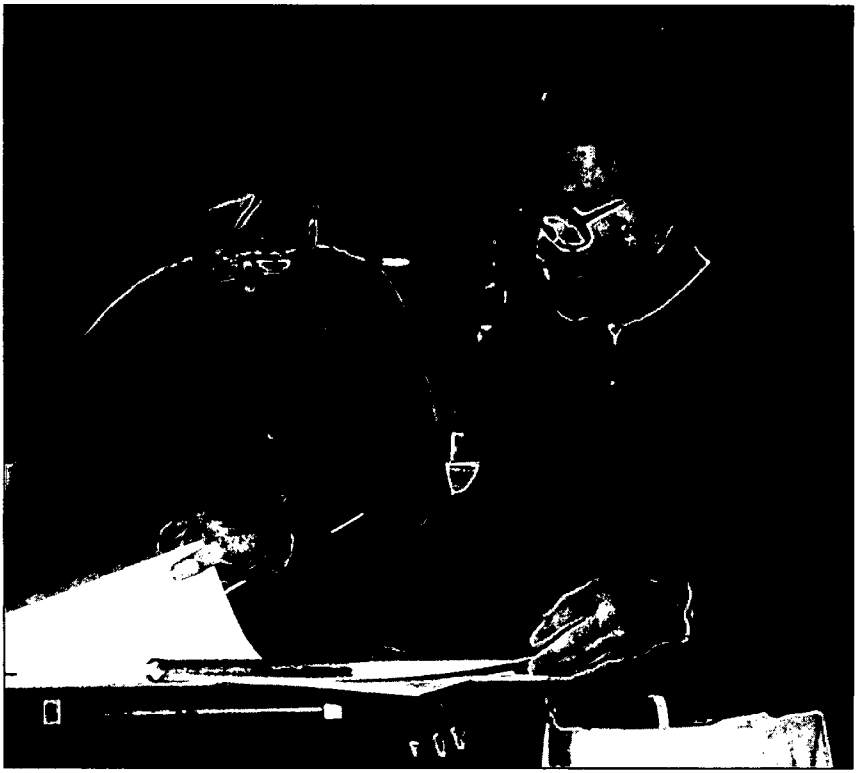
Some of Elgar's themes for the symphony were taken from his 1923 incidental music for Laurence Binyon's play *Arthur*, some from the abandoned third oratorio

The Last Judgment, others from other discarded projects. This is not in itself a sign of failing powers. It was his method throughout his career (as it has been with many other composers - think of Brahms's *First Piano Concerto*). Admittedly in his last fifteen years of life he returned to early sketches for most of his works but, in the case of the symphony, an original creative urge does seem to have reawakened and it is a tragedy that the cancer which killed him did not wait a few more months before striking him down. He was, as we should say today, most definitely back in symphonic mode and this is what Mr Payne has sensed most strongly. In so doing he has created a work of art. But whose? His or Elgar's? Whatever one may answer to oneself, the truest answer is that Mr Payne has brought his own insights and intuitions to the selfless service of Elgar and has paid him homage in his own image. It now remains to be seen how many Elgar conductors will take it up and how many will follow the (misguided, in my view) attitude of several famous Mahler conductors to the Cooke performing version of the *Tenth* and refuse to conduct it because it is not *echt*-Elgar (yet they conduct Mozart's *Requiem*, without a qualm, not to mention much Monteverdi).

It is historically right and proper that the work's first performances should have been given by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, for whom it was intended in 1934. Right, too, that a recording should have preceded the first public performances, for Fred Gaisberg planned that also. The recording comes not from EMI, but from a small company, NMC, which specialises in new music - a commentary on the present state of the recording industry. It is splendidly bright and full, well balanced, resonant without boom, and it is conducted with the utmost conviction by Andrew Davis and played with zest, colour and poetry. The only pity is that room was not found on the disc for the *Arthur* suite. But, as I said at the start, no Elgarian - and certainly no member of the Elgar Society - should be without the documentary disc which is indispensable to full appreciation of Anthony Payne's achievement. In these days when the BBC and most of the media seem to have decided that no one can concentrate on anything for longer than two minutes and then only if it is spoon-fed to them, it is heartening to find a record company which trusts music-lovers to be intelligent and inquiring.

Congratulations, too, to Boosey & Hawkes for producing the full score in good time, too - a properly engraved score, not a photostat of a manuscript. It is beautifully done. There are facsimiles of Elgar's full score of the opening page and of his sketches for the Adagio, containing his comments like 'Why not?' and 'First two bars repeat third higher sequence'. Mr Payne's account of his involvement with the sketches and of how he went to work on them occupies two pages and there are short biographies of Elgar and Payne. All three articles are also printed in French and German. Ideally one would have liked there to be some way of indicating in the score those passages fully scored by Elgar, but I can see that might have been difficult. There is an index to the starting-page of each movement, something that occurs more often these days and how welcome it is.

There will, inevitably, be differing views on this symphony. I confess I had misgivings at first, but the music is enough of an Elgarian experience to still 95 per cent of my doubts. I hope dry academic musicologists will not niggle and haggle over every bar of Mr Payne's "composition" of Elgar development sections.



Anthony Payne (right) with Andrew Davis during the recording of Payne's elaboration of the sketches for the Third Symphony (photo: BBC Radio 3 © Jim Four)

The music is now there. It was dead, but it is now alive. And if we still have a moment's uneasiness over "Don't let anyone tinker with it", remember that Elgar also said : "If I can't complete the Third Symphony, somebody will complete it - or write a better one - in fifty or five hundred years".

Michael Kennedy

BOOK REVIEWS

Elgar the Cyclist : a Creative Odyssey, by Kevin Allen, 1997
Published by the author, 23 Benbow Close, Malvern Wells, Worcs WR14 4JJ
£5-50 (incl. postage)

Elgar seems to have the effect on his admirers of stimulating research into almost every aspect of his activities. Some years ago a cottage industry seemed to have been set up for all kinds of information, and research was coming in from many parts of the country, and even from overseas. Lately the stream seemed to dry up, but this new work shows that the industry is alive and flourishing.

Kevin Allen has obviously researched Elgar's cycling years (from 1900 to 1909) with great diligence, and the results are extremely interesting. This small book details most of Elgar's rides and tours and relates them to the many compositions, including most of Elgar's major works, which came from the years under review. Many of Elgar's friends and relations were also keen cyclists at this period, and the relaxation and companionship which this gave to the outings obviously meant a great deal to him.

The book is attractively produced, well-printed in stiff card covers, and contains a number of photographs, and reproductions of contemporary post-cards of the Worcester and Hereford countryside of the era. Additionally, there is a facsimile folding map, from Kelly's *Directory* of the period, which enables us to pinpoint the places mentioned in the text. Elgar, the man, continues to fascinate, and Mr Allen has produced information much of which is new to us. Recommended to all who love Elgar, his music and his countryside.

Ronald Taylor

A Genius in the Family : an intimate memoir of Jacqueline du Pré, by Hilary du Pré and Piers du Pré.
Chatto & Windus, 1997. 426 pp, hardback. £16-99

Many members might be familiar with this book through the serialisation of some of its more sensational pages in *The Times*. It is a rounded portrait of "Jackie" by her sister, Hilary (another gifted musician), who married Christopher 'Kiffer' Finzi, son of Gerald Finzi; and by her brother Piers. Surprisingly considering the presence of a Finzi in the du Pré family, there is no mention of Gerald Finzi's *Cello Concerto* in this book at all. One wonders if Jackie knew it, played it, or recorded it. Considering its beautiful elegiac slow movement and its undoubted Elgarian influences this must surely be one of the greatest disappointments for lovers of British music.

Jackie emerges as intense, but light-hearted and fun-loving - with a bawdy sense of humour, but also cowed by the fast, high-living jet-set life of top international musicians as exemplified by the lifestyle of her husband, Daniel Barenboim (who emerges as very loving and supportive of Jackie during her last mortal illness). The book also describes how Jackie's supreme talent affected the rest of her family (frequently causing Hilary great anguish); how her mother Iris, a very talented musician in her own right, pushed and encouraged her; how Jackie's earlier emotional crisis caused her to claim the support of 'Kiffer' to the extent of demanding him in her bed; and the harrowing details of her descent through multiple sclerosis. Some of the *minutiae* of their family life might have been omitted but this is a minor carp.

As one might expect, there are many references to her music, particularly the Elgar Concerto : the British and American press eulogies are quoted, the recording with Sir John Barbirolli described (the producer who booked the orchestra for two days for the sessions was amazed when the recording was completed in one); the filming of her performance with Barenboim; and the agony

of the last performance in the Royal Festival Hall, when her hands were beginning to feel the grip of disease. Finally, there is the moving description of the thanksgiving ceremony for Jackie's life held on what would have been her forty-third birthday, 26 January 1988. Zubin Mehta was to have given the address. He was so full of emotion he could not read his prepared notes. Instead, he said : "Recently, I was conducting the Elgar Concerto in New York. Towards the end of the third movement, I just could not conduct any more. The cellist looked up and said, 'You're thinking of her, aren't you?' 'Yes', I replied. The thought of Jackie playing with me in London for the last time in 1973 completely overwhelmed me. At that point I knew that I could never conduct the Elgar again. There was no one like Jackie and no one could replace her. There is nothing else I can say. There is nothing else to be said". In fact, he has not conducted the Elgar concerto again.

Ian Lace

Gerald Finzi : an English Composer, by Stephen Banfield.
Faber & Faber, 1997. £25

This life and music of Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) is long overdue and Stephen Banfield must be congratulated on a thoroughly researched and objectively written book. Finzi admired the works of Elgar and indeed, as Banfield frequently shows, there is a definite Elgarian influence apparent in many of Finzi's works from early student creations through to his *Cello Concerto*. In 1923 Finzi was at the Gloucester meeting of the Three Choirs Festival where he got close enough to the older composer to report that he wore stays, but probably never met Elgar again. Banfield also notes that Finzi was the same age as Elgar when he married, and that both wives came from secure families in the Indian service, and both needed unlimited faith in a self-taught artist with as yet little reputation and no proof of attainment.

Considering the serenity and other-worldliness of so much of Finzi's music, the character of the man himself emerges often as quite contradictory; in his youth he was often arrogant and overbearing, intolerant of his mother, and quirky (he was rumoured to have hidden under a table at a reception rather than be introduced to John Ireland). His Jewish ancestry was as complex and as impressive as that of Mendelssohn. His childhood was lonely and filled with tragedy; his three older brothers all died before the end of 1918. He also lost his teacher Ernest Farrar to the carnage of the Great War. The story of his life covers his formative influences amongst the 1920s' arts and crafts fraternity in the Cotswolds, his early strivings for recognition in London, and his marriage to Joy who was so supportive and who largely transformed him. His friendships with musicians, especially Vaughan Williams, and his outside horticultural interests are covered and we are left with the impression of a musician greatly admired and missed by his colleagues.

Banfield dissects Finzi's works with clinical precision and objective criticism. His settings of Hardy, Shakespeare and other poets are fully examined. Banfield explains Finzi's weaknesses as well as praising his strengths. The composer recognised his own limitations too well and anticipated his critics especially those who attacked him for having the temerity to set some of the most highly regarded

gems in *The Golden Treasury* of English poetry - not the least being Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, that contains so many well-loved and often-quoted lines. Finzi's reply was "I don't think everyone realises the difference between choosing a text and being chosen by one". Banfield says that in his work, Finzi approaches Elgar's genius and succeeds "...in making his Immortality Ode the setting of Wordsworth...and adjusts and enhances our view of the poem and poet for ever..."

Banfield also writes movingly about Finzi's *Cello Concerto* which was the composer's final opus number and which dominated his final year (he died in pain at the tragically early age of 55). Of this work, Barbirolli, who loved it and conducted its first performance, said in a letter to Joy : "I felt tears in my eyes in the slow movement. There are only a few moments in music which do that to me..." As Banfield says, Finzi's music often speaks to us directly about loss.

The book includes many musical examples, comprehensive lists of works, a fulsome bibliography, and a masterly final assessment of Finzi's achievement. Banfield acknowledges that there are still many avenues requiring further investigation. He hints, in his Introduction, as some missing materials, so we must wait for a complete picture to emerge of this fascinating English composer, but in the meantime, this new book fills the gap splendidly.

Ian Lace

RECORD REVIEWS

Violin Concerto in B minor, Op 61. With : Vaughan Williams: The Lark Ascending
Nigel Kennedy (violin), City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Sir Simon Rattle
EMI: 7243 5 56413 2 8

This disc has received a mixed reception, and it is easy to see why. When Nigel Kennedy played the concerto last autumn in London with Sir Roger Norrington conducting I found myself surrounded by a collection of his fans who rose to their feet at the end and cheered to the imaginary rafters of the RFH. The contrast with my reaction was very obvious, as I sat there, despairing at the rambling performance and the stamping with which Kennedy had chosen to emphasise the sforzando markings in the last movement. I seemed almost alone in reacting in this way, although I could not see how Norrington would have been happy either, as he tried to keep the performance consistent.

There were many beautiful things to be sure, as there are in this record, but despite Sir Simon Rattle's stern control this is still something of a considerable curate's egg, at least for me. I must state my preference for the younger Kennedy in his combination with the LPO and the natural Elgarian sympathy of Vernon Handley.

(Nigel) Kennedy (photo © EMI)

Nigel Kennedy now prefers to be called just Kennedy. I have no idea whether he anticipates a peerage or some other honour. His hubris permeates this record from the inappropriate sleeve (a picture of Bulldog Dan) to his personal statement in the notes. I recall with sadness the twenty five year old memory of a young man, recently a pupil of the Yehudi Menuhin School, playing this great concerto under Lord Menuhin's guidance, as the baton was passed on from the interpreter whose performance remains at the heart of EMI's *Elgar Edition*. It is sad if Nigel Kennedy ignores this legacy, for I fear he may misunderstand Elgar and his music to such an extent that he sees bulldogs when he should see windflowers and hears pomp and circumstance when he should be hearing the intimacy and insights of this heartfelt work. These misconceptions inevitably affect his performance.

Let me take the famous entry of the violin in the first movement. It is balanced perfectly, for example, in the Menuhin/Boult performance of 1967. Here the violin emerges (*mf* not *f*) as if from the orchestra, which I feel was Elgar's intention. Kennedy hits you in the face, dispelling the sense of movement sustained by the long opening. Throughout the recording these moments of ugliness suddenly emerge, contradicting some of the beauty Kennedy produces elsewhere, such as in the second subject of the first movement. Michael Kennedy has recently pointed out the crucial role Elgar performs as conductor in his own recording with Menuhin. It is his involvement, particularly in this movement, sustaining, moving forward and supporting Menuhin that is so vital, and why for me, it is the indispensable performance. Listening to his support you can detect Elgar's completeness with his creation, allowing the ebb and flow of the music to appear relaxed whilst never allowing his grip to falter. Rattle's more analytical approach

lacks the warmth I would have liked here, and although I suspect his control was essential it allows a sense of detachment to occur. His analytical approach is, at times, out of keeping : it is fine for Mahler, but not for Elgar, who wears less hearts on his sleeve!

EMI has, in its archives, some of the major recordings of this work : Menuhin/Elgar, Sammons/Wood and Kennedy/Handley. None of these has had to endure such promotion or 'hype' as here, and this does the artists involved no good, for it is virtually impossible for the end to match the expectation. Sadly we 'ain't seen nothin' yet' and until a sense of artistic responsibility returns to the record industry this sort of promotion will become accepted practice.

On the surface there is little difference between these two recordings. There is initially a greater vividness in this new one but this is because the CBSO is balanced more closely. As a consequence, some of the finer detail of Elgar's orchestration is lost. The LPO is more at home with Elgar's orchestral balancing, aided by the engineering, and I feel Handley, the more experienced Elgarian, understands how to relax the music more effectively. The opening bars, up to the solo entry, are virtually the same timing but for me the Rattle performance is more forced, and therefore appears to be quicker.

I prefer the earlier recording because of the above points and because I feel Handley restrains the younger Kennedy more and is therefore more completely in control of the score. Take from, say, fig 27 in the first movement, where Handley exercises a powerful but unobtrusive hold over the music, almost allowing one to forget the soloist. Kennedy Mark II is so dominant that my eyes and ears did not stray from his part, except when he was resting. My notes cover all three movements, but all point to a preference for Kennedy Mark I and his partnership, and I feel the point is sufficiently well made already without repeating these comments again and again!

Kennedy is, as I have suggested, less of a mature artist now than he was in 1984. He is determined that we should applaud his performance and it shows. This is better than the over marketing and the booklet would suggest, but it is something of a vulgar retrogression if one can recall what he was capable of 13 years ago.

I need say little about the Vaughan Williams. Here is a masterpiece, indeed music of rare perfection drawn out to last for 17 minutes or more. One deeply loved performance lasted only for 14 minutes. Need I say more?

Andrew Neill

Cello Concerto, Op 85. With works by Boccherini, Haydn and Bruch.
Pablo Casals, London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Landon Ronald, BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult
Biddulph LAB 144

Cello Concerto, Op 85. With Britten : Cello Symphony.
Mstislav Rostropovich, Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Natan Rakhlin and Benjamin Britten Revelation RV 10100

Two of the century's greatest cellists playing what is arguably the greatest cello concerto of the century has to be a mouth-watering prospect, and one which demands attention; even more when one considers what else is to be found on these discs.

First, the Casals. There has always been controversy about this version. When he first played the work in London before the war the performance was heavily criticised for being "un-English", ie. over-emotional and sentimental; but when he came to make the recording with Boult and the BBC orchestra in October 1945 (and played it exactly the same way, according to the conductor) it was widely hailed as a masterly interpretation. Times change; performances over the last thirty years have often been self-indulgent to a degree that makes Casals sound positively restrained. His overall timing (27'28") is by no means slow - again, by modern standards.

The opening movement is a disappointment. Where the 9/8 theme is phrased over the whole bar (as at fig 2 and again at fig 6), Casals often breaks it up for no good reason, and sometimes appears to slur the quaver on to the following crotchet. The pace and the interest pick up in the Scherzo, and the rest of the performance is very good indeed. The Adagio is simply wonderful, poignant without being over-indulgent, with superbly controlled playing. A slight (unmarked) *accelerando* at fig 40 cannot break the spell. Casals takes full advantage of all the virtuosic opportunities in the final movement; and throughout he is wonderfully supported by Boult and the orchestra (though it is a pity that the mistake by the first clarinet in the first bar of fig 7 was allowed to pass). Just occasionally Casals' intonation is faulty, and one wonders if there were time constraints at the sessions, as they took all day on 14 October, longer than scheduled. That only left the following morning to record Haydn's *Concerto in D* (one of Casals' favourite works, with which he had made his American debut in 1904). In the event only the first two movements were made, and the third postponed to a later date which, sadly, never took place. So the Elgar concerto comprised Casals' last commercial recording with orchestra (the 1953 Schumann concerto was a 'live' taping of a concert). Now you can hear the two Haydn movements for the first time, and very good they are, making the absence of the final movement recording the more tragic.

Casals' Elgar has been available on CD before, on EMI Références label (1990) coupled with the 1938 recording of the Dvořák concerto with Szell; and the 1936 *Kol Nidrei* with Landon Ronald and the LSO. This last piece is also on the Biddulph disc, along with Boccherini's B♭ concerto, recorded two days after the Bruch in 1938, and makes for excellent value (over 78 minutes music).

In a long and illustrious career, Rostropovich's neglect of the Elgar concerto - certainly recently and in the West - has never been explained so far as I am aware. Nevertheless, this is the third version to appear on record. Two accounts from the 1960s, both conducted by Rozhdestvensky, have appeared; on the Rococo label in 1967, and on Russian Disk in 1994 (Laurie Watt wrote a generally approving review of the latter in the JOURNAL November 1994). The latest issue (although the recording is older than the others, dating from November 1958) is on the Revelation label, whose output consists of music which was taped over seventy years but suppressed by the Russian authorities, and now being released and heard for the first time. Apparently there are over 400,000 tapes, featuring such

artists as Richter, Oistrakh, Kogan, Menuhin, Shostakovich, Rubinstein, and many others. No wonder the *New York Times* called the discovery of these tapes "the greatest cultural coup of the century". The recordings have been digitally remastered, and the results are impressive. As well as the Elgar, Rostropovich plays the Britten *Cello Symphony* (of which he was the dedicatee) in a recording of its first performance in Moscow on 12 March 1964 conducted by the composer. The discovery and release of the première of what the New Grove calls "Britten's most commanding instrumental work" is obviously a major event in recording history, and may well be sufficient reason for you to buy this disc.

Rostropovich's account of the Elgar concerto is, like Casals', weakest in the opening movement. The soloist begins very dramatically and with tremendous verve, but the opening 9/8 statement by the orchestra is very slow and feeble. The dotted crotchet equals 56, which is nowhere near *moderato*; just listen to Boult on the Casals recording to see how it should be done. Rostropovich goes along with the plodding pace, and the movement fails to convince. However, the sun breaks through the clouds with the arrival of the Scherzo, and here the playing is sharp, crisp and convincing; the orchestra seems to buck up, too. There is plenty of passion and tenderness in the Adagio; and the Finale swings along with panache. I felt that Rostropovich could have mused over the final coda a little more, but this is a minor quibble. Obviously, a live performance often has its share of shortcomings. The balance is generally fine, marginally favouring the soloist, so that some orchestral detail is occasionally lost in the *tuttis*. Like Casals, Rostropovich's intonation is suspect now and again, and he makes an awful fluff of the last quaver before the final flourish at fig 74. But there is much to commend here; and of course the Britten is a real find.

The Editor

Symphonies nos 1 & 2, Opp 55 and 63. In the South, Op 50. Pomp & Circumstance Marches nos 1 & 4, Op 39.

Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli
DG 453 103-2 (2 CDS)

Symphonies nos 1 & 2, Opp 55 and 63. Cockaigne, Op 40. Pomp & Circumstance Marches, Op 39.

Royal Philharmonic and London Symphony Orchestras
conducted by André Previn
Philips DUO 454 250-2 (2 CDS)

I must confess that when the Editor rang to ask for a review of yet more discs of the Elgar symphonies, close on the heels of the pair I reviewed in only last November's issue of the JOURNAL, my heart sank. However, the feeling of *déjà entendu* soon dissipated with the sounds of the Philharmonia under Sinopoli in the opening tread of the *A flat Symphony*. I also make it a rule never to listen to recordings of works I am about to conduct myself, which is currently true of this very same symphony. Yet despite myself I was compelled to reach for the score to verify some of Sinopoli's tempi and confirm some of the detail which comes over in this reading (recorded in Watford Town Hall in 1991). In places he is unashamed to linger (figs 12-14 and its recapitulation at figs 38-41 in the first movement, for example), yet the end of the same movement is curiously hurried

(Elgar's *ritardando* at fig 55 is ignored). The bassoon tends to get a fair share of the limelight (eighth bar of fig 37 in the first movement, and at fig 84 in the Scherzo), but these are details worth hearing, and are probably inaudible in the concert hall. The Scherzo is brisk and leads fairly effortlessly into the Adagio, a difficult transition to pace where many a conductor, braking too late, has scattered skid marks around fig 92; going into one-in-a-bar at fig 89 helps. I was never more aware of the Wagnerian harmony of this work than in (the experienced Bayreuthian) Sinopoli's reading of the Adagio, which also increases in warmth and tenderness as it nears its *very* slow conclusion. The Finale is somewhat leaden-footed, more a feeling of four-in-a-bar rather than the two (*alla breve*) marked by the composer, but the magic of the passage (figs 130-34) is evident (though here few come anywhere near either Boult or particularly Barbirolli).

Lacking the motto theme which calmly opens the *First Symphony*, the *Second*, in the composer's words, is "the passionate pilgrimage of a soul", with raw emotion aplenty as it progresses. Sinopoli shapes the opening *Allegro vivace* with plenty of *nobilmente*, sees the development through a glass darkly and guides the work smoothly back to tempo at fig 37, though tension is lost at fig 42 where Elgar's "tramlines" need a fraction longer to register before the music proceeds. There is little to be found of the composer's description of the work as "joyous and light-hearted" in the second movement which is an agonised response to Alfred Rodewald's, rather than Edward VII's, death. What Sinopoli's reading may lack in forward propulsion implied by the *larghetto* marking, it gains in gravitas and Mahlerian drama. To digress, for a moment, it seems that the Italian Sinopoli feels literally at home in Alassio, judging by the vitality and colour he brings to his performance of Elgar's picture of sunny climes (*In the South*). That the conductor is totally involved in his work is evident from the audible grunts and exertions which punctuate the performance of this Straussian tone poem. The Scherzo to the *Second Symphony* also has its Italian origins, reputedly inspired by the pigeons in Venice's Piazza San Marco alternately whirling off and alighting in the square as the composer emerged from the cool of the Basilica in April 1909. Sinopoli conveys the wide-ranging moods of the Scherzo, with its alternately skittish and ghoulish moments, and concludes with a committed and glowing account of the Finale. In short Sinopoli offers a fresh, occasionally quirky view with his emotions worn on the sleeve.

Another foreigner who became a committed Elgarian through his association with a London orchestra was André Previn, though in his case it has been with two of them, the RPO and LSO (the recordings here date from 1985 and 1993). In the first movement of the *A flat Symphony* Previn paints with a broad brush, encourages much of the detail like Sinopoli, and unleashes his brass players wherever Elgar encourages it (figs 16, 42 and 50). The Scherzo fizzes along and dramatically observes the one bar pull-up a bar before 64, which Sinopoli weakens by starting a bar earlier. The brass continue to impress, a little too much at fig 77 in the trombones and tuba, and the violin solo is sweet if a little thin of tone at fig 85. The Adagio is impassioned, Previn never hesitating to linger over the spots he loves most, particularly around fig 104, where *molto espressivo e sostenuto* means just what it says; these moments could be cloying (one is reminded of his background in film music) but Previn's sincerity is never in

doubt. The introduction to the Finale is full of tension, the tempo of the movement itself treads lightly. For those interested, he is four minutes quicker than Sinopoli overall.

"The long notes will take care of themselves, the small notes and their text is what matters". This was Wagner's instruction to his performers (orchestra and singers alike) in the first Bayreuth Festival of 1876 when the Ring was given its première. What impresses in Previn's performance of the *Second Symphony* is the breadth given to the inner pulse of the music, starting with a first bar stretched to its limit and repeated at fig 42 (the recapitulation) in a gaping abyss of a pause at Elgar's "tramlines". What emerges throughout this performance is the detail and clarity of the smallest notes, just as Wagner described, such as the upward scale of semiquavers in the final bar of the first movement. In the Larghetto one might carp at the exaggerated use of *portamento* in places and the undue prominence given to the horns which distracts from the main aural focus at times, but in general Previn takes an expansive view without being particularly slow. A tender moment occurs at the end (fig 87) when the opening of the whole work is recalled. His reading of the Rondo produces not only the light touch and breath of Mendelssohn but also the Falstaffian swagger of its boisterous moments and a nightmarish climax at fig 120 through which the side drum cuts like a knife. The grandeur and eloquence of Boult's BBC Bedford recording made immediately after the War may be in shorter supply in Previn's account of the Finale, but the LSO sound is never undernourished; its justly famed brass producing blazing colour (listen out for the principal trumpet's sustained *crescendo* on the top B♭ at fig 149, for example) and warm string sound. The generous fillers are an exhilarating account of *Cockaigne* and boisterous renditions of all five *Pomp & Circumstance Marches*.

Christopher Fifield

Enigma Variations, Op 36. In the South, Op 50. Coronation March, Op 65.
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by George Hurst
Naxos 8.553564

After years languishing as something of a bridesmaid amongst British conductors, it has been gratifying for George Hurst's admirers (myself included) to see the recognition he has begun to receive of recent years. His recording for Naxos of the *First Symphony* was chosen as the preferred version among modern recordings by no less than Jerrold Northrop Moore, who found in his "no-nonsense" approach an affinity with the composer's own recording.

I too found Hurst's version immensely satisfying, which makes this new recording all the more disappointing. In what is an extremely competitive field, it is impossible to recommend either of the two main works on this disc. I suspect that few would disapprove of a conductor who from time to time fails to observe the composer's markings; but only if the result makes artistic sense, and is not just an idiosyncrasy. I fear the latter is the case here.

In the *Enigma* Hurst is most effective (as one might expect) with the faster variations. 'HDS-P', 'WMB', 'Troyte' and 'GRS' are all extremely well done, and though fast, Hurst manages to bring out detail often lost in other recordings. It

should be noted at this point that the recording, in the Wessex Hall at the Poole Arts Centre, is remarkably clear and spacious, and the orchestral playing of a very high standard throughout, though the strings are sometimes rather overwhelmed by the brass in the loudest passages.

Elsewhere in the work Hurst seems to lack the finesse and subtlety with what is essentially a series of intimate portraits. The mood is set at the very start with 'CAE', which begins much too loudly. Here, and especially in 'Ysobel' and 'WN', Hurst doesn't get inside the music enough, and they sound rushed. However, 'Dorabella' is beautifully done, as is 'BGN', where he lingers very effectively over the solo cello's final three bars. But the 'Romanza' is totally lacking in that sense of bleak despair which Elgar clearly put into this movement. The climax, when the quote from Mendelssohn is played on the brass, is preceded by an *accelerando*, which ruins the effect. In fact, Hurst nearly always seems to equate *crescendo* with *accelerando*. It ruins 'Nimrod', which begins beautifully; so quiet in fact that I had to turn the volume right up to hear the start! But at the two *crescendos* - three bars after fig 34, and five after fig 35 - he speeds up, as he does again when approaching the climax at fig 37. It makes no sense at all. The Finale starts well, the three-note figures, beautifully articulated, giving a feeling of excitement; but ten bars or so in, the *crescendo* marking touches the gas pedal again, and the impact of the main theme at fig 62 is spoilt. Once in full flow, he seems to find it difficult to stop; the *grandioso* at fig 68 - surely an imperative broadening - is completely ignored.

In the South fares no better. The *vivace* opening - appropriately labelled 'joy of living' by Elgar in one of his sketches - sounds rather dull, but soon one or two *crescendos* touch off the usual response. At fig 6, the wonderful descending melody is marked *nobilmente* and *molto sostenuto*, though listening to Hurst one could be forgiven for thinking there was no expression mark at all. Sadly, there are too many other places where similar things happen for them all to be identified. I am not arguing for pedantry, but for a convincing interpretation of the score. As with the *Variations*, there are some good sections, notably 'Moglio' and the 'Romans'; but again the final pages are frustratingly rushed. The *Coronation March* is better, but lacks the dignity of other recordings - Ronald, or Groves even.

If you are looking for a budget-priced *Enigma*, Naxos themselves have a perfectly serviceable version by Adrian Leaper on 8.550229 (reviewed JOURNAL January 1991) coupled with *Salut d'Amour*, *Pomp & Circumstance 1 & 4*, and two works by Delius. It is also available on 8.554161 with Elgar's *Serenade for Strings* replacing the Delius.

Overture Froissart, Op 19. Choral Suite From the Bavarian Highlands, Op 27. Give unto the Lord, Op 74. Caractacus, Op 35 - Triumphal march. Sospiri, Op 70. Sursum Corda, Op 11. The Snow, Op 26, no 1. Fly, singing bird, Op 26, no 2.

Scottish Philharmonic Singers, St Cecilia Choir of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Charles Groves
BBC Radio Classics 15656 91802

I was delighted when this disc was released as I treasured a very imperfect tape of the broadcast from about 1982. It is appropriate to be reviewing it at a time which sees the establishment of a Scottish Branch of the Elgar Society, for it

reminds us that forces north of the border can give inspirational performances of the composer who is supposed to personify Englishness (though who could forget Alexander Gibson's Elgar over a number of years?). The players and singers perform as if the music is in their blood, and Sir Charles, who has often been vilified for his leisurely speeds and pale interpretations, is on fine form here. The performances are lively and characterful, and this well-filled disc (76 minutes) of some rather off-the-beaten-track Elgar at budget price can be enthusiastically recommended: *Froissart* is bright and breezy; Sir Charles really digs into the main opening theme, and there is some impassioned playing especially from the strings. The *Bavarian Highlands* has much to recommend it; just listen to the expression in the central section of the second song ('False Love') at the words "Ever true was I to thee". The weakness is a rather pedestrian speed for the last song, *The Marksman*, though its *grandioso* climax is wonderfully brought off. The singing is delightful throughout, the Triumphal March from *Caractacus* having a marvellously barbaric edge to it, and the ladies singing with great intelligence in their songs (here, unusually, in their orchestral accompaniment). The psalm setting, *Give unto the Lord* - again, with orchestra - is also most effectively done. In the two slower pieces, *Sospiri* and *Sursum Corda*, Sir Charles makes sure that there is sufficient breadth for the emotional impact to be made, yet they are by no means slow performances. A worthy addition to the output of a man who did much for the Elgarian cause over the years.

The Editor

Stars of English Oratorio Volume 1

Dutton Laboratories: CDLX7025

Originally destined for volume 2 of *Elgar's Interpreters on Record*, Isobel Baillie's famous 1947 recording of 'The sun goeth down' from *The Kingdom* has been obligingly incorporated by Mike Dutton in this anthology. It is dominated by the voice of Baillie and Heddle Nash with distinguished contributions by Gwen Catley, Oscar Natzka, Webster Booth and Keith Falkner (wonderful). However it is Kathleen Ferrier, with two contributions from *Elijah*, and Florence Austral who provide the most characterful contributions from their sex.

Lyndon Jenkins, in his excellent notes, says that Baillie's performance (with Sir Malcolm Sargent and the Philharmonia Orchestra) has no disadvantages whatever. True she sings the notes perfectly, but I have never felt she was remotely involved in what is almost an operatic piece. Margaret Price's performance in the Boult set over twenty years later was so compelling for the opposite reasons.

Mike Dutton has waved his magic wand over this collection and this recording which is, nevertheless, of great importance to all interested in the development of Elgarian recordings and performances of what is now a by-gone age. With the composer's Prelude, it was all we had of *The Kingdom* until the Boult set!

Andrew Neill

LETTERS

From: Martin Passande, Chairman of London Branch

I am not, as many are, a member of the "snap, crackle, and pop" league - those who enjoy old recordings in their original state and original format.
Since the great advances made in recent years in the technology of transfer to compact disc, it is possible to enjoy the best of the past in a form which is acceptable today. Testament Records, who transformed the original Sargent recording of Gerontius *have won glowing reviews for their exceptional achievement. Yes, this recording dates back over fifty years but that does not detract from the strength and spirituality of the performance. It would be difficult to better the soloists and no other recording offers two different voices to fill the roles of the Priest and the Angel of the Agony. And not only this; the set is completed by the intensely moving performance of the* Cello Concerto *performed by the inimitable Paul Tortelier, my own introduction to the work before Jacqueline du Pré's 1965 recording.*
The Society's own issue, 'Elgar's Interpreters on Record', covers a greater span of time, but again it is quite amazing how fresh these old recordings can sound. Tudor Davies's excerpt from King Olaf, *and those from* Caractacus *by Peter Dawson would make this recording worth buying if there was nothing else on the CD.*
Forget prejudice about sound quality; high fidelity lies in the work of the artist regardless of the date when that artistry was committed to disc.
By buying these recordings you will not only give yourself years of pleasurable listening, but support the Society, which benefits from royalties from these two recordings.

From: Robert Seager, Chairman of Yorkshire Branch

It would appear as if the enigma of The Enigma will continue to run and run AND run. However, is it reasonable to allocate twenty-one pages of the November 1997 JOURNAL to this subject?
I found the fourteen pages of Ian Lace's `Elgar and Empire' a much more interesting read. For me it proved a highlight of Vol 10 no 3 and of other editions from the recent past!
Please could we have a long break before any further excursions into the Op 36 affair are published.

From: P J Taylor

Dr Rollett's proposed solution to Elgar's 'Enigma' (JOURNAL November 1997) prompts me to suggest another. I do not think that this suggestion is original, even though Dr Rollett does not mention it, but when and where I encountered it I cannot now remember.
As set out by Dr Rollett, the crucial facts as I see them are these. "The Enigma was concerned with a tune...The theme is a counterpoint on some well-known

melody which is never heard"; yet at the same time "its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed", which as Dr Rollett notes, suggests words rather than music. Later, Elgar divulged the fact that "it is possible to add another phrase, which is quite familiar, above the original theme", and more than once expressed his surprise that nobody had guessed what it was. Finally, as Dr Rollett remarks, there appear to be two *'enigmas'; "through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes', but is not played...so the principal Theme is never on the stage". It is far from clear on the face of it how these two strands are to be related.*

I am going to suggest that the solutions to the "missing tune", and ultimately to the "larger theme", are to be found in that medieval plainchant, the Dies Irae. *The words of the* Dies Irae *- the Day of Wrath - appear in every Requiem Mass (and certain other works) and certainly count as "well-known": so well-known as to be unobvious, as Elgar failed to anticipate when he expressed his surprise that "no one has spotted it". (To Elgar the Catholic it might have been more obvious than to others). Its associated musical setting, from over 700 years ago, has been used by subsequent composers from Berlioz to Britten and remains as chilling now as when first composed. Either words or music, or both, would qualify as a "dark saying"; none more so. As for the "larger theme": well, Dr Rollett has unwittingly provided the answer himself, in footnote 5: "The 'chief character...never on the stage' is 'Death', in both of the 'late dramas'". All the "friends pictured within", like the composer himself, would one day be dead. The Enigma Variations was to be their memorial.*

All the notes in plainsong are of equal length, so cannot have the rhythm of the critical first four bars, hence the Dies Irae *could not strictly be used as counterpoint. But Elgar* himself *doesn't say it is. "Mr Elgar tells us that the heading 'Enigma' is justified by the fact that it is possible to add another phrase, which is quite familiar, above the original theme..." If we substitute "under" for "above", the* Dies Irae *becomes, I submit, a perfectly satisfactory ground bass, for which an exact fit to the melody of the treble line is not required. I suggest that "above" is either loosely expressed, or deliberate obfuscation; to have said "under" might have made the solution seem too obvious. While so far as I know Elgar made little use of this technique, he must have been thoroughly familiar with it. And incidentally plainsong, not being harmonised, avoids the harmonic problem noted by Dr Rollett.*

I believe that this solution is very much more in line with what we know of Elgar the man than any of the jolly ("Auld Lang Syne") or basically optimistic solutions that have been propounded, such as Dr Rollett's "Light and Life" scenario. We know that, behind the bluff facade, Elgar's was a deeply pessimistic nature; Dr Rollett himself notes that "Shortly before the Variations *came to be written Elgar had been very depressed" - a depression for which their composition effected no permanent cure. One understands Elgar's evasions, his reluctance to admit to the truth unless it was forced out of him. And there is the well-known story of how Ernest Newman heard from Elgar, on his death bed, words which shocked him so much that he would never divulge them. There is nothing to prevent a composer in the depths of his despair from composing music that is powerful, serene, even vivacious; Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert did so a hundred times. But he may pay for it somewhere else, in a* Requiem Mass *or the* Winterreise. *We all know the demons that break*

through the mask in Gerontius *and the* Second Symphony. *If they lie hidden too behind the* Enigma Variations, *it is not a thing that should surprise or shock us.*

[Mr Taylor may like to know that the Dies Irae was suggested as a possible solution in an article in the Journal for May 1979. Members who may sympathise with Mr Seager's comments will be relieved to hear that there will be no more articles on Op 36 until well into the new millennium! After all, Elgar did compose other works! - Ed.]

As a young boy, living above his father's music shop in the centre of Worcester, Elgar would often borrow music scores from the shop and walk the three miles to Claines Parish Church, to sit beside the grave of his grandparents and study the scores. Although he never met his maternal grandparents, Joseph and Esther Greening - they died some years before his birth - this was often a place of pilgrimage and quiet for him to spend a fine summer's day.
The grave can be seen near to the gate and boundary wall at the south-east corner of the churchyard. (Photo and text: Gordon Lee)

100 YEARS AGO...

Alice Elgar's diaries are blank from 17 December 1897 to 6 February 1898. The Elgars' Christmas card that year was a musical setting of an old poem, 'Grete Malverne on a rocke', the tune of which was put to some Christmas words ('Lo! Christ the Lord is born') some years later. But it was the work for the forthcoming Leeds Festival which was occupying the composer's mind at the time (and may account for the *lacunae* in the diaries). By Christmas nothing had been finally settled, and this was clearly troubling the insecure Elgar; so much so that he wrote to Alfred Littleton, chairman of Novello: "I hear that nothing save the merest accident will prevent my being asked to contribute a Cantata to the Leeds fest:- I have hinted at other things but it seems they wish a Cantata. Now, I do not know if they will offer me any fee or whether it is usual for them to do so, but I thought it wd. simplify matters if you could give me an idea, - nothing official, but an expression of opinion, - if your firm wd. be likely to purchase a work: I cannot say it will be easier than K.Olaf - it seems to be less involved so far as written: the subject is 'Caractacus'".

The issue was settled by 18 January. Elgar was paid £100 by Leeds for the commission, and was offered £100 by Novello to purchase the copyright. Work was interrupted by visits to Leeds (15-17 February) for a performance of four of the *Bavarian Highlands* songs; to Manchester; and to Wolverhampton (18-23 February) for performances of *King Olaf* at Birmingham and Wolverhampton. When they returned to Malvern, he began work immediately : "E writing Caractacus with enthusiasm", the diary reported on 24 February. On 1 March he wrote to Jaeger : "Caractacus frightens me in places"; and on 29 March to Kilburn: "Carac: goes on well & people look pleased...when they hear it. I have just arrived at hating what I have done & feeling a fool for having done it - but my wife says I always do that at certain stages: anyway there are some gorgeous noises in it - but I can't say how much music - but it 'flows on somehow' like the other best of me".

As one would expect, there are many references about this time to friends later immortalised in the *Enigma Variations*. On 19 April the Elgars stayed with G R Sinclair, organist of Hereford Cathedral, after a choral concert which included the *Bavarian Highlands* suite. Elgar had marked his visits to Sinclair by writing little musical themes entitled 'The Moods of Dan', Dan being Sinclair's bulldog. This time he wrote a two-bar phrase with the words "He muses (on the muzzling order)". It later became the 'Prayer' theme in *The Dream of Gerontius*. Other "variations" - Isabel Fitton and Winifred Norbury - were linked with the new Worcestershire Philharmonic Society, the first concert of which took place on 7 May. The programme included works by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Gluck, Liszt, and Massenet, as well as the first performance in England of Humperdinck's cantata *Die Wallfahrt nach Kevlaar* (The Pilgrimage to Kevlaar), and 'And King Olaf heard the cry' from Elgar's own cantata. He insisted that the Humperdinck was sung twice (once in each half of the programme) and in the original language; Rosa Burley commented that "...the result was more satisfactory musically than linguistically...for the most part strange chewing noises were produced that sounded like no known European language". However, she did admit that overall "...a success was made with the local public".