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*The Editors do not necessarily agree with the views expressed by contributors,
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Front Cover: Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) photographed by Ursula Vaughan Williams on the steps of Mont St Michel, Normandy, 1952. Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust, courtesy of Stephen Connock.

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Presentation of written text:

Subheadings: longer articles benefit from judicious use of these.

Dates: use the form 2 June 1857. Decades: 1930s, no apostrophe.

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Numbers: spell out up to and including twenty, then 21 (etc.) in figures.

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End a footnote with a full stop, please, and never put a comma before a parenthesis.

Titles that are 'generic' in Roman: e.g. Violin Concerto. Others in *italics* (e.g. *Sea Pictures*; *The Musical Times*). Units within a longer work in single quotes, e.g. 'Sanctus fortis' from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

At the end of the essay, add about a hundred words about the author, please.

Full version of the 'Notes for Contributors' please see:

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EDITORIAL

It is a measure of our maturity as a Society that we can embrace the music and life of composers other than the one to which we are primarily dedicated. So, in this issue we have a number of articles on Ralph Vaughan Williams, the 150th anniversary of whose birth falls during 2022. Of course, RVW has his own, very successful, Society and we cordially salute its impressive efforts on his behalf.

There are many differences between Elgar and RVW as both men and musicians. Elgar the arch-Conservative, born in a humble country cottage, then moving to a flat above a shop in Worcester, a Roman Catholic at a time when this could be a disadvantage in a provincial city, and an auto-didact who never attended a university or music conservatoire. RVW was the descendant of Wedgwoods and Darwins. If not formally a socialist then certainly with left-wing inclinations, he was born in a country vicarage at Down Ampney in Gloucestershire and then lived in a mansion in the Surrey Hills,¹ attending Charterhouse School, Trinity College Cambridge, and the Royal College of Music. Elgar constantly worried about money (although the lack of it seems often to be his own fault for spending extravagantly and failing to heed advice over dealings with publishers) whereas RVW had a private income – if not born with the proverbial silver spoon in the mouth, then perhaps at least a silver-plated one by a very good maker!

Elgar collected honours with enthusiasm, was knighted and made a baronet and eventually became Master of the King's Musick (a peerage eluded him – only Britten being awarded one long after Elgar's death) whereas RVW refused all honours except one, preferring to remain Dr Vaughan Williams. He accepted the OM only because it was a personal gift from the monarch.

Their respective approaches to their work could hardly have been more different. The self-taught Elgar, once he had completed a piece, rarely if ever made any changes. RVW, the man who studied at the RCM with Stanford and Parry and abroad with Bruch and Ravel, would continue to revise his works, often decades after they were first performed, although once he was certain he had achieved that which he wanted, no-one could shake his resolve.

Having highlighted some of their differences, are there things they had in common? Obviously, they both wrote wonderful music, but they were both somewhat susceptible to a pretty lady! In Elgar's case this probably went no further than flirtation (at least when Alice was alive) but it is clear that RVW started an affair with Ursula (later his second wife) when their respective spouses were still alive. By all accounts, RVW enjoyed a risqué joke, but there is little or no evidence that Elgar ever relaxed his Victorian façade. The 15-year difference in their birth-dates made an enormous difference in a world of rapid change.

And what of the music? Elgar's music remains steadfastly in the European tradition of Brahms and Wagner and he showed no interest in folk music, whereas RVW sought to establish an 'English School', collected and arranged many folk songs, and used many in his works, thereby ensuring they did not perish with their surviving exponents. RVW was certainly not alone in this and, for example, Tchaikovsky often employed national folk songs in his *oeuvre*. RVW was almost a generation younger than Elgar and whilst, naturally, was more influenced by twentieth-century musical 'progress', his music remained resolutely tonal – he pronounced 'tone row' to rhyme with 'cow'!

Famously Elgar was suspicious of RVW because of the latter's association with academe, but also because E.J. Dent, who was friendly with RVW, had little time for composers who were not

1 Leith Hill Place, gifted to The National Trust by RVW when he inherited the property.

Stanford pupils and embraced folk song – on both counts Elgar was ‘beyond the pale’ for Dent. Later of course Dent severely criticised Elgar (‘too emotional and not quite free of vulgarity’) and Elgar probably assumed RVW would share Dent’s views – which he did not! Later on, it appears that more cordial relations were established, with Elgar suggesting in 1932 that RVW should set Skelton’s ‘Elinor Rummig’ (which became *Five Tudor Portraits* – a wonderful work all too seldom performed) and, having heard *Sancta Civitas*, observed that he had no need to write the third part of his trilogy, to follow *The Kingdom*, as VW had done it for him.

Because we love Elgar’s music, cannot we also love RVW’s? I suggest we certainly can! We all have our blind spots. To the horror of some of my friends, I cannot get on with Britten’s music at all; although I can see it is brilliantly written, it does not for the most part touch me. I am sure there are some Society members who do not believe they like RVW’s music: well it may be that, like me with Britten, they have heard a good deal and it does not ‘speak’ to them, or perhaps they have only heard *The Lark Ascending* and do not realise the amazing variety of the rest of his output. Sadly, it must be admitted that there are apparently some misguided souls who do not like Elgar’s music!

As I prepare this editorial BBC Radio 3 is running a series of programmes on RVW, but the Proms do not appear to have embraced his anniversary to the extent one might have hoped, only two symphonies being performed. As I type I am listening to a Radio 3 relay of *Sir John in Love*, recorded in 2006 at the London Coliseum – but what a shame that the English National Opera could not have revived their wonderful production in this year of all years – or even their (admittedly very controversial) *Pilgrim’s Progress*. However, it is good to know that British Youth Opera will be performing *Sir John in Love* at Holland Park in late August.

On a personal note, the mention in Stephen Connock’s article of the five RVW concerts conducted by the late Donald Cashmore in 1972 reminded me that I attended all those concerts and was thrilled both by the music and the virtuosity of the City of London Choir. Shortly after I auditioned for a place in the basses and was amazed to be admitted – previously I had sung in only a suburban (and frankly rather poor) choir. Little was I to know that a few years later I would become its Chairman and General Manager. Ursula Vaughan Williams was then the Choir’s president and I remember her taking the chair at an AGM and her vivid comments on Haydn, whose great last six masses we were then to sing in one season. Sadly, some of the RVW works I heard in that 1972 season (half a century ago!) such as the *Benedicite* and *Magnificat* I have never heard again live, and others such as *Five Tudor Portraits* only very rarely.

In this issue, we reproduce an article written for *Musical Opinion* by Stephen Connock which discusses *inter alia* the reasons for the lack of public performances of much of RVW’s output and this all makes fascinating reading. As well as Stephen’s article, we are honoured to have a specially written essay from Hugh Cobbe discussing RVW at 150. These two articles are introduced by Andrew Neill.

Arthur Reynolds contributes a vivid article about the unfortunate dispute with the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe in the context of Elgar’s Violin Concerto. Although Ysaÿe’s attitude seems petulant and uncompromising, it appears that Elgar may have unwittingly contributed to the misunderstanding at the root of the dispute!

Stephen Johnson has prepared a transcript of his 2021 A.T. Shaw lecture entitled ‘Edward Elgar: Faith & Doubt, Affirmation & Denial’, a fascinating and very readable article, full of wisdom and insight. We are very grateful to Stephen for finding time in his very busy schedule to prepare this.

Kevin Mitchell has once again produced our usual ‘100 years ago’ but this time has added another: ‘RVW 100 years ago’. Both of these provide fascinating insights into the lives of two

very different men.

We have two music reviews: The Elgar Complete Edition has issued a revised version of Volume 6 - *The Dream of Gerontius*, newly edited by Iain Farrington, and this is reviewed enthusiastically by Stephen Dickinson. It is excellent news that this is now available, as it was long acknowledged that the original publication (by Novello & Co.) was lacking in a number of important ways. Volume 29 (The Marches) is reviewed by the eminent conductor Martyn Brabbins and we are most grateful to him for finding time in his very busy schedule to write such a perceptive review.

In this issue we have just one book review: Peter Sutton has produced a small book of poems entitled 'Elgar Country' and this is reviewed by Andrew Neill.

We have reviews of a number of CDs. Christopher Morley welcomes the new CD (sponsored by the Society) 'The Reeds by Severnside' with music by Elgar performed by William Vann and his splendid choir from the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Having heard this myself, I can attest to the brilliance of the singing. This professional choir of young singers is on top form at the moment and with superb performances of some unusual (and some more familiar) repertoire this CD is really not to be missed.

Arthur Reynolds gives a warm welcome to the third volume of SOMM's 'Elgar from America' and reflects on the riches to be found in this and the previous two volumes in this series.

Steven Halls reviews the fourth and final volume of Albion's survey of folk songs arranged by RVW and repeats the enthusiastic welcome he gave to the first three issues. This has been a revelatory series of CDs well worth exploring. Steven also reviews two recordings with largely non-UK performers, one of the Cello Concerto and the *Enigma Variations*, the other comprising, again, the Cello Concerto but this time with Bridge's *Oration*.

Andrew Keener reviews a CD of music by Ian King. There is no direct link between Elgar and King, but they have both been involved with the Three Choirs Festivals and Andrew provides an interesting commentary on the work of this more recent composer.

Kevin Mitchell has contributed very brief reviews of CDs received but not reviewed in detail at this time.

Finally, I have reviewed another RWV CD by Albion, this time including both some well-known choral music and two first recordings, the Communion Service in G minor (arranged from the Mass in G minor) and an early Whitman setting, only recently discovered. William Vann and his excellent Royal Hospital Choir are the performers.

David Morris

With the Editorial Team of Andrew Dalton, Kevin Mitchell and Andrew Neill.

Contributions for the December issue should be received by 15 October 2022.

Edward Elgar: Faith & Doubt, Affirmation & Denial

Stephen Johnson

A transcript of the A.T. Shaw lecture given on 30 October 2021

Edward Elgar was a complicated man; so much so that a comprehensive overview that takes in all his contradictory, or just plain perplexing, elements is hard to achieve. Even the late Michael Kennedy, one of the most insightful authorities on Elgar, called him (in conversation with this writer) ‘a mystery man’. Michael was referring to a letter of Elgar’s that had long puzzled him, in which the composer says that his influence on others has been prevalingly ‘for evil’ – this from the man who created one of the greatest musical celebrations of friendship and its creative benefits in the *Enigma Variations*!

For me though, it does make a kind of sense. Having experienced severe clinical depression, I have also known that terrible sense of being destructive, toxic to others, sometimes in the teeth of all the evidence (depressives are very good at that). I’m by no means the only commentator to have concluded that Elgar suffered from some kind of affective disorder. Robert Schumann, whom Elgar described as ‘my ideal’, was a man who could be emotionally volatile, whose moods – and with them his verdicts on his work, himself, the world he lived in – could change suddenly, often to the astonishment of those who knew him. (In Kay Redfield Jamison’s magnificent study of bipolar disorder and creativity, *Touched With Fire*,¹ Schumann heads the list of probable sufferers.) Is this one of the factors that drew Elgar so closely to Schumann? The young violinist Vera Hockman, who became very close to Elgar in his last years, and who inspired at least one of the themes from the unfinished Third Symphony, remembered the ‘volcanic nature of Elgar’s temperament, the extent to which his continuing capacity for overwhelming states of feeling could erupt into uncontrollable physical restlessness and agitation’.²

Not only was Elgar intense, labile; as his first biographer Ernest Newman put it, ‘Like all highly-strung human beings, he was a mass of seeming contradictions’.³ Newman recalled Alice Elgar asking him at a dinner party, to steer the conversation away from the topic of suicide, as Elgar was ‘always talking of doing away with himself’.⁴ This was at the height of his success, after

1 Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched With Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

2 Quoted in Kevin Allen, *Elgar in Love* (Malvern: 2000), 25.

3 Allen, 4.

4 Letter 23 October 1955, *Sunday Times*, quoted in Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 123.

the triumphant premiere of the First Symphony – there’s another aspect Schumann and Elgar had in common. Both composers were also capable of working at phenomenal speed, but they could also both be plunged into a kind of paralysed silence, as Schumann famously was during the years 1844-5. Elgar could work enthusiastically at, say, *The Music Makers*, and confide at the time to his close friend Alice Stuart-Wortley that it was one of the works in which he had truly ‘shewn myself’; then, the day after he’d finished the score, we find him confessing that he now feels ‘empty and cold – how I hated having written anything; so I wandered out again & and shivered & longed to destroy the work of my hands – all wasted.’⁵ Perhaps the problem was indeed that he had ‘shewn’ himself, laid himself bare, and that he didn’t like what he saw. Another description from Vera Hockman comes to mind: ‘one moment [he was] so disillusioned, materialistic, the next so mystical and visionary’.⁶

It’s important to stress however that this doesn’t mean that the depressive, negative, self-hating Elgar is the ‘real’ man/composer, and that the positive one found frequently in his music and correspondence is ‘false’, or a mask donned for public appearances. Hockman’s remark acknowledges that both are genuine, however difficult it might be to try to reconcile them. Elgar the man, it seems, never did, but Elgar the composer? In his poem *The Choice*, W.B. Yeats wrote of how ‘The intellect of man is forced to choose / perfection of the life, or of the work’. With Elgar the man it often seems that when he is in one of his extreme positions, he believes that this state of being is uniquely ‘the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’ – that alternatives are unreachable, unthinkable. Take his famous bitter remark, after the premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius*, that ‘I’ve always said God was against art’.⁷ *Always?* From his writings and quoted remarks, it’s quite clear that such an assertion is ridiculous – that there were times when he clearly believed quite the opposite. With Elgar the composer, however, it can be argued that in his greatest works we can see how the challenge to comprehend, if not completely reconcile, that ‘mass of seeming contradictions’ drove him to create some of his most original work.

We must remember that, although a composer’s work may be rooted in his or her personality and life experience, it doesn’t always simply reflect it. Self-transcendence can be as important a goal for a creative mind as direct self-expression. Let’s try a simple thought-experiment. Imagine that you know only the music of Mahler and Sibelius, and nothing of their lives. If I were to tell you that one of these men was a stern disciplinarian, who ran a very tight ship professionally, ruthless in his dealings with workmates, good with money, who in addition trained his muse to come to him during his annual ten-week holidays, and apart from one crisis in his last full year of life always gave the impression of having his intense personal energies under control; and if I were then to tell you that the other man was a hopeless alcoholic mess, an irresponsible parent, a needy desperate womaniser, inclined to ‘disappear’ in moments of crisis or to spend £500 in an evening buying champagne for everyone in a hotel bar, a man whose diaries are full of desperate extreme outpourings - which would you say was which? If you judge from the music, almost certainly you’d get it the wrong way round. In each case there appears to be a threshold between, as T.S. Eliot put it, ‘the man who suffers and the mind which creates’.

Is it possible that Elgar too found a way to bring his spiritual opposites into some kind of

5 Letter 19 July 1912, Jerrold Northrop Moore, ed., *Edward Elgar: The Windflower Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 103.

6 Allen, 25.

7 Letter to August Jaeger, 9 October 1900, Jerrold Northrop Moore, ed., *Elgar and His Publishers, Volume I, 1885 to 1903* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 244.

balance in his work, without necessarily diminishing the tension between them? Let's call to witness one more poet, John Keats. There's a famous letter in which Keats described how, 'several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. You'll probably have guessed from the above that I believe Elgar the composer did possess exactly that kind of 'Negative Capability'. As with his ideal, Schumann, in his best, and I would argue his *sanest* work, Elgar had that very capacity for being in ambiguity, where 'several things dove-tail in the mind', without trying to rationalise his internal contradictions into a neat, logical consistency – and for me this is the driving force for some of his most wonderful inspirations.

I'd like to start with a firm favourite: a work small in scale, but which on examination turns out maybe to be not so 'small' after all. Strikingly it's the first piece with which Elgar pronounced himself satisfied: the *Serenade for Strings* (1892), composed seven years before the great public breakthrough of the *Enigma Variations*. Elgar was then thirty-five and still racked with doubt about his 'vocation' as a composer. After some local success he'd tried his luck in London, but had come back, disheartened, a year later. On the face of it, the *Serenade's* structure is very simple. There are three movements on a traditional fast-slow-fast pattern. The mood is sweetly charming, sometimes ardently nostalgic. It starts in a simple rocking triple time – a lilting dotted rhythmic pattern of which Elgar was particularly fond. The first movement is in a clear A – B – A form, with A a wistful arching tune in the home E minor and B an expansive song-like melody in E major. After the gorgeous, heartfelt 'song without words' of the slow movement, the finale brings a return to the lilting triple time of the first movement, but it's in the 'wrong' key – G major, not E major. After a while a little melancholic sigh, with a hint of the first movement's dancing opening figure, leads without any apparent effort into the expected E major and return of the first movement's second theme, leading to a serene-seeming conclusion, now firmly in the 'right' key.

It's all so beautifully engineered that it's easy to miss how unusual, how original all this is. We think we're in the finale, but hints of the first movement's leading rhythmic figure plant the idea, if subliminally, that there are still 'issues' raised by that opening that still need to be resolved – is the contentment of the finale's opening G major in some way illusory? Then the slide back into E and the return of the first movement's second theme pose some interesting questions? Is this the formal 'recapitulation' that the E major theme never had? In which case, are we really in a separate 'finale' at all, or have we never really left the world of the first movement?


Behind this, I believe, is the great example of Schumann's Second Symphony, composed as he was trying to work his way out of one of grimmest depressions he ever experienced. Particularly relevant is the structural and emotional 'sliding doors' effect Schumann creates in the symphony's slow third movement and finale. The deeply probing C minor elegy comes to an apparently peaceful conclusion in C major; then the finale starts rousing, but memories of the previous movement keep encroaching until the finale comes to a dead stop in C minor – as though this were an alternative, more sombre minor-key-ending for the slow movement. After this the finale starts again, but with a new theme, alluding to Schumann's wife Clara, and perhaps thereby to love and renewed hope. Schumann's Second Symphony may be a darker, more difficult work than Elgar's *Serenade* (it remains a stumbling block for some listeners), yet in both we find the same kind of 'structural teasing': 'Where are we? Oh – we're *here!*'

Sometimes the sense of ambiguity is conveyed less on a structural level and more 'locally', in passages that seem to call into question what seemed like an established mood or character.


Schumann was very good at this: the weird *ppp sul ponticello* episode at the heart of the first movement of his First Piano Trio is a classic example. The finale of Elgar's Violin Sonata provides another. After a couple of minutes of easy-going, then warmly-confident music, two strangely questioning *pianissimo* bars lead (Fig 41) to a kind of mesmerically repetitive hushed passage, full of seemingly rootless, side-stepping augmented triads. Development seems to have been suspended, to be replaced by eerie circling movement. In context it can have a quality well summed up in the old saying 'someone just walked over my grave'. The return of the leisurely first theme a moment or two later seems to shrug it off; but when this passage returns, transposed but otherwise largely unchanged, towards the end of the movement, the forward moment of time seems again to have slowed down, if not stopped altogether. A similar passage seems – again twice – to bring a chill to the otherwise 'agreeably pleasant' (to borrow a phrase from Dickens) slow movement of the String Quartet (Figs 25 & 33). There's a strong kinship here with the passages in the first movement of Elgar's Second Symphony, labelled 'ghost' in the sketches, that Elgar famously compared to a 'malign influence walking thro' the summer night in the garden',⁸ and which returns, this time with mounting violence, in the *Rondo* third movement. In all these cases we may be left with the feeling that the ghost, the malign influence, is still walking, circling, spreading its balefully timeless presence somewhere in the background, even when we can't hear it.

All of the above is relevant to one of Elgar's greatest achievements – and indeed one of his greatest professional triumphs – the First Symphony. After its stunningly successful premiere in 1908, nearly a hundred performances followed, not only the UK but as far afield as Rome, Vienna, Budapest and St Petersburg. There's an interesting connection with another work that took the musical world by storm at its first performance, the *Enigma Variations*. Some years after the symphony's premiere, the composer's friend and chronicler W.H. Reed pointed out that the final cadential phrase of *Enigma* is virtually identical to the first thematic phrase of the First Symphony. It should be even clearer if we transpose the theme from the Symphony down a semitone from A flat major to G major. Just the first note is changed slightly: the original tense minor third (B flat) becomes a bright, confident major:

Enigma Variations: Final Cadence (double note values)



Symphony No 1: Motto theme (transposed)



Elgar was surprised by Reed's comparison, but he agreed that the resemblance was striking - an indication perhaps of how much of creative work can take place at a subliminal, unconscious level. What could be more natural than that a nervous, highly self-critical composer, setting out on the daunting task of giving the world the First Great British Symphony (something widely expected of him), should draw on the triumphant clinching cadence of his great breakthrough orchestral piece – the culmination, moreover, of the variation movement (E.D.U. = Alice Elgar's nickname for her husband) associated with himself?

8 Letter to Alice Stuart Wortley, 29 January 1911, Jerrold Northrop Moore, ed., *The Windflower Letters*, 75.

And yet... Elgar does something rather strange here. His new, thoroughly major-key version of the *Enigma* cadence motif is not in the original warm, solid G major (the key in which the famous 'Land of Hope and Glory' theme makes its first appearance in *Pomp and Circumstance* March No 1), but a semitone up, in A flat major. The key of A flat major may be relatively familiar territory to pianists, but in orchestral music it is surprisingly rare. Elgar's First is the only symphony in the regular repertoire in this key,⁹ and the only other well-known work featuring orchestra which makes A flat its home key is Wagner's *Parsifal* (which Elgar knew well). A flat may be a reasonably comfortable key for wind players, and particularly for the brass, but for the strings it can be a trial,¹⁰ and the necessity of hand-stopping, and thus damping the open strings' natural vibration, gives it a strangely veiled effect. In *Parsifal*, the slight oddity of the A flat major orchestral sound contributes to the unworldly atmosphere of the Prelude and the music associated with the castle of Knights of the Grail at Monsalvat. Elgar's theme, with its stately marching accompaniment has more than an echo of the processional music for Wagner's Grail Knights, enhanced by the use of his signature expression marking *nobilmente*. This is the theme Elgar associated with 'massive hope for the future' and with what he called the 'glad confident morning' of Edwardian England, when the monarch on the throne shared the composer's first name and appeared to beam benevolently on Elgar's own steady artistic and social ascent. And yet that slightly 'off-centre' string sound can also convey an element of unreality to those parts of the symphony that are most clearly in its putative home key. Is there a hint of doubt even here?

A hint is all it may be, but soon the note of self-questioning becomes rather more emphatic. The First Symphony's highly original tonal structure was, the composer once claimed, a long-delayed response to a friend's challenge that he 'couldn't write a symphony in two keys at once'. A typical piece of deflective self-deprecation perhaps (an English gentleman should never be seen to take art too seriously): in any case, a deeper explanation can be found once again in Elgar's love for his 'ideal', Robert Schumann. Not only did Schumann famously dramatize his internal opposites by giving them names: Florestan (the active, passionate, impulsive, reckless character) and Eusebius (the passive, delicate, melancholic dreamer); identifying them in some of his earlier scores with the initials F. and E.; he parallels this in several major works by the use of what can only be called a 'bipolar' tonal scheme. The piano cycle *Davidsbündlertänze* is a significant example (it begins in G, ends in C, but is 'really' in B minor). Even more arresting in the current context is a work which we know deeply impressed the young Elgar: Schumann's String Quartet Op 41 No 1. Nominally in A minor, the Quartet does begin with a profoundly elegiac slow introduction in that key – or is it really an 'introduction' in the classical sense at all? Because what follows – a lightly dancing Allegro, based on a lilting, rhythmically repetitive theme (how Elgarian!) – isn't just in another key, F major, it seems to float in from another world. A minor has been seriously challenged, and it's questionable whether it ever re-establishes itself solidly enough to be called the true home key.

Such thinking unmistakably left its imprint on the intellectual and emotional tissue of the First Symphony. As we've seen, the symphony's opening, with its 'massive hope' motto theme, is in A flat major. But like Schumann's 'quasi-introduction' in Op 41 No 1, this Andante march music also turns

9 The tonally adventurous Joseph Haydn, for instance, wrote two of his 62 piano sonatas in A flat major, but none of his 104 symphonies are in that key.

10 Talking with members of the BBC Philharmonic string section before a Discovering Music concert about Elgar's First Symphony it was impossible to find one who found A flat major comfortable to play in. One musician suggested that the reason Dvorak's Quartet Op 105 was so rarely performed was that its A flat major tonality made it 'a bit of a strain' for the players.

out to be a strangely deceptive preparation for something wildly different: an impassioned Allegro in D minor – the key that’s furthest away from A flat major. The interval spelt out by A flat – D is the tritone, on the keyboard a step of three whole tones, an interval so ambiguous and harmonically destabilising that it was anathematised by medieval church music theorists and termed the *diabolus in musica*, ‘the devil in music’. The long, turbulent first movement does eventually manage to pull itself back to A flat for a return of the *nobilmente* motto theme, but at the very last moment (Fig 55) this is subverted again, with the result that the final *ppp* A flat major chord sounds strangely provisional. Stand further back and view the tonal plan of the whole symphony and it soon becomes clear that this is a work that spends significantly more time in D minor or D major (the home key of the Adagio third movement) than it does in what I called above its ‘putative’ home key.

Given the above, there is one haunting little detail at the heart of the Adagio that should be highlighted. In the movement’s gorgeous heartache-saturated coda, the *nobilmente* theme makes a barely disguised reappearance – hardly disguised at all, in fact, yet it’s placed so deftly that it’s apparently seldom noticed: a fine example of ‘hiding in plain sight’. As with the transformation of the final *Enigma* cadence at the beginning of the symphony, it involves only the tiniest of adjustment: two notes are shifted up an octave, with the second now rising a tone instead of falling by the same interval. Transpose the *nobilmente* motto theme to D major and the connection should become quite clear:



Nobility, glad ‘confidence’, have become the epitome of exquisitely painful longing, the effect achieved partly by Elgar’s masterful use of harmony and orchestral colour, but also by the motto theme’s painful wrench from the home ground of A flat to the ‘diabolically’ distant key of D.

This is one reason why Elgar’s First Symphony is such a phenomenal achievement. Elgar has successfully dramatized his internal opposites and ambiguities and, without seeking any false or implausible reconciliation between them has dramatized his opposites, and has drawn them into ‘one great song’, as Mahler described his own Tenth Symphony, composed just two years later. On one level it is all so magnificently integrated, yet at the same time we may still feel the poignancy of the irreconcilable. The answer to the question, ‘Does the First Symphony end in triumph?’, turns out to be a brilliant, utterly original ‘yes and no’.

But perhaps the most remarkable of all dramatizations of EE’s ‘mass of seeming contradictions’ occurs in one of his very best loved works, the *Enigma Variations* – an indication perhaps that when it comes to audience favourites the alleged ‘wisdom of crowds’ can play a part. I’m not for a moment suggesting that I have an answer to the famous ‘enigma’ posed by the composer in his programme note for the 1899 premiere: ‘The Enigma I will not explain – its “dark saying” must be left unguessed... further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme “goes”, but is not played’. I’m nevertheless struck by how few of the potential riddle-solvers have picked up on Elgar’s remark about the puzzle being a ‘dark saying’, and that is what I want to look at now.

'Dark' can of course simply mean 'obscure', as in St Paul's famous 'we see in a glass darkly'; but from what one knows of Elgar it isn't stretching credibility to suggest that he also meant 'dark' in an emotional, even spiritual sense.

Some years after *Enigma*'s breakthrough first performance, Elgar wrote to Ernest Newman about its theme which, he said, 'expressed when written... my sense of the loneliness of the artist ...and to me, it still embodies that sense'.¹¹ There's little doubt that this sense of loneliness could, for Elgar, be acutely painful, even at times creatively debilitating. But what place has 'loneliness' in a work apparently celebrating friendship, famously dedicated 'To my friends pictured within'? Another recollection might help us here. When Alice Elgar heard her husband playing the theme, it's said that she stopped him and asked, 'What's that'? Elgar replied, 'Nothing, but something might be made of it'.¹² Was he simply talking about the theme as a musical artefact, or could he also have been indicating the 'lonely' artist himself – the man prone to lacerating, often solitary self-doubt? If so, the theme is also Elgar himself, the 'Enigma', or, as Michael Kennedy put it to me, the 'mystery man'.

Strikingly *Enigma* doesn't belong with those sets of variations which take a simple skeleton of a theme – as Beethoven did in the finale of his *Eroica* Symphony or Rachmaninov in his *Paganini Rhapsody* – and then proceed to put all kinds of new melodic flesh on its bare bones. Instead Elgar's theme has a strong character of its own, and it retains its broad melodic outlines more or less throughout the variation process that follows. We hear for ourselves what 'can be made of it', as the theme interacts with each of the friends portrayed in turn. It becomes the organist Hew David Stuart-Powell's fancy footwork on the pedals in Variation II, stands to one side, admiring or sympathising with Matthew Arnold's son Richard in his deep seriousness, or his moments of nervous laughter, in Variation V; 'Elgar'/'Enigma' can again be heard down below, in the bass. Or, most famously of all, it fuses in hushed majesty with the Adagio theme of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata in 'Nimrod', Variation IX, inspired by a memory of discussing Beethoven's great slow movements with one of most crucially supportive friends, August Jaeger, in which Jaeger told Elgar that one day *he* would rise to similar heights. All of this leads by a process of spiritual ascent to the magnificent affirmation of the finale, and to that radiant concluding cadence which, as we saw, Elgar was to draw on in a moment of deep artistic need as he set out to compose his First Symphony. Here, at the end point of *Enigma*, Elgar seems to turn to all of his friends, and especially Jaeger and Alice Elgar (both recollected at length in the finale), and says, 'Look what you have made of me!', the composer who started out as 'nothing'.

And yet when Elgar wrote to Newman about *Enigma*, it was clear that the sense of 'loneliness' endured, despite the embrace of warm, often perceptive friendship and repeated artistic triumph. Is there a sense in *Enigma* of the artist who also remains apart? I think so. Take the exquisitely melancholic minor-key Variation XII, a tribute to Basil Nevinson, whose understanding sustained Elgar through several periods of deep depression. The cello solo that begins and ends the variation is surely the cellist Nevinson himself, gently, tactfully coaxing Elgar to open his heart. In that case, the *tutti* cello melody that forms the backbone of the variation would be Elgar himself, pouring out his pain and unappeasable longing. Normally in performance, Variation XII flows straight on into Variation XIII; in fact, I've never heard or heard of its being played separately. But, uniquely in *Enigma*, Elgar provided an alternative ending for Variation XII in case it was played on its own, perhaps by an amateur cellist like Nevinson. In contrast to the other five minor-key variations in

11 Letter 14 August 1912, Jerrold Northrop Moore, ed., *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 249.

12 Charles Barry, programme note 19 June 1898.

the set, this ‘other’ ending is firmly minor-key. Here then is a ‘dark saying’ which in any complete performance ‘must be left unguessed’. As with the cypher-like ‘Sphynxes’ Schumann included in the score of his piano cycle *Carnival*, the performer is in the know, but the audience...

If, as is conventional, Elgar’s profoundly melancholic ‘Sphynx’ is omitted, Variation XII flows on seamlessly into Variation XIII. (For the superstitious Elgar the number has to be significant). This is the variation headed, mysteriously, not with initials, but with three asterisks (***) and a title, *Romanza*. Almost certainly this is a disguised reference to a memory of ‘what might have been’ – a lost love, Elgar’s former fiancée Helen Weaver. Clearly this relationship was a very different, more ‘romantic’ proposition, than that with the far more motherly Alice, whom he later married. Elgar spent some eighteen months in what appears to have been an emotionally reciprocal relationship with Weaver; but then he lets slip to a friend, Charles William Buck, that ‘my engagement is off and I am lonely’. Elgar continues, ‘I am not wanting energy, I think, so, sometimes, I conclude that ‘tis want of energy & get into a mouldy desponding state which is really terrible’, the light ironic touch fading rather at the end. Eventually came the news that Helen Weaver was emigrating to New Zealand and was thus irretrievably lost to him. Writing again to Buck, ostensibly congratulating him on his engagement, Elgar confesses, ‘accept my good wishes for your happiness, these I can give you the more sincerely since I know what it is to have lost my own forever’.¹³ A poignant invocation on clarinet (in quotation marks in the score) of Mendelssohn’s Overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* (a *bon voyage* for Helen?), leads to a more ominous passage (Fig 58) which for Elgar embodied ‘deeper and more human feelings’. What is also striking here is that the possibly confessional Variation XII flows directly into this clearly still painful reminiscence. Is this, by inference, the core of what Elgar has just portrayed himself revealing to Basil Nevinson?

After this comes the finale: Elgar (E.D.U.) himself in triumph, dark shadows forgotten – or maybe not. Let’s remember those words of Vera Hockman: how Elgar could be ‘one moment so disillusioned, materialistic, the next so mystical and visionary’. The point is that *both* are true – both are authentic aspects of this extraordinary, multi-faceted, wildly mood-swinging, sometimes apparently self-contradictory man. There is no one ‘true’ Elgar; as much as his ideal Schumann, or nearer his own time Gustav Mahler, Elgar embodies a remark Beethoven scribbled on the manuscript of one of his songs: ‘sometimes the opposite is also true’. There are many impressive facets of Elgar’s achievement as a composer, but what emerges above all here, for me, is how truthfully, how ingeniously, how movingly he was able to embody the oppositions of his own nature in his music. We do him an injustice, as man and as composer, if we fail to take this ‘whole truth’ into account.

Writer, composer and broadcaster Stephen Johnson is the author of books on Beethoven, Bruckner, Wagner and Mahler. For fourteen years he presented BBC Radio 3’s Discovering Music. His orchestral work Behemoth Dances was premiered in 2016 by the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, his Clarinet Quintet Angel’s Arc had its first performance in January 2019 and his String Quartet was premiered by the Brodsky Quartet in November 2021. His award-winning book about music and mental health, How Shostakovich Changed My Mind (Notting Hill), was published in May 2018, followed in 2020 by a study of Mahler’s Eighth Symphony, The Eighth: Mahler & the World in 1910 (Faber), and in 2021 he curated a collection of ghost stories, The Wrong Turning.

13 This quotation, and the above, from Jerrold Northrop Moore, ed., *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 104.

Elgar and ‘L’affaire Ysaÿe’

Arthur Reynolds

When Louis Lochner, biographer of Friedrich ‘Fritz’ Kreisler, asked the dedicatee of Edward Elgar’s Concerto in B minor for Violin and Orchestra for his memory of the most magnificent performance of the work Kreisler had ever experienced, Lochner expected the celebrated violinist to cite an occasion of one of his own renditions, most likely the 10 November 1910 premiere, given the audience response that drew this description from the *Musical Observer*:

Time after time Sir Edward and Herr Kreisler were recalled amid the greatest enthusiasm from the orchestra and the large audience, which included the principals of our musical institutions, many famous composers and other celebrities in the world of art and letters.¹

But no: Kreisler replied as follows:

No one has yet heard the Elgar concerto to ultimate advantage who was not present when Ysaÿe introduced it in Berlin. It was one of the noblest specimens of violin playing in recent years.²

The concert in question took place in Berlin on 8 January 1912 under the direction of the Hungarian conductor Arthur Nikisch, the soloist being the 53-year-old Belgian virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe. Another prominent musician in the audience, Vladimir Cernikoff, echoed Kreisler’s impression, observing that Ysaÿe, ‘...had a way of playing the cadenza in that very beautiful work in such a detached manner that, for once, the expression, *Music from Heaven* seemed inadequate’.³

Kreisler’s boundless esteem for Ysaÿe’s playing was widely shared in an age when the concert-going public revered renowned executants as Olympian figures. Sir Henry Wood, founding conductor of London’s annual series of promenade concerts, spoke for many when he wrote:

I can never say enough—in fact, words utterly fail me when I think of Ysaÿe’s performances. The quality of his tone was so ravishingly beautiful and it is no exaggeration to say that, having accompanied all the great violinists in the world during the past fifty years, of *all* of them Ysaÿe seems to impress me the most. He seemed to get more colour out of a violin than any of his contemporaries and he was certainly unique as a concerto-player...⁴

1 Louis P. Lochner, *Fritz Kreisler* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950), 110.

2 Lochner, *Fritz Kreisler*, 111.

3 Vladimir Cernikoff, *Humour and Harmony* (London: Barker, 1936), 173.

4 Henry J. Wood, *My Life of Music* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1938), 173.



Ysaÿe. c.1910



Fritz Kreisler, c. 1910

For Yehudi Menuhin, Eugène Ysaÿe was to the concert hall what Sarah Bernhardt was to the theatre - the greatest and the last of the grand-manner players. Among the Maestro's ardent admirers was fellow violinist Edward Elgar. Ysaÿe and Elgar were near contemporaries, Eugène having been born a year and a month after Edward. Both sprang from music-making tradesmen origins and passed their formative childhoods in provincial cities: Elgar in Worcester, Ysaÿe in Liège. Their high achievements and disappointed hopes were complementary: Elgar attained greatness as a composer, but his ambition to achieve virtuosity as a solo player eluded him; while Ysaÿe's compositions - his numerous sonatas, chamber music, and concertante works - failed to attract the plaudits bestowed on his performing prowess.

Among the items of memorabilia lodged at The Firs⁵ is Elgar's copy of the programme for an 1899 Queen's Hall concert at which Ysaÿe performed the Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto No. 3 in B minor with the 'orchestral accompaniment' provided by the pianist Raoul Pugno. Both performers signed the prized memento.



Raoul Pugno, 1895

5 Elgar's birthplace at Lower Broadheath, now in the care of The National Trust.

Shortly after that occasion, August Jaeger wrote to Elgar, at the time hard at work on *The Dream of Gerontius*, urging him to produce a string piece for Ysaÿe. Elgar replied with a pun,

As soon as this 'Dream' (nightmare) is done—I'll write such a lot of things for Ysaiah—and all the profits...⁶

It was not long before the two artists began to encounter one another on the festival circuit. Elgar and Ysaÿe shared the 2 October concerts given at the 1902 Sheffield Festival. Ysaÿe played the Beethoven Violin Concerto in D major between Elgar's morning performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* and the afternoon composer-conducted premiere of his *Coronation Ode*. The programmes of Britain's music festivals frequently featured the appearance of an eminent violin soloist from abroad. Eugène Ysaÿe and Fritz Kreisler often took turns reprising the role of *de rigueur* foreign virtuoso. It was Kreisler's turn to attend the October 1905 Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Musical Festival (aka The Norwich Festival). Since Elgar was also present, the violinist took the opportunity to nudge the composer into action by issuing this statement to the press:

If you want to know whom I consider to be the greatest living composer, I say without hesitation, Elgar. Russia, Scandinavia, my own Fatherland, or any other nation can produce nothing like him. I say this to please no one; it is my own conviction. Elgar will overshadow everybody. He is on a different level. I place him on an equal footing with my idols Beethoven and Brahms...I wish Elgar would write something for the violin. He could do so, and it would be certainly something effective.⁷

Before he left the Festival, Edward jotted down several sketches for a violin concerto in B minor. Another five years would pass before he completed his Concerto. Did Elgar have Ysaÿe in mind as well as Kreisler while he was at work on his *tour de force*? When they met in October 1910, Elgar presented Ysaÿe with the proof copy of the piano arrangement, to which he penned the following inscription: 'to Mr. Eugène Ysaÿe with greatest admiration & sincerest regards from Edward Elgar Oct. 1910'.⁸

A month later, on 10 November, Elgar conducted the premiere in Queen's Hall with Kreisler and the Philharmonic Society. We do not know whether Ysaÿe was in the audience, but Elgar's friend Charles Sanford Terry placed him among the attendees at the full rehearsal on 9 November. Afterwards Ysaÿe publicly announced his intention to play the work in Brussels with the composer conducting.

The performance of a different Elgar work four months later served to strengthen the bond of mutual esteem between the two maestros. Dr. Jerrold Northrop Moore sets the scene:

In the second week of March 1911 Edward and Alice went to Brussels for a Belgian production of the First Symphony. They received a joyous welcome from Eugène Ysaÿe, the great Belgian violinist who conducted symphony concerts in Brussels. Ysaÿe paid Edward the compliment of leading the orchestra he usually conducted through the final Symphony rehearsals and at the concert under Elgar's baton.⁹

6 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 306.

7 Moore, *Edward Elgar A Creative Life*, 468-469.

8 Stanford University Libraries, MLM 294, quoted in the *Elgar Complete Edition*, Vol. 32, 2nd edition, xix.

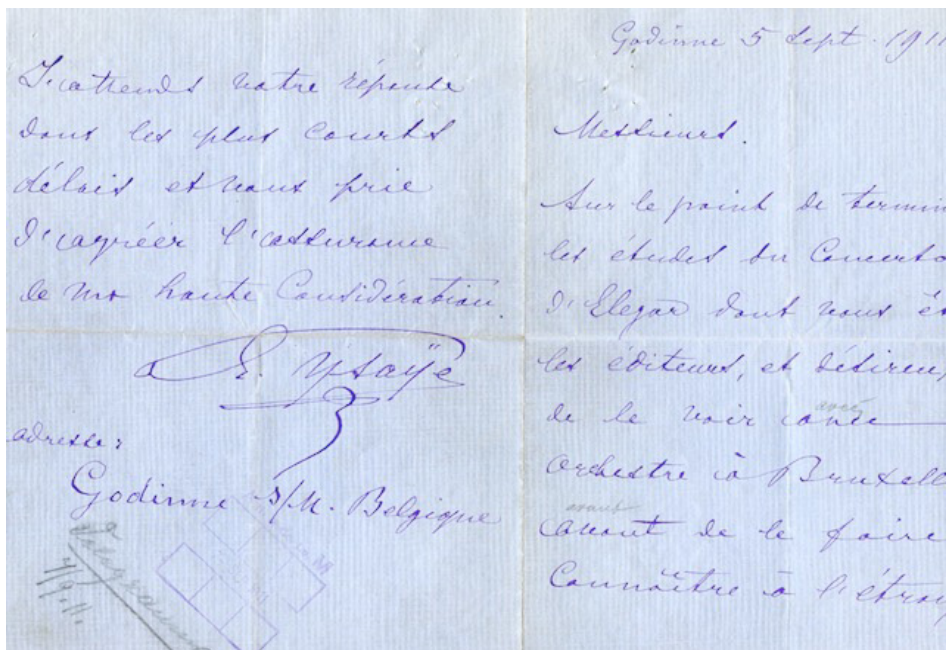
9 Moore, *Edward Elgar A Creative Life*, 612.

In view of the camaraderie now well established between composer and player, the melodrama of misapprehension that subsequently unfolded offers an example of Aristotle's dictum that effective drama must be at once surprising and inevitable.

On 5 September 1911, Ysaÿe wrote to Novello requesting copies of the Concerto's full score and orchestral parts so that he could rehearse the work with his Brussels orchestra in preparation for four performances scheduled to take place in England during September and October: three at Queen's Hall, where Robert Newman was manager, plus a performance at the 1911 Norwich Festival, where Sir Henry Wood was Music Director. Sir Henry was engaged to conduct all four concerts.

Ysaÿe's letter notified Novello of his intention to perform the work wherever the orchestral resources were available, owing to assurances he alleged he had received from the composer that the fees required of other executants would not apply to the greatest player among them.

Ysaÿe's letter to Novello dated 5 September 1911



Godinne
5 Sept. 1911
Gentlemen

Since I am about to complete my study of the Elgar Concerto score of which you are the editors. I want to rehearse the work with the Brussels Orchestra in preparation for performance abroad, please tell me if you would graciously place at my disposition the full score and parts. My friend Mr. Elgar has assured me that between him and me there could be no question of my making any payment to perform the work. I believe you are of the same opinion and that I will be able to perform the Concerto wherever the artistic means are available to me without the special conditions which you have assigned to the usual performance.

I await your reply as soon as feasible and ask you to please accept my highest regards.

E. Ysaÿe¹⁰

At this juncture, Alfred Littleton, Novello's Chairman, dismissed Ysaÿe's claim as a simple misunderstanding. After all, Elgar's agency agreement with Novello left it to Littleton's firm to set performance fees and music hiring charges unless Sir Edward specifically requested individual-case modifications. Since no such consultation had taken place between the composer and his concert agent, Littleton sought to summarize the Novello perspective with, 'what I thought to be a very careful and diplomatic reply'. The Novello files preserved the following draft of Littleton's letter:

London
12/9.11
Mr. Ysaÿe

Surely Mr. Ysaÿe will recognize that the composer of a great work like the Elgar Concerto should have some financial return for all his time & labour he bestowed upon it.

This return can only come from performances of the work when a large audience is attracted by the work itself and by the distinguished performer who plays the principal part in it.

...In order to make this quite easy we would propose to reduce the fee to frs 125 p. performance or frs 2000 for 20 performances in one season.

The whole of this amount less a small percentage for use of the material would be paid to the composer.

Notwithstanding all we have said we will not charge any fee for your concert on 30 Sept.

With kind regards
Yours sincerely
Alfred Littleton ¹¹

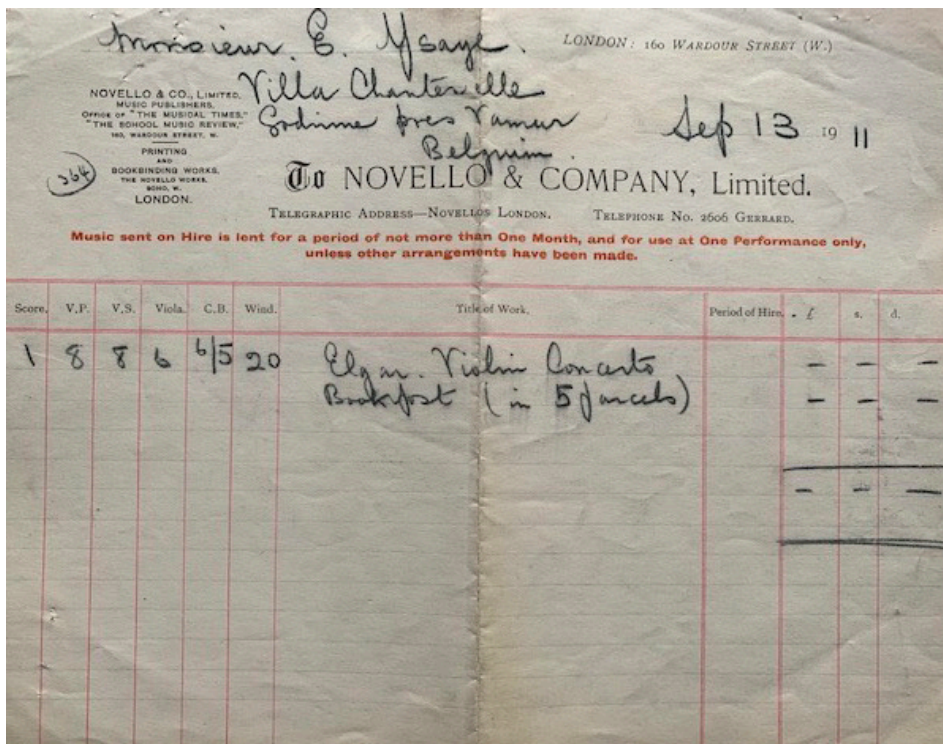
At the time, Novello was quoting other soloists a performing fee of £7 17s 6d, of which Elgar received £5 5s. Littleton's proposed reduction to the sterling equivalent of £5.0s for a single performance, reduced further to £4.0s each for a season of twenty performances, with no charge for the 30 September concert, amounted to a substantial concession. What the Novello management

10 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 747. (Author's archive, author's translation).

11 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 747-748. (Author's archive).

failed to grasp was that it was the *principle* of pay-to-play not the *quantum* that outraged the sensibilities of the artist.

Assuming Littleton's letter had cleared up the matter, Novello's publishing manager, Charles May dispatched the score and parts the following day. A company invoice dated 13 September confirms that the materials had gone off gratis to Godinne, Ysaÿe's Belgian residence.



Novello & Company's shipping invoice

There followed a visit to Godinne from Mr. Rosenkrantz, the Novello European representative, with instructions to present the publisher's remuneration request for anticipated performances on the Continent. Rosenkrantz reported that the maestro abruptly terminated their interview, bellowing: '*Quoi! Un homme de mon rang, de ma position et indépendance—me faire une proposition pareille?*'¹²

Not content with seeing off Rosenkrantz, and unaware that the Concerto's score and parts were on their way to him, Ysaÿe fired off this anger-suffused response to Littleton's letter:

12 'What! A man of my rank, position, and independence—make me such an offer?' *The Musical Times*, 54 (1913), 19.

Godinne
13 Sept. 1911

Sir

After my meeting with Mr. Rosenkrantz, during which I clearly explained the reasons that oblige me to refuse to agree to the payment demands you have imposed on the performance of the Elgar Concerto, I had believed and hoped, not only to immediately receive the material I needed to rehearse the work with the orchestral resources at my disposal here, but also that there would no longer be a question of a fee requirement, neither for myself nor for the Philharmonic societies with which I would propose to perform. I see by your letter that I am deceived, that you are motivated by 'Marchandage' [Crass Commercialisation], that you speak to me in a strange language which distances itself from the artistic purpose which is the only one that guided me, *Me*, during my passionate study of the Concerto. I understand the reasons of self-interest that motivate you, but I refuse to participate in a painful discussion on this subject. I don't believe it is possible that the Composer asked you to write to me to convey such miserable terms, the reading of which breaks my heart. I regret to have to inform you that I am giving up performing the Elgar Concerto; my decision is forced upon me by reason of my dignity that will have nothing to do with commercial considerations.

I send, Sir, Greetings,

E. Ysaÿe¹³

Littleton's draft reply, found in the Novello files, assures the 'Illustre Maître' that the score and parts had been sent to him, but warns that the use of the material is restricted:

London

14.9.11

Monsieur Eugène Ysaÿe,

Illustrious Maestro

Following our letter of yesterday [sic] we write to confirm that the orchestral material (score and parts) was sent to you by post yesterday. This material is unpublished and therefore not for sale. Nor can you give a public performance in Brussels etc (the Concerto may be performed in England only).¹⁴

Littleton appended this file note to his draft:

It is curious to think that while Mr Isaye [sic] is in receipt of a larger fee per performance than any other violinist he should consider it just that the composer—who provides the music which he plays—should be content with nothing & presumably live on air.¹⁵

Ysaÿe's peevish fusillade painted Novello into a corner. Well aware that their cherished client was eager to hear the great Belgian virtuoso play his Concerto, Littleton dispatched May to discuss the matter with Elgar. An undated note in the Novello files summarizes the substance of that meeting:

Mr. May saw Elgar with reference to this matter & he reports that Elgar seemed very anxious that Ysaÿe should play the work, but stated that the question of fee was a matter for the firm to decide & he suggested that a nominal fee should be quoted for say 10 performances.

13 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 748 (Author's archive, author's translation).

14 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 749 (Author's translation).

15 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 749.

At the same time Mr. May thinks from Elgar's remarks that he would be very pleased if we could allow Ysaÿe to play the work even if he was *not* disposed to pay any fee.¹⁶

Littleton followed May's internal report with a letter to the composer, giving vent to his frustration:

2 Palmeira Court Hove, Brighton

Sept 17, 1911

My dear Elgar

I think you know that we have been in correspondence with Isaye [sic] about performances of the Concerto on the Continent. My brother, thinking the matter important and wishing to please Isaye sent Rosenkrantz to Belgium to see him but of course he could not settle anything definitely at a first introductory meeting. A day or two after this Isaye wrote and his letter was brought down to me by Rosenkrantz.

I drafted what I thought was a very careful and diplomatic reply. I did not insist on payment of a performing fee but I endeavoured to explain the justice of the point that some fee should be paid by somebody. But justice appears to be something that Mr. Isaye does not appear to care about or understand—and in reply we received the enclosed rude letter...

The *great artist* thinks of nothing but collecting his own exorbitant fees, and it seems to me that the words 'transactions commerciales' and 'Marchandage' apply more to him than to anyone else. I should like to show the whole thing up in the public press—

With kindest regards

Yours very sincerely

Alfred H. Littleton¹⁷

Henry Clayton, the Novello Company Secretary, objected to any proposals of special terms, pointing out that granting Ysaÿe the right to perform the Concerto without charge or at a reduced fee could arouse demands from other players for corresponding treatment.

Meanwhile, Newman and Wood reacted with dismay to Ysaÿe's cancellation threat. Expectations in Norwich were running high; the Festival Committee had already published a preliminary programme announcing Ysaÿe's forthcoming performance of the Elgar Concerto.

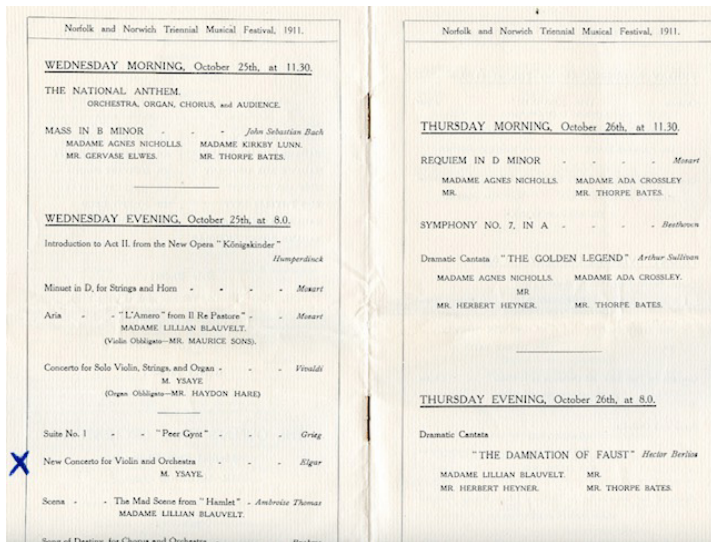
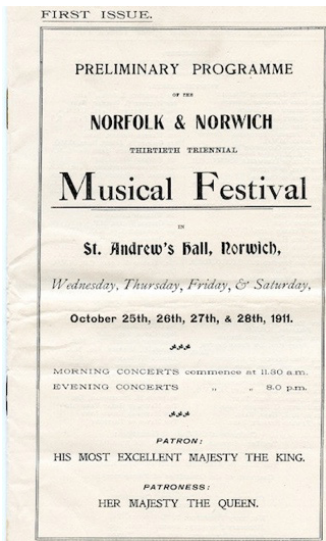
Sir Henry proposed a cunning solution: the Norwich Committee, together with the Queen's Hall Syndicate would augment the orchestral charges by the amount of the soloist's performing fee thereby sparing Ysaÿe's artistic blushes. If Sir Henry thought he had achieved resolution, he was mistaken. Ysaÿe's chagrin boiled over when he found out about the scheme; he informed Novello that he would not play the Concerto if *any* fee were paid by or to *anyone* involved. So now the customary parts hiring charge paid by the orchestra as well as the soloist fee was impermissible. Sir Henry appealed to Sir Edward, who wired this message to Littleton on 22 September:

Received telegram from Henry Wood begging me to accede to Ysaÿes [sic] terms[.] Understand final conference tomorrow presumably for Norwich[.] Have begged Wood consult you[.] Letter follows.¹⁸

16 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 749. (Author's archive).

17 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 749-750.

18 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 751 (Author's archive).



Norwich Festival preliminary programme

The letter that followed gave Elgar’s account of what he believed he had promised in Brussels the previous March:

Plás Gwyn, Hereford

Sep 22 1911 4.pm

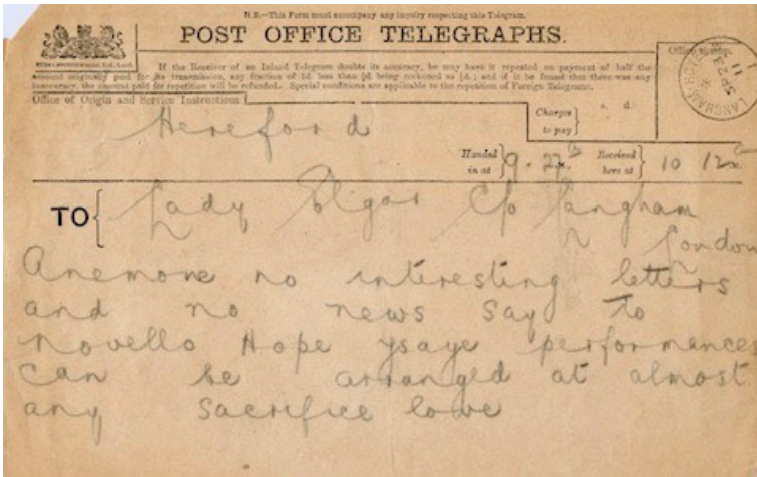
Dear Sirs:

I have just recd. the encld. telegram from Sir Henry Wood—in reply, & in a letter sent by this post, I have said I cannot understand Ysaÿe’s attitude at all & have asked him to take you into his confidence—if this has not already happened—& see if anything can be done.

When I was conducting one of Ysaÿe’s concerts in Bruxelles last March we were talking about the possibility of his playing the Concerto & I promised I wd. conduct the first performance which he proposed to give in Bruxelles for nothing. I suppose I must give up everything for the sake of art & must leave you to decide.

Yrs try
Edward Elgar¹⁹

On 23 September Novello’s disgusted Chairman replied by telegram: ‘You must of course do what you think best. I cannot take part to giving way to such a person’.²⁰ The same day Alice Elgar added her voice to those urging her husband to bow to Ysaÿe’s demands. The text of her telegram dated 23 September to Elgar at London’s Langham hotel ended with: ‘...Hope Ysaÿe’s performances can be arranged at almost any sacrifice’.²¹



Alice’s telegram to Edward

19 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 751 (Author’s archive).
20 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 752.
21 Author’s archive. Unpublished.

On 24 September Elgar yielded via a telegram to Ysaÿe that read: ‘Pour vous aucunes conditions’ [For you no conditions]. But it was too late. Ysaÿe had made up his mind that his dignity - once wounded never mended - rendered him unwilling to perform the work in England under any circumstances. Elgar wrote to Littleton:

Plâs Gwyn, Hereford
Sept. 25

My dear Littleton

I am much obliged to you for your letter: I quite feel with you but I felt I *had* to give way to Ysaÿe: so I wired this morning saying he must have his way. Wood & Newman seem disgusted I think at Y. but laid stress on their having *three* performances arranged— besides Norwich & I could not well stand in the way of this & I dreaded the sort of ‘Scandale’ & the quite misunderstanding way the press wd. treat the matter. Since I telegraphed to Ysaÿe—Newman has just wired that the concerts are *off*—he says ‘Sorry for troubling you but have recd. letter from Ysaÿe this morning that prevents his Concerts taking place. Newman’—so the very reason I gave in to—is now vanished.

I am sick of it all....

Kindest regds
Yrs. snclly
Ed. Elgar²²

Ysaÿe’s injured *amour propre* did not prevent him from accepting the 250 guineas (approximately £21,100 in today’s sterling) the Norwich Festival Committee agreed to pay him for his appearance as a concerto soloist, so he showed up but instead played the Beethoven Concerto. Perhaps the substitution was for the best, for the only outcome worse than not playing Elgar’s Concerto would have been to have played it badly. Sir Henry puts the episode into perspective:

Robert Newman went to meet Ysaÿe at the station on the morning of the day of his concert. The first thing Ysaÿe said was: ‘*Don’t tell Henry* but I’ve been fishing at Godinne for the last two months and haven’t taken my fiddle out of its case’. Ysaÿe started off with an organ rehearsal with Haddon Hare for the Vivaldi concerto, which he played that evening as well as the Beethoven, his performance of which was easily the worst I have ever directed. In the slow movement his memory went to pieces— indeed I do not know what he would have done had not Maurice Sons [the leader] prompted him as he went along....²³

Elgar too was present at the Festival to conduct *The Kingdom*. History does not relate whether or not he and Ysaÿe met; they certainly had good reason to avoid one another.

If the dramatis personae thought the curtain had come down on L’affaire Ysaÿe, they were mistaken. On 26 September Arthur Nikisch wrote to Novello, informing the firm that he intended to conduct the Concerto in Berlin on January 8th with Ysaÿe as the soloist. This proved to be the occasion Kreisler extolled to his biographer. Word reached the firm that other Concerto performances with Ysaÿe were scheduled to take place in Bremen on 3 January, in Königsberg on the 13th, and in Vienna on 23 February.

Ysaÿe appears to have taken Elgar’s message, ‘pour vous aucunes conditions’ as an endorsement of his recollection of that previous understanding, whereby the composer had given the artist unrestricted consent to play the work free of charge whenever and wherever he chose;

22 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 752-753.

23 Wood, *My Life of Music*, 328-329.

so of course, Ysaÿe saw no reason to return the score and parts. Elgar would later claim that when he sent his 'aucunes conditions' message, he was unaware that Ysaÿe possessed the orchestral material without which performances other than the scheduled concerts in Norwich and London would not have been feasible. Clayton made known his anxiety to Elgar:

[160 Wardour Street. W]

February 5th [1912]

Dear Elgar

The Ysaÿe trouble is becoming acute and serious. We learned on Friday that he gave a third performance of the Violin Concerto on Jan. 13th, this time in Königsberg on the Russian Frontier. Again he has not consulted us either as regards the performing right, or the use of the music...

We wrote to him on Jan. 11th asking him to return the music, & explaining to him that his performance of the work without our sanction in Germany or elsewhere was irregular, & that you had not authorized any such performance. He has ignored our letter. So we have determined to take action in the Belgian Courts to establish the performing right in the work, unless in the meantime he agrees to hand over the music.

Before we do this we shall make one more attempt to persuade Ysaÿe to return the music, & I think we must ask for your co-operation. I send you a copy of what we wrote to him on Jan. 11th. Could you not write and tell him that you have read that letter, that it agrees with your view of the case, & that you would be personally obliged to him if he would end this unpleasant controversy by returning the music to us...

Yours sincerely
Henry R. Clayton²⁴

Four days later Elgar wrote as requested:

Severn House
42, Netherhall Gardens
Hampstead N.W.
9th Feby 1912

Dear Mr Ysaÿe

Messrs. Novello inform me that you still have the orchestral material of my Violin Concerto.

I sent you a telegram only referring to the three proposed concerts in London in September and October last and the Norwich Festival as Messrs Novello gave me permission to deal with those performances.

I have no power to give you full use of the concerto and if you cannot agree to Messrs. Novello's terms, which of course concern me very materially, I shall be obliged if you will return the orchestral material.

I am deeply sensible of the honour you do me by performing the Concerto and I am sure you do not wish to do very considerable harm to me by not conforming to the ordinary course of business.

Kindest regards,
Yours faithfully,
Edward Elgar²⁵

24 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 755-756 (Author's archive).

25 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 759 (Author's archive).

Ysaÿe ignored Elgar's plea; his cock-a-snook response came in the form of the aforementioned Vienna concert on 23 February.

KONZERT-DIREKTION
ALBERT GUTMANN

Freitag, den 23. Februar 1912, abends 7/8 Uhr
im Großen Musikvereins-Saale:
KONZERT
Eugène Ysaÿe

Begleitung: Das **Wiener Tonkünstler-Orchester**
Dirigent: Direktor Oskar Nedbal.

PROGRAMM:

1. **J. B. Leclair** Konzert D-moll, für Violine, Streich-
(1697—1764) orchester und Orgel.
Allegro poco maestoso.
Aria.
Vivace.
Orgel: Prof. Georg Valker, k. k. Hoforganist.

2. **Edward Elgar** Violinkonzert H-moll.
Allegro.
Andante.
Allegro molto.

3. **Bruch** Violinkonzert Nr. 1, G-moll.
Allegro moderato.
Adagio.
Allegro energico.

Das II. Konzert Eugène Ysaÿe, unter Mitwirkung von Pablo Casals, findet Montag, den 4. März, abends 7/8 Uhr im Großen Musikvereins-Saale statt. Programm umseitig.

Preis 20 Heller.

Vienna concert programme

Two weeks later, an exasperated Henry Clayton made one last epistolary attempt to effect the return of the music before instructing solicitors:

[160 Wardour St. W.]

March 14th [19]12

Dear Sir

On January 11th we addressed to you, at your house in Brussels a letter in which we called your attention to the fact that the performing rights in Sir Edward Elgar's 'Violin Concerto' are reserved, that Sir Edward Elgar had not authorized any of the performances which about that time you were giving on the continent; and that the score and band parts which you made use of on those occasions are our property; and that they were lent to you *only* with a view to your rehearsing the work in anticipation of certain English performances, which had been arranged when we sent you the Orchestral Material.

You have not favoured us with a reply to that letter, which we much regret, because if you do not answer our letters, we can see no prospect of terminating the unfortunate misunderstanding between yourself and us, without invoking the assistance of our lawyers, and that is a step which we are anxious to avoid...

Yours faithfully,
Novello & Co. Ltd.²⁶

The threat of legal action produced the desired result. A fortnight after receiving Clayton's letter, Ysaÿe returned the orchestral material. *En revanche*, the violinist acknowledged as the greatest lyrical player alive vowed never to perform the work again. Clayton's concern proved prescient: Fritz Kreisler and others protested that since 'aucunes conditions' had been offered to one player, 'aucunes conditions' should prevail for all Concerto executants.

For his part, Ysaÿe bore Elgar no ill will. Nor did his perspective on Novello's supposed villainy diminish his appreciation of the Concerto as a work of genius. Toward the end of 1912 Ysaÿe embarked on a concert tour of the United States, where an interview in New York with *Musical America*, published on 23 November, offered the opportunity to praise the 'great work' and represent the composer as a fellow victim:

I do not claim to have brought great quantities of new music of great significance with me. In Europe I have played a new Concerto by Moore, and also the Elgar. I should have liked to play the Elgar here, but I finally abandoned it because of the endless difficulties I had with the publishers and the enormous royalties they were asking. The composer himself is so effectively bound, hand and foot, that he can do nothing to aid the artist. It seems a very foolish thing to me that it should thus become the fashion to hinder the propaganda for a great work. And the Elgar Concerto is a great work—the finest thing in its way, I claim, since the Concerto of Brahms.²⁷

The Maestro's esteem for Elgar's music was not confined to the Concerto. After hearing a performance of Symphony No. 2 conducted by Landon Ronald, Ysaÿe wrote to Ronald:

26 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 759-760.

27 *The Musical Times*, 54 (1913), 19.

London 16 June (11:00 pm) 1915.

My Dear Old Friend

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to hear this beautiful work by Elgar; this Second Symphony is of Herculean strength, of a splendid structure, and also full of soul and of a deep sincerity; the musical texture is full of interest and the scoring is stupendous!...Well done, dear friend, your luminous performance was superb.

All good wishes together with my avid appreciation.

E. Ysaÿe²⁸

Did Elgar in an unguarded moment of bonhomie offer the assurances Ysaÿe alleges in his letter of 5 September 1911? If so, why did not Novello's valued client notify Littleton of his commitment, or at least confirm his pledge during his September 14 discussion with Charles May, the meeting notes for which convey the impression that Elgar knew nothing about a prior promise? Elgar makes his denial explicit in his letter to Novello dated 22 September 1911.

Ysaÿe's New York interview pronouncements suggest an inclination to overstate. The 'endless difficulties I had with the publishers' came to an end a short time after they began. The 'enormous royalties they were asking' amounted to less than 4.0% of Ysaÿe's customary performing fee. More likely the Maestro's justifications masked Ysaÿe's aggrieved perception that *any* fee request represented an *ipso facto* humiliation, an affront to his *primus inter pares* status acknowledged by fellow artists and an applauding public.



Ysaÿe portrait medal

28 Sir Landon Ronald, *Myself and Others* (Great Missenden: Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd., 1931), 140.

Initially, Ysaÿe's outcry appeared to be an isolated viewpoint unshared by other players eager to take up the work. Novello's files now in my possession bulge with correspondence from executants or their agents eager to pay the firm's asking price for the right to perform the work while it was a novelty.

By the summer of 1910 rumours that the Concerto was nearing completion began to arouse competitive bidding for the right of first performance. On 2 July, before Elgar had even sent the last movement to Novello, Thomas Busby, Managing Director and Secretary of the London Symphony Orchestra wrote with an offer to pay the hiring charges plus £125.00 for the premiere and £52.10 for the second performance. January 1911 saw the beginning of extensive correspondence with Thomas Baring, head of prominent concert agents Baring Brothers, writing on behalf of Elgar's former pupil Marie Hall, to whom Thomas Baring was married. On behalf of Hall, Baring requested the exclusive right to perform the work in North America during his wife's forthcoming tour. Novello declined as competing proposals poured in.

In February 1911, Novello received an offer from Geoffrey Turner, General Manager to Maud Powell, the American violinist who had given the US premieres of the Sibelius and Tchaikovsky violin concertos. Turner offered \$2,000 - the equivalent of a staggering \$60,000 in today's currency - for the first North American performance to take place at the forthcoming US Norfolk Festival with Powell as soloist and Elgar as conductor; or \$500 - today \$15,000 - with Powell but without Elgar. When Novello failed to reply in time for the Festival, Turner withdrew the offer; so the honour of the first performance in America went to Albert Spalding on 8 December 1911.

Others writing to ask for performance terms in 1911 included Ysaÿe's pupils Florizel von Reuter, and Michael Zacharewitsch. The L.G. Sharp concert agency wrote on behalf of Manchester violinist Helen Seely. Arthur Henry Mann, the organist at Kings College Cambridge wrote to confirm that Kings would be pleased to pay the fees for violinist Leonard Pecksai, who went on to give a thrilling performance, according to Elgar, who attended.

Between 23 November 1910 and 13 June 1912, more than 50 performances earned the composer performing fees amounting to £233 19s. The Concerto's popularity among players was short-lived, however. Between 9 December 1912 and 8 May 1914, the number of performances dwindled to seven, earning Elgar a mere £33 1s 6d.²⁹

Ysaÿe remained outspoken with a told-you-so attitude, asserting that the falling-off of performances of the Concerto was due not to the quality of, or interest in the work but to the publisher's extortionate royalty demands. At the Maestro's prompting, Ysaÿe's pupil Leonora von Stosch (Lady Speyer) pleaded the point with Elgar, who wrote to Clayton:

Severn House, 42 Netherhall Gardens, Hamstead, N.W.

May 15 1914

Dear Clayton:

The Concerto was a huge success again yesterday & I am strongly advised to withdraw all performing fees! Lady Speyer told me she had seen Ysaÿe &c. &c. & that the only thing that stood in the way of the worldwide success of the work was the terrible attitude of Novellos — I said all I could to combat the latter part: but, shall we let the work go free for the future? I am quite agreeable...

Yours snclly
Edward Elgar³⁰

29 John Drysdale: *Elgar's Earnings* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), 159.

30 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 783-784.

One factor motivating the request was Elgar's harboured hope that fee-free status might induce Ysaÿe to abandon his boycott and at last perform the Concerto in England. When Novello delayed announcing the change, Elgar wrote again to Clayton; his letter included this paragraph:

As to performing fees Concerto &c.—can't we make the announcement *now*: you see if we wait until September it will be too late for soloists &c. to include the work in the winter programmes: there may be still some reason for keeping back the announcement but wd. there be any objection to my informing Ysaÿe? Lady Speyer was very keen on his doing it when I talked to her at the last Kreisler performance & I would ask her to write to Ysaÿe & see if the thing could be reopened on friendly terms....³¹

Novello acquiesced. The August 1914 issue of the *Musical Times* carried this bulletin:

Messrs. Novello & Co. take this opportunity of announcing that, by arrangement with the Composer, they have decided to publish the parts of ELGAR'S VIOLIN CONCERTO forthwith. The Orchestral Score (Conductor's Copy and Miniature Edition) has already been published.

The Score and Parts will still be available on hire from the Publishers as heretofore.

Whenever the Score and Parts are or have been obtained directly from the Publishers, either on purchase or hiring terms, no additional fee for the right to perform will be charged until otherwise advised.

Henceforth there would be no charge for performing the Concerto. The band parts could be purchased as well as hired; if hired the composer would receive one guinea, approximately half of Novello's hiring charge.

Once again Elgar and Novello acted too late. A short time after *Musical Times* announcement, the onset of the Great War uprooted Ysaÿe, now forced into a nomadic existence, first in Britain and later in the United States. The strain of refugee status served to advance to an acute stage Ysaÿe's congenital health afflictions, chiefly his diabetes and heart disease. Henceforward his capacity to execute demanding works would be severely diminished. Given Kreisler's description of the Concerto as '...from a player's point of view, it is perhaps the most difficult of all concertos for endurance...';³² it is not surprising that Elgar's hope of hearing Ysaÿe's account went unrealised. In the summer of 1919, the ailing artist made his way back to Godinne, ending five years of enforced exile. By now, ongoing bouts of ill health confined his performing activity chiefly to unaccompanied sonatas and chamber music. When Menuhin met the Maestro in 1926, he found Ysaÿe, 'old, ailing decayed, chained to his chair by a diabolically gangrenous foot'. The 'supreme master' died 'laden with age and honour' in 1931.³³

L'affaire Ysaÿe could be dismissed as an isolated episode of egocentric self-regard were it not for the denunciations of others. Protests against Novello's fees imposed on Elgar's repertoire persisted throughout the years of the composer's client relationship with his publisher and concert agent. Consider this complaint from Harold Rawlinson, founder of the London Phoenix Orchestra, published in the 14 July 1923 edition of the *Daily Telegraph*: 'In my opinion I do not think we

31 Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, 785.

32 Hadden Squire in *The Christian Science Monitor*; Boston, 19 November 1910. Quoted in Moore, *Edward Elgar A Creative Life*, 591.

33 Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1976), 66.

shall ever be able to look forward to many public performances of Elgar's greater orchestral works while his publishers demand such heavy performing fees'.³⁴ In a subsequent *Telegraph* edition, music critic Rupert Erlebach declared himself to be in agreement, 'with those who protest that the performing fees for many Elgar works are exorbitant'.³⁵

Conspicuously absent was any protest against the exorbitance of the fees demanded by the soloist performers, compared to which the publisher's charges and the composer's remuneration were modest. In his March 1905 inaugural lecture as the University of Birmingham's Peyton Professor of Music, Elgar stressed the point that unlike authors and practitioners of the plastic arts, composers of what he termed, 'the living art of music'³⁶ depend on executants to bring their work to the attention of the public. The consequent financial disparity was the subject of an editorial published in the 1 January 1913 edition of *The Globe* that concluded with: 'To contrast the fees of the man who composes with those of the man who plays is to realise one of the world's inequalities'.³⁷

For Edward the disproportion was more than a matter of material consideration. Michael Kennedy tells us that in his Concerto, Elgar, '...filled the solo part with all the poetic and expressive warmth he must have craved as an executant'.³⁸ Had his prayers for virtuosity as a violinist been answered, would Britain's foremost composer have joined the ranks of contemporary players headed by Ysaÿe for whom the palliative of performing success served to diminish their capacity to call forth the inspiration and untiring effort needed to compose large-form music of surpassing beauty?

'I have the Concerto well in hand & have played it thro' on the P.F. & it's *good!* awfully emotional! too emotional! but I love it' wrote Elgar to Frank Schuster in May 1910.³⁹ A reward in a currency more valuable than pounds and pence awaited him in the form of a first-performance audience response the *Daily Mail* described as '...rapturous applause as might have greeted the victor of Trafalgar... For a quarter of an hour they called and recalled the man who had achieved a triumph not only for himself but for England, and hailed him with wonder and submission, as master and hero'.⁴⁰

Arthur S. Reynolds is Chairman of the Elgar Society's North America Branch. For more than half a century, he has acted as an enthusiastic rescuer of Elgar material, much of which was destined for an undeserved oblivion. Arthur holds degrees from Columbia College, Columbia University, Emmanuel College Cambridge and from New York University's Graduate Business School.

34 Richard Westwood-Brookes, *Elgar and the Press*, (2019), 236.

35 Westwood-Brookes, *Elgar and the Press*, 236.

36 Ed. Percy M. Young, *A Future for English Music* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1968), 31.

37 *The Musical Times*, 54 (1913), 20.

38 Ed. Raymond Monk, *Edward Elgar, Music and Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 72.

39 British Library, MB transcript. Letter 7019.

40 Westwood-Brookes, *Elgar and the Press*, 177.

Ralph Vaughan Williams 150 Years On

Introduction by Andrew Neill



RVW and Sir Malcolm Sargent in 1958 almost certainly discussing Vaughan Williams's ninth symphony the premiere of which Sargent conducted in London's Royal Festival Hall on 2 April with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The photograph taken by George Vargas of *Rex Features Ltd* states, on the reverse, '9th S - St Pancras Town Hall - rehearsal' confirming it was taken on Sunday 9 March. RVW died four months later on 26 August. Photograph from the collection of Ursula Vaughan Williams, courtesy of Stephen Connock.

Composers born in 1872 included Hugo Alfvén, Julius Fučík, Rubin Goldmark and Alexander Scriabin. However, looking from the comfort of this small island, perhaps the two most important 1872 musical arrivals were those of Sergei Diaghilev and Ralph Vaughan Williams (RVW). Any

connection between Elgar and Diaghilev is slender (to say the least) but there is, of course, a substantial link to RVW even if he and Elgar never became close. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that we devote a proportion of this Journal to celebrating the life of another great composer in his sesquicentennial year. It is generally accepted that the baton of leading British composer passed from Elgar to Vaughan Williams on the death of the former. Few, reading this, will have lived at the same time as Elgar and certainly even fewer (if any) will have a memory of him conducting his music.

Fifteen years younger than Elgar and living more than ten years longer, many of us reading this grew up during the time RVW was the dominant musical personality in Britain. Increasingly, this domination was shared with Benjamin Britten but, after RVW's death, this was soon undermined by factors such as the developing passion within institutions like the BBC for what was considered 'contemporary' music even if no composer could have been more 'contemporary' than RVW. The 'rot' set in shortly after his death and I remember meeting Sir William Glock, then Controller of Music at the BBC, who could not have been more charming but was obviously musically 'on another planet' to me.

Times change and much has changed, mostly for the better, notably as far as the performance of the music of Elgar and RVW is concerned. Neither were prodigies such as later contemporaries like Benjamin Britten, Rued Langgaard or Erich Korngold but neither Elgar nor RVW suffered the oblivion applied to the music of either Langgaard or Korngold.

After the death of RVW's father in February 1875 his mother took the family back to live with her parents at Leith Hill Place beneath the Surrey Downs. The photograph below shows the house today.



Elgar and RVW had little in common beyond their profession. That Elgar turned down the approach of RVW and others when they asked for lessons probably stems more from his inherent insecurity, and the fact that he was self-taught, than any lack of confidence in his ability as a composer. Their personalities were entirely different too as any reader of their respective biographies will soon deduce and, further, one raised in a city craved for the country and the other raised in the country was happy to live in London. Nevertheless, we feel that Elgar, who could be as generous as anyone, would want this RVW year recognised, and we are grateful to Hugh Cobbe for writing a piece especially for this Journal. In addition, we reproduce an article by Stephen Connock - originally published in *Musical Opinion* and we are grateful to Stephen Connock and Robert Matthew Walker, the editor, for their permission to publish it.

[N.B. SOMM Recordings have just released a 2CD set of RVW's *Wasps Overture* and Symphonies 6 and 9 remastered by our good friend Lani Spahr. Conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent, this is the premiere performance of the 9th. The notes by Simon Heffer are invaluable too. We hope to review this for the December 2022 issue of the Journal,]

Vaughan Williams at 150

Hugh Cobbe

For many commentators the role of chief torchbearer of English classical music in the twentieth century passed in succession from Edward Elgar (1857–1934) to Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), and then from Vaughan Williams to Benjamin Britten (1913–1976). The relations between each of these composers can best be described as somewhat distant, which is scarcely surprising given their very different backgrounds and approaches. In October 2022 we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of the central figure in this trio, and there is an opportunity to assess recent developments in how Vaughan Williams’s music is viewed critically and by the public.

In 2013 Michael Kennedy published an article tracing the rises and falls in the reception of the composer’s music.¹ He noted that both Elgar and Vaughan Williams suffered a period of neglect immediately following their deaths. In Vaughan Williams’s case this was somewhat paradoxical. He had done much to alleviate the position of German-speaking immigrant musicians before and during the Second World War. However, to some extent it was these very musicians whose influence led the younger generation to compare Vaughan Williams’s music unfavourably with the more astringent styles of European avant-garde composers. Even so, Vaughan Williams’s flame was by no means entirely extinguished, and performances of the major works never dried up. In 1972, to mark the centenary of his birth, the British Museum mounted an exhibition on his life and music, largely based on the generous donation of a collection of his autograph manuscripts by his widow, Ursula, who was a tireless crusader for her husband’s music. Amid a growing awareness of his achievement, by the time of the 50th anniversary of the composer’s death in 2008 his stylistic context was perceived within a broader perspective, and his music had attracted ever-increasing interest on the part of musicologists. His preoccupation with folksong (especially evident in his work as music editor of *The English Hymnal* of 1905) had perhaps led to earlier descriptions of his style as ‘cow-pat’ music and the like but it was by now becoming evident that there were hidden depths.

We have now reached the 150th anniversary of Vaughan Williams’s birth and can survey the most recent developments in both the study and general reception of his music. The Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust is a comparatively newly arrived factor on the scene. It was established under the will of Ursula Vaughan Williams to administer Ralph’s and Ursula’s intellectual property, and to receive the share of the income arising from it which had not already been assigned by them to the RVW Trust, created in 1956 to assist young British composers gain commissions and establish their reputations. The new trust has had the mission to support all aspects of the music of Vaughan Williams, in particular the operas and the publication of hitherto unpublished scores,

1 ‘Fluctuations in the response to the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams’, Alain Frogley and Aidan Thomson eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 275–297).

mostly from his earlier years; the creating of new editions and performing material for the major works, in preparation for the end of copyright protection on 31 December 2028; and the recording of previously unrecorded pieces.² Another player in the field has been the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, founded in 1994 by Stephen Connock, which has done much to foster the widespread appreciation of the composer. The society's *Journal* has become increasingly elaborate, containing articles of insight as well as reviews of performances, while the society's Albion label has created many premiere Vaughan Williams recordings. The society's founder has edited two valuable books: *Toward the Sun Rising*, a collection of personal memories of the composer either recorded directly for the book or culled from other publications; and *The Edge of Beyond*, a detailed study of Vaughan Williams's military career during the First World War. Keith Alldritt has written a biography entitled *Vaughan Williams: Composer, Radical, Patriot - a biography*, while Janet Tennant has written a biography of Ursula Vaughan Williams, *Mistress and Muse: Ursula, the Second Mrs Vaughan Williams*. Most importantly, a new volume on Vaughan Williams by Eric Saylor is to be published in mid-2022 in the Master Musicians series, while two further collections of essays on the composer, *Vaughan Williams in Context* and *Ralph Vaughan Williams and his World*, are due to appear in 2023.³ Finally, towards the end of this anniversary year, a new stained-glass window in Vaughan Williams's memory is to be unveiled in All Saints, Down Ampney, where his father was rector and he himself was born.⁴

Much of the work represented by these recent publications has been supported by two major new resources. First is the extensive collection of papers bequeathed by Ursula Vaughan Williams to the British Library following her death in October 2007. Containing papers of both Ralph and herself, it was arranged and made available as MS Mus 1714 by the end of 2011. Keith Alldritt's biography was an early beneficiary of this. The creation of a further resource arising from Ursula's papers was instigated by her in 1986. This was the formation of a corpus of Vaughan Williams's letters, many of which she had collected either as original letters or as photocopies when preparing the biography of her husband, *R.V.W.*,⁵ published in 1964. She continued to approach people she knew had letters from her husband, with the request that they might be made available to the project, and she commissioned the present writer to edit the collection. The first outcome was the publication in 2008 of a volume entitled *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*,⁶ which contained some 750 items from a collection that now amounted to some 3,500 in all, chosen to give an all-round picture of the composer, in effect in his own words. The project continued with two new editors so that the letters could be mounted in their entirety as a publicly available database, and this was launched in late 2017 to mark the tenth anniversary of Ursula's death. Since then it

2 A note of the major publications and recordings supported by the trust may be found at: <https://vwct.org.uk/support/>. There are plans to combine both trusts into a new Vaughan Williams Foundation.

3 The volume by Saylor will be published by the Oxford University Press, New York; *Vaughan Williams in Context*, edited by Julian Onderdonk and Ceri Owen, will be published by the Cambridge University Press; and *Ralph Vaughan Williams and his World*, edited by Byron Adams and Daniel Grimley, will be published by the Chicago University Press.

4 The artist will be Tom Denny, who created memorial windows in Gloucester Cathedral to Ivor Gurney and Gerald Finzi.

5 Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964)

6 Hugh Cobbe (ed), *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, revised edition 2010).

has continued to develop, and now amounts to upward of 5,100 letters - its benefit evident in the footnotes to many current articles about Vaughan Williams.⁷

So it is with this background of much increased resource that we have reached the present sesquicentennial milestone. There is no doubt that the whole event, supported in the background by the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust, is creating an ever more widespread interest in the composer's oeuvre. More than 300 performances have been logged over the anniversary season. Many are of the well-established works such as the symphonies, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and *The Lark Ascending*; but many others are of unfamiliar works, such as the British Youth Opera's production of *Sir John in Love* at Holland Park.

For those who look beyond the immediately popular works which feature year after year in the Classic FM list of public favourites, it is of course the symphonies which form the backbone of the very wide range of works in practically every genre created over a working life of more than 60 years. Michael Kennedy, describing the first symphony, *A Sea Symphony*, commented on the composer's choice of words from Whitman's poems as emphasising the soul's voyage towards the unknown. In a way this is a feature of the whole cycle of nine symphonies, and if there were to be only one achievement from the sesquicentenary it would be to move the public perception of Vaughan Williams's style away from the cosy setting of folksongs by the village green towards his confrontation with the challenges of an unknown future. The last movement of *A London Symphony* echoes this, while the *Pastoral Symphony* is a distillation of memories of wartime experience in the army. The Fourth Symphony is a passionate outburst about the cruelty of life, whether the increasing debility of his wife, Adeline, or the growing threat from Nazi Germany. The Fifth provided solace and comfort to a nation afflicted by the realities of war, while the Sixth in contrast was written amid Britain's post-war austerities and the uncertain outcome of threats presented by the Cold War. In a sense the Seventh, *Sinfonia Antartica*, reversed the equation, depicting heroism tragically vanquished by an overwhelming destiny, set in the chilling waste of the Antarctic continent. The Eighth Symphony relaxed briefly, bringing pleasure to many with its inclusion of 'all the 'phones and 'spiels known to the composer',⁸ and with the fact that it is one of the few works by Vaughan Williams to culminate with an *fff* ending. But if he was clear about this symphony's direction of travel, the same was not true of the last, his Ninth, where he knew that he was heading, in truth, 'toward the unknown region'; and indeed, he so departed just four months after the symphony's first performance. Vaughan Williams's lifelong preoccupation with Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is perhaps an indicator of this preoccupation with the journey towards an unknown destination. He used his art as a means to 'look through the magic casements and see what lies beyond'.⁹ Perhaps we may learn from the final movement of his Ninth Symphony whether he was finally content with what he thought he saw.

Hugh Cobbe was formerly Head of Music at the British Library until January 2002 and President of the Royal Musical Association 2002-2005. He is Chairman of the RVW Trust, and Director of The Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust. His edition Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958 was published by OUP in 2008 (paperback edition 2010).

7 The database, edited by Katharine Hogg and Colin Coleman, is at <http://www.vaughanwilliams.uk/> and letters are quoted by their number prefixed by VWL.

8 As Vaughan Williams wrote in his programme note for the first performance of the symphony.

9 As he wrote to the children of a primary school in Norfolk a month before he died, see VWL3275.

Music to ‘chase fatigue and fear’: Ralph Vaughan Williams – A Double Celebration in 2022

Stephen Connock

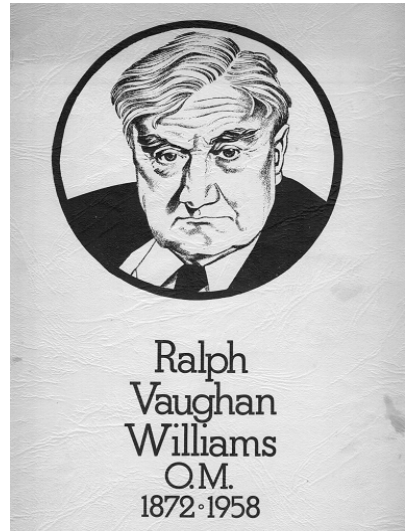
The 150th anniversary of Ralph Vaughan Williams’s birth falls on 12 October 2022 which provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the composer’s stature, nationally and internationally, and to consider the relevance and importance of his music today.

It was fortunate that Vaughan Williams’s centenary in 1972 had Sir Adrian Boult taking the lead, conducting many of the symphonies, especially Nos. 2, 5 and 8, along with a memorable *Job*. There were also fresh and lyrical performances of *Hugh the Drover*, produced by Dennis Arundell, in June that year at the Royal College of Music, and a series of five concerts conducted by Donald Cashmore at London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall, with highlights including *Epithalamion*, *Pilgrim’s Journey* and *Hodie*. A youthful André Previn conducted *A London Symphony* at the Royal Festival Hall on 26 September 1972 and told us: ‘I don’t think there is a worry in the world that Vaughan Williams is a world figure’. With a centenary exhibition in the British Museum and EMI Records proudly announcing the recording premiere of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* it seemed that the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams had, as Sir Arthur Bliss put it in 1972, achieved a ‘passport to the interest of posterity’.

The subsequent 50 years have only partly sustained the momentum generated by those centenary celebrations. Richard Hickox performed all nine symphonies with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in September and October 1995 at the Barbican in London, leading to *The Times*, after the performance of the *Fifth Symphony*, saying: ‘Hickox and his players came close to the music’s heart, revealing its greatness of soul’.

Recordings of Vaughan Williams’s music have certainly exceeded all expectations. There are 10 complete sets of the symphonies (Boult twice, Previn, Thomson, Slatkin, Handley, Haitink, Andrew Davis, Rozhdestvensky and Manze) with more to come from Martyn Brabbins and Sir Mark Elder. Only the untimely death of Richard Hickox in 2008 prevented another complete cycle. All the operas are now available on CD, including *The Poisoned Kiss* (Chandos, 2003), along with the music to each of Vaughan Williams

Cover of the Centenary Booklet, 1972.



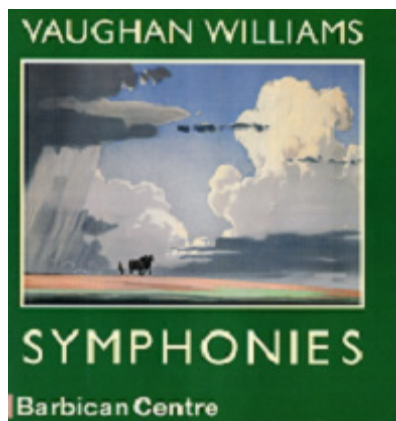
film soundtracks. This recording bonanza represents a remarkable achievement and is due mainly to the efforts of EMI, Chandos, Hyperion and, more recently, Albion Records. This label, the recording wing of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, has released almost 250 world premiere recordings of individual works and arrangements including *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* conducted by Sir David Willcocks and *A Cambridge Mass* conducted by Alan Tongue

It remains a major disappointment, however, that there are so few DVDs of the music of Vaughan Williams. Only one of his operas can be viewed on DVD – *Riders to the Sea* with Sarah Walker as Maurya and Bryden Thomson conducting (Warner 51442, 1988). At least there are two excellent documentaries on Vaughan Williams; *O Thou Transcendent* directed by Tony Palmer (Isolde Films, 2007) and *The Passions of Vaughan Williams*, directed by John Bridcut (shown in 2008 and released by Crux Productions in 2018).

The passing of Boult, Barbirolli, Sargent, Previn, Hickox, Willcocks, Handley, Thomson and many other fine conductors has clearly had a major impact on performances of Vaughan Williams's music. Many of these conductors held official positions in orchestras and were in a commanding role to programme the composer. This could be experienced, for example, in concerts with Boult and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Barbirolli with the Hallé and both Previn and Hickox with the London Symphony Orchestra. The gap has been partly filled by Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Mark Elder, Sir Andrew Davis, Martyn Brabbins, Andrew Manze, John Wilson, Paul Daniel and, more recently, Sir Antonio Pappano but the relative pre-pandemic absence of Vaughan Williams from the concert halls in both the UK and North America was noteworthy. When did you last hear *A Sea Symphony* at the Royal Festival Hall? Royalty/performance income is constant at around £668,000 per annum, which is about half that of Benjamin Britten, largely because Britten's operas raise a higher level of income. At least a number of non-British conductors are now programming Vaughan Williams, including Jurowski, Vasily Petrenko and Salonen.

What is very different now compared to 1972 is the volume of Vaughan Williams material that is easily accessible online. Remarkably, over 5,100 letters to and from Vaughan Williams can be found online at <http://www.vaughanwilliams.uk/>, building on Hugh Cobbe's more selective publication of *The Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, with a most helpful word search facility and year-by-year breakdown. The RVW Society website contains much fascinating information on the composer while You Tube provides opportunities to watch Sir Simon Rattle conduct the London Symphony Orchestra in the Fifth Symphony from the 2020 Proms or La Jolla Symphony Orchestra from California playing *Dona Nobis Pacem* along with hundreds of other fascinating performances. Digital offerings still contain disappointments. There is only one performance of a Vaughan Williams work in the Digital Concert Hall of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra – the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, conducted by Rattle.

To demonstrate an increasing international interest there are now French and German studies of Ralph Vaughan Williams. The French book is by Marc Vignal in the *Collection Horizons* edition (2015) and the German-language book is in the *Musik-Konzepte* series (2018), with a chapter by



Cover of the programme for 3 October 1995

David Manning on the non-symphonic orchestral music.

This is all most encouraging but serious gaps remain. Productions of Vaughan Williams operas are very rare. In 2012 Martyn Brabbins conducted the first fully-staged performances of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in London since the Covent Garden premiere in 1951 (both the Philharmonia Orchestra and the Royal Opera versions of 2008 had been semi-staged) – and this for a work many regard as Vaughan Williams's ultimate masterpiece. Richard Hickox programmed a concert performance of *Sir John in Love* at Newcastle City Hall in September 2000 and English National Opera staged both *Sir John in Love* and *Riders to the Sea* in 2006 and 2008 respectively. Excerpts from *The Poisoned Kiss* were heard in a concert performance at the Barbican in 2008 and, for professional performances of the operas at least, that is about all. Impressive productions by a mix of amateur and professional forces of *Hugh the Drover*; (Sussex Opera, Hampstead Garden Opera), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Royal Northern College of Music, twice, Cincinnati Opera), *The Poisoned Kiss* (Leeds Youth Opera, Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club, Sussex Opera, Bronx Opera and The Wandering Minstrels) have served only to remind us of what we are missing. Performances of *Job*, a 'Masque for Dancing', are equally rare, especially in the original staged version. This score is one of Vaughan Williams's strongest, revealing the diverse elements of the composer's musical genius, and its neglect is puzzling. Fortunately, the centenary concert from 1972, with Boult leading a magisterial performance of the orchestral version of *Job*, has been released by ICA Classics on DVD (ICAD 5037, 2011).

Why has Vaughan Williams's 'passport to the interest of posterity' been delayed? The problem continues to be a perception among certain arts administrators and commentators that his music is 'national', by which they mean both 'provincial' and 'insular'. Vaughan Williams found his musical style through English folk song and, even when he is not quoting folk song directly, the modal harmonies, colour and contours of folk song are deeply assimilated in his music. English folk song freed Vaughan Williams from foreign, mainly Teutonic influence which had weighed on him in the period up to 1908 and he also loved folk music for its intrinsic beauty. As Michael Kennedy put it: 'Through a conscious nationalism Vaughan Williams discovered a means of self-expression'.

What is wrong with that? Chopin, Bartók, Kodály, Smetana, Borodin, Dvořák, Grieg, Sibelius and many other composers have created their own national musical idiom, often using folk songs of their countries either directly or more subtly. Vaughan Williams said: 'The composer who tries to be cosmopolitan from the outset will fail, not only with the world at large, but with his own people as well. Was anyone ever more local, or even parochial, than Shakespeare?' Yet this national means of expression still provokes dislike, even hostility, and partly accounts for the

Advert for *The Poisoned Kiss*, Leeds Youth Opera, February 2012.



relative scarcity of Vaughan Williams performances. The appointment in 1959 of William Glock as BBC Controller of Music, which included organising the BBC Proms from 1960 to 1973, led to a marked reduction in Vaughan Williams performances at the Proms. From a total of 59 Vaughan Williams works played in the years 1950-59 there were just 28 works programmed in the years 1960-69. As Glock put it in the 1961 Proms booklet, he wanted to ‘Look further abroad for works that would add colour and freshness to the programmes’. This often led to more Edgard Varèse than Ralph Vaughan Williams, with a continuing focus on the music of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. This emphasis at the Proms continued after Glock’s retirement; there were no Vaughan Williams works at all in 2006 (planned by Nicholas Kenyon) or in 2011 (under Roger Wright) and only two in 2021.

William Glock and his successors knew that programming often atonal works would not be popular with audiences but they believed they knew better than anybody what was good for us. Surveys of audience preferences do not always agree. In 2021 *Classic FM* listeners voted Vaughan Williams’s *The Lark Ascending* the UK’s favourite piece of classical music for a record eleventh time since the radio station began this survey 26 years earlier. In addition, the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* was voted Number 3 in this ‘Hall of Fame’. No music by Varèse or Schoenberg, not even *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*) can be found in the top 300. For many arts administrators, however, we are still in the wrong. As Vaughan Williams put it in 1951: ‘Schoenberg meant nothing to me – but as he apparently meant a lot to a lot of other people I daresay it is all my own fault’.

In summary, Vaughan Williams has benefited from an astonishing array of fine recordings over the last 50 years but performances of his works remain patchy and the operas fare even worse. His nine symphonies are widely respected as are certain of his choral works such as the *Mass in G minor*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, *Sancta Civitas* and the exquisite *Serenade to Music*. His hold on the affections of classical music audiences seems assured, notwithstanding that their preference is for the gentle beauty of works like *The Lark Ascending* rather than the more uncompromising *Fourth Symphony* or *Piano Concerto*. We can look forward with eager anticipation to anniversary performances in 2022 under the banner *RVW150*, including a Vaughan Williams Festival at the composer’s birthplace of Down Ampney in Gloucestershire starting on 12 October 2022.

Vaughan Williams in 1951 in his study at The White Gates, Dorking



Centenary of the *Pastoral Symphony*

Vaughan Williams's third symphony was first performed 100 years ago in the Queen's Hall, London on 26 January 1922 with the orchestra of the Royal Philharmonic Society conducted by Adrian Boult. The soprano soloist in the last movement was Flora Mann.

The soldier-composer had begun to think about this symphony in 1916 while he was on active service in the British Army based at Ecoivres in Northern France. His unit was the 2/4th London (Field) Ambulance within the Royal Army Medical Corps and Vaughan Williams experienced much of the terror and pathos of war in this harrowing role. The Field Ambulance was next posted to Salonika in Southern Greece, arriving on 30 November 1916. Here the main danger was malaria rather than the aggression of enemy forces along the Salonica Front. On 27 March 1917, Vaughan Williams decided to apply for a Temporary Commission as an Officer, and he was accepted on 29 April 1917. After intense training at Maresfield Park in East Sussex and at Lydd in Kent he was assigned to 141 Heavy Battery, within the 86th Brigade of the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was one of the subalterns responsible for the heavy horses that transported 60-pounder guns to various locations behind the front line in the area south of Arras, back in Northern France. Vaughan Williams joined his new unit in the middle of a dreadful British retreat during the massive German 'Spring Offensive' of March 1918. He survived this onslaught and, within months, became directly involved in three major offensive battles of 1918 – the Battle of Amiens, Fifth Battle of Ypres and the Battle of Courtrai.

As if witnessing first-hand the awful impact of artillery warfare was not enough, Vaughan Williams became, unhappily, part of the Army of Occupation, marching through Namur and Charleroi toward the Rhineland following the Armistice signed on 11 November 1918. Fortunately, after a few weeks he was transferred from the front line to a new role as Director of Music for the First Army, based in Valenciennes in France. Vaughan Williams's marching days were over. He was back in England – at Sheringham in North Norfolk – by mid-February 1919 and finally demobilised on 18 July 1919. He had witnessed death and destruction daily and lost many of his close family and friends during the war, not least the composer George Butterworth who was killed by a sniper on 5 August 1916 near Pozzières.

The horrors of The Great War emerge in Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony*, less in anger than in sadness and regret together with a profound sense of loss. Pastoral imagery is invoked as a deliberate antithesis to the indescribable features of the war raging around him. Ursula Vaughan Williams recalled in her biography of her husband what he had said about the *Pastoral Symphony* in a letter to her in 1938:

Ralph Vaughan Williams in the Royal Garrison Artillery, 1917



It's really war-time music – a great deal of it incubated when I used to go up night after night with the ambulance wagon at Ecoivres and we went up a steep hill and there was a wonderful Corot-like landscape in the sunset – it's not really lambskins frisking at all as most people take for granted.

Alongside the war-inspired music, the French and English landscapes also seem to merge in this moving symphony. Herbert Howells described the work as 'the Malvern Hills when viewed from afar' and the work's understated quality owes something to the quiet of the Cotswolds near where Vaughan Williams was born. The work also shows the influence of Maurice Ravel, Vaughan Williams's teacher for a short period in early 1908, especially in the impressionistic first movement. Here, too, folk song is deeply sublimated – as in so much of Vaughan Williams's works – lending a notable elegiac tone to the symphony.

Following the first performance in 1922, contemporary press reactions were mixed. H. C. Colles, writing in the *Evening Mail* on 1 February 1922, was most impressed with the fourth movement:

'The theme of the *Finale*, which is first heard sung by the soprano voice above a distant drum roll ... pervades the whole of this wonderful movement, and creates a climax, not a battering climax of full orchestral tone but one reached in an intense unison of violins. This movement is in a sense the finest of the four, or rather it is the one which justifies and fulfils the other three.

Ernest Newman, in *The Sunday Times* on 29 January 1922, was less convinced, feeling that the work 'always keeps promising something that it never performs'. Commenting that practically the whole symphony is painted in 'low tones' he hoped he might like the work more in subsequent hearings and did, indeed, write more enthusiastically about the symphony on 23 December 1923 when he said that the work was 'Vaughan Williams often at his best'. Francis Toye, reviewing the symphony on 11 February 1922, said that the work was 'strikingly bold because it is so wholly restrained'. This elusive symphony communicates powerfully and effectively without hardly raising its voice, an unusual and subtle symphonic technique which was to be repeated in the pure *pianissimo* fourth movement of Vaughan Williams's *Sixth Symphony* composed around 25 years later.

The restraint of the *Pastoral Symphony* can be heard in the opening *molto moderato* which is quiet and contemplative. A solo violin introduces a gentle arabesque. Much solo work follows, for flute, oboe, harp and horn, built around a descending four-note phrase. Despite the slow tempi, there is a powerful underlying momentum. The ruminative mood is continued in the second movement, marked *lento moderato*, which includes a natural E flat trumpet, one without valves, playing a haunting solo against muted strings. This magical episode originated when Vaughan Williams heard a bugler practising in the woods when he was based at Bordon, Hampshire, for his officer training in late 1917. There is a forlorn *Last Post* quality about this episode, making it all the more surprising that early audiences and commentators did not grasp the significance of the wartime influence on this symphony. Vaughan Williams described the third movement, *moderato pesante*, as 'in the nature of a dance'. The first real climax of the work is reached before a short fugal coda dissolves into silence.

It is in the finale that Vaughan Williams allows the pent-up emotions and the pity of war to fully emerge. Now the loss of so many friends and comrades is deeply felt. The movement begins with a wordless soprano vocalise, both visionary and ethereal, un-harmonised except for a drum-roll, which seems to conjure up, as one of Vaughan Williams's colleagues in the Field Ambulance

said: ‘the desolate area of no-man’s land some called the Edge of Beyond’. From this poignant moment the most expressive and heartfelt theme of the symphony is heard on lower strings. The music becomes even more impassioned, led by flutes and strings, leading to a fulsome restatement of the soprano’s melody for full orchestra. The disembodied voice returns, this time accompanied by a high note held by muted strings, before dying away, leaving so much unsaid. As Wilfred Owen put it in *Spring Offensive*: ‘Why speak they not of comrades that went under?’

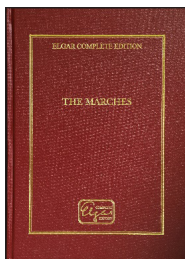
The *Pastoral Symphony* is intense, absorbing music as Vaughan Williams gives expression to his innermost feelings of loss and regret, and allows himself, and us, to mourn for those that suffered. This grieving is universal, a benediction recollected in tranquillity and expressed with total sincerity.

High Table

Vaughan Williams, on the 150th anniversary of his birth, can rest easy having secured a place at the High Table of Composing Immortals, even if he is not yet near the head of that table. He will be there in his pork pie hat, old Mackintosh and in a jumper torn apart by numerous cats. Vaughan Williams’s modesty and lack of interest in status symbols – he refused a knighthood on at least two occasions – along with his thoughtfulness and undoubted sincerity, accords with contemporary values leading to many, including Benjamin Britten, calling him ‘a great man’. He was that and more – a great composer whose stature in this special year is increasingly recognised. Remembering the words he set in *An Oxford Elegy*, Vaughan Williams wrote music ‘to chase fatigue and fear’. This is the more necessary today given the post-pandemic ‘harsh, heart-wearying roar’.

Stephen Connock retired from a long career in business having been awarded an MBE for his work in the customer service field in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 1999. He collaborated with Sir Paul McCartney as Chairman of the Linda McCartney Foundation, raising funds in England and America to fight breast cancer. In this capacity, he commissioned 10 new works from British composers for the song-cycle A Garland for Linda, recorded by EMI in 1999.

Stephen was one of three co-founders of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society in 1994 and the Society’s first chairman. He was also Editor of the Journal of the RVW Society from 1995 to 2004. He founded and led Albion Music and Albion Records and is the author, co-author or editor of 10 books. He is now a Vice-President of the RVW Society and is writing A Musical Warrior – Ralph Vaughan Williams in the Second World War, due for publication in 2024.



Rickmansworth

The Elgar Complete
Edition 2021

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MUSIC REVIEWS

Elgar: The Marches

Elgar Complete Edition, Volume 29 edited by Sarah Thompson

As an enthusiastic collector of scores, I am always cheered up when the latest volume of the Elgar Complete Edition arrives at home. The superb production values of these scores is a very special thing, and something the editorial team should be congratulated upon. The Marches volume continues the fine tradition of previous volumes, with impeccable scholarship and exemplary score layout ensuring every detail of Elgar's flawless orchestration is presented with crystal clear clarity.

The march as a genre was a form which occupied Elgar's creative thoughts from as early as 1881, evidence the sketches of *Marziale* in the appendix of this volume, and as late as September 1933, the March in B flat being the last work he started. Although neither work is complete they both, along with the eight completed marches, show that Elgar clearly had a real enthusiasm for this succinct, stirring and oftentimes practical musical form.

One of the indisputably brilliant qualities of all of Elgar's orchestral music is the profound level of understanding he had for how best to clothe his musical ideas, both in terms of textural layering, and of orchestration. In addition, his clever use of articulation - how often we see the same line in different voices of the orchestra, marked at differing dynamic levels, with different articulations and varying dynamic nuances. The marches, although undoubtedly 'occasional' pieces and not at the qualitative heart of Elgar's output, do nonetheless display this refined aural imagination and attention to detail, apparent on each page of this volume.

Just looking at pages 220 and 221, in the luxuriously elaborate *Coronation March*, we see clearly the master composer's fabulously intricate and complex scoring. The two harps striding along with those fingerprint eight repeated quavers in the bar, the two players an octave apart. The subtle shadings of colour created by the wind and horns doubling of the string lines. The dynamic increases as we approach the climactic *Grandioso*, and trumpet triplet quavers appear, as the trombones and tuba add their inimitable colour and power with highly athletic descending quaver arpeggios. All of this underpinned by an organ pedal G, 16' and 32', and background harmonic doubling. The care and thought that is required to create such a richly vibrant orchestral sonority was something that came naturally to Elgar, and this characteristic of his music appears time and again in the eight marches in this handsome volume.

The march and percussion were clearly made for one another, and Elgar deploys the percussion quite precisely here. The usual complement of timpani, snare drum, bass drum and cymbals is standard throughout, but it

is the additional instruments that help create specific colour and character. The glockenspiel appears only in *Pomp and Circumstance* No.1. The jingles (schellen - as we hear in the opening few bars of Mahler's 4th Symphony) Elgar uses in both numbers 1 and 2. The tenor drum makes a couple of appearances, in *Pomp and Circumstance* No.3 and the *Coronation March*, and tubular bells are heard only in the *Empire March*. Elgar displays his usual personal and careful way of integrating the percussion department into the overall orchestral timbre.

A few other details caught my eye. I am particularly partial to the fact that *Pomp and Circumstance* No.1 in D major, begins on an E flat. A wonderful example of Elgar's wry sense of humour. Only *Pomp and Circumstance* No.5 uses the 6/8 time signature - made famous by J.P. Sousa of course, but clearly not a metre that attracted Elgar to the same extent. The last couple of pages of *Pomp and Circumstance* No.3 are very striking, in many different aspects - but particularly I find the penultimate bar to be completely delightful.

(One thing that caught my conductorly eye - the penultimate bar of the *Empire March* - should the cymbal *sforzando* be on the 4th beat, not the 3rd, with the rest of the orchestra?).

Martyn Brabbins

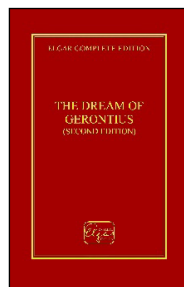
Elgar: The Dream of Gerontius

Elgar Complete Edition, Volume 6 (second edition), edited by Iain Farrington

My first impressions of this new edition were not only the size and weight of it with the familiar, distinctive, almost Regal livery of the Elgar Complete Edition replete with gold lettering, but also, on opening the volume, to see that the presentation, printing and paper were all of superb quality. The volume is a pleasure to handle. That the editorial team have in the years of Covid completed this vast assignment of a new edition of the full score, is quite remarkable. Iain Farrington and all of those named (on page xxvii) should be congratulated on this nothing-less-than-superb achievement which is unlikely to be superseded for many decades.

Before reaching the score itself, there is a very detailed FOREWORD relating how the work came to be written and the process of composition. Many of us will be familiar with the fact that A.J. Jaeger of Novello had a considerable part to play in the published version of Elgar's masterpiece, not least in his insistence that the climax of the work should be rewritten following Elgar's first thoughts: the orchestral passage leading up to the 'God chord', followed by the tenor's 'Take me away', producing perhaps one of the most awe-inspiring and terrifying moments in all music.

This outlining of the work's history (even if one is familiar with it) makes for very worthwhile reading and anyone with a particular interest in the work



Rickmansworth

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should absorb this superbly written and informative introduction by John Norris, which also includes detailed information on the work's source material (Elgar's manuscript vocal and full scores, the printed vocal and full scores as well as the printed orchestral parts). This invaluable Foreword also sets out Elgar's advice to his friend Nicholas Kilburn on details of performance practice in such as the Demons' Chorus which, although available in much other biographical material, is very instructive to read again and to realise how particular the composer was about the interpreting of his music.

After the 115 (!) endnotes following the Foreword (many of those being references to correspondence between Elgar and his publishers, Novello, including much to and from Jaeger) and acknowledgements of the editorial team's work, there comes a pictorial section. Here we find well-reproduced photographs of Cardinal Newman (author of the poem) and Elgar, both striking similar poses, the soloists at the premiere (Marie Brema, Edward Lloyd and Harry Plunket Greene), Hans Richter, conductor of the premiere, and George Johnstone, Chairman of the Birmingham Festival Committee that commissioned the work. The pages that follow in this section are facsimiles of various parts of Elgar's manuscript sketches and score (also well reproduced), some sketches for music not eventually used and, most interestingly, a page of the autograph full score leading up to the 'God chord' with Elgar's instructions for this moment inserted in manuscript ('N.B. At [figure] 120 for "one moment" must every instrument exert its fullest force') as well as that famous title page of the autograph full score signed by the performers of the premiere. There is also reproduced the composer's dedication (in September 1902) of the autograph score to Birmingham Oratory, and the famous quotation from Ruskin ('This is the best of me. . .') signed by Elgar at Birchwood Lodge in August 1900.

There follows an in-depth section, SOURCES, which begins with the full text of Cardinal Newman's poem, printed in such a way that we can see in bold font the lines that Elgar actually set and those he cut (these in a lighter font). The number of lines not set is considerable particularly in Part 2. One can of course see why; the work would otherwise have been of an impractical length! But also of interest are the lines from a copy of the published poem belonging to General Charles Gordon (found among his belongings after his death at Khartoum) which he had marked as being of particular spiritual interest: 'These lines were widely copied following Gordon's death and are included in the text below' by means of side lines.

The Sources section has many nuggets of information embedded in the wealth of detail, too many to enumerate, but one example is in the manuscript vocal score, showing that the Angel of the Agony's solo was a late addition to the work and that this music was originally conceived for Judas in *The Apostles*, a fact of which I was certainly unaware. Another revelation of especial interest is that the score of the Prelude includes the composer's naming of the various themes contained therein such as Fear, Prayer, Sleep, Miserere, Despair, etc., but the practice was not continued by Elgar in the rest of the work. These identifications were repeated by Jaeger in his analysis of

the work, which is printed in full as an Appendix at the end of this volume.

There then follows the COMMENTARY which in essence is a scrupulously detailed breakdown of the many errors from previous editions of the score and the orchestral parts and which are now corrected. To quote from the preamble to this section:

The prime purpose of the Commentary is to record differences between the chosen copy text (almost invariably the published score where one exists) and this Edition.

Followed by:

While the full score published by Novello in 1902...is taken as the natural copy text for this Edition, its congested layout resulted in a significant number of engraving errors and ambiguities which can be clarified with reference to the autograph full score, published vocal score and printed orchestral parts.

Therefore such important minutiae as slurs beginning and ending in the wrong place, incorrect note values, incorrect stems on individual notes, dynamic and other markings wrongly placed, and many more errors that have accrued over the years, all these have been meticulously corrected and are listed in seven very detailed pages with reference to those sources noted above.

We then come to the SCORE itself. My only point of comparison with this new edition has been the Novello Study Score of 1992 (much smaller in size of course) which itself was based on the first edition of this volume, published by Novello in 1982. That this new edition completely supersedes that one in every particular, is noticeable from the very first page of the Prelude in which the layout of the orchestral material is more spaciouly printed in a clearer font (the details of Elgar's astonishing and masterful orchestration leaping out with renewed clarity) enabling one to follow the score with ease when listening to a recording and to enable the listener to identify so much detail one was unaware of previously. For instance, from four bars after figure 25, 'Tis this strange innermost abandonment...' the strings are spaciouly divided (each instrument in three, then four parts) and the two harps are playing repeated note triplets at the bottom of their registers: here was something I had not really taken in previously but to see this remarkably atmospheric detail of orchestration in print so clearly was something of a minor revelation (and for instance, is most certainly to be heard on the Barbirolli recording of 1964). Of course, that is a very small but telling detail.

The larger moments of this miraculous score, too, are as visually impressive on the page as they are aurally arresting in performance so that as another example, the great *tutti* passage at the end of Part 1 has all the instrumental parts, phrasing, dynamics and the text printed with the greatest clarity and definition so as to make one marvel once more at Elgar's sheer virtuosity and imagination. The same must also be said for the beginning of Part 2 where a

new sound world (reflecting Gerontius passing into the afterlife) is portrayed with the utmost subtlety of very soft muted strings (at one point, they are directed to play *pppp*) and in complete contrast, the Demons' Chorus which unleashes the most stunning orchestral and choral forces in, again, a feat of virtuosity surely unmatched at this period of English music - a comparison with no less a composer than Berlioz is surely not out of place at this point in the work, as one of the more enlightened reviewers of the first performance indicated.

Likewise, the 'Praise the Holiest' sequence, with so much variety and detail in the scoring and choral writing, is a joy to read and to absorb in this new edition. That Elgar reached the heights of inspiration in this work is never in doubt. There are of course so many moments one could choose to demonstrate the composer's absolute mastery of his material, his mastery of orchestral colour, and vocal and choral writing of thrilling idiomatic quality, that it would take far too much of this review - it goes without saying that one can of course listen to a recording or attend a performance to experience these qualities. To have been able to study this score in its new garb has been the greatest pleasure. The remarkable definition of the printing style throughout has made a huge difference in following it as a listener and it will surely be a revelation to conductors utilising it for performances now and in the future.

I have identified remarkably few typographical errors, not that I was looking for any but it is incumbent on the reviewer to point out such things! In the Foreword there is a misspelling of 'soloists' (as 'solists') on page xxiii; on page xxxi, in the printing of the epigram signed by Hans Richter ('Let drop the chorus, let drop everybody - but let not drop the wings of your original genius') from the title page of the autograph full score, the word 'everybody' is missing the 'r'. And one other minor typo, also in the Foreword, the number of page 'xlv' is missing. In the context of this considerable achievement these are hardly blemishes of any note and will barely be noticed by the majority of purchasers.

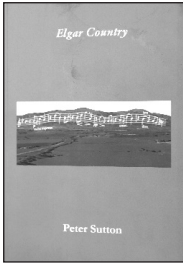
Following the score, as an APPENDIX and printed in full, are the 'Analytical and Descriptive Notes by A.J. Jaeger on the Dream of Gerontius'. This thorough analysis of the work is as complete as it is possible to be in describing the work to an audience new to the work. That the first audience had Jaeger's notes to refer to would have meant considerable study before the performance, there being so much to absorb. There are no fewer than 76 musical examples to guide the listener, though if the prospective listener were a non-musician, these wouldn't mean a great deal, nor would some of the technical language describing purely musical happenings. Nonetheless to have this valuable and detailed analysis (which was approved by Elgar) by Elgar's great friend and supporter is a fitting end to this fine volume. The listener is taken through every stage of the work with the various motifs named (the opening of the Prelude is the Judgment theme, the next occurring one, the Fear theme) and are referred to in the progress through the work as and when they occur. Interestingly, Elgar in a letter to Jaeger regarding these motifs revealingly says, 'My wife fears you may be inclined to lay too

great stress on the leitmotiven plan because I really do it without thought - intuitively, I mean'.¹ Although as already stated, this extensive note is really for reading at home before attending a performance, even the non-musician can gain an understanding of the work through the telling of the narrative as it proceeds. Once again, the presentation here doesn't falter; the musical examples are laid out with exemplary clarity on the page, and the text printed with the same clarity and size of print as the Foreword at the beginning of the volume.

In sum, as I have indicated, Elgar's extraordinary score is given (through the remarkable work of the editorial team, for which I have the greatest admiration) a sweeping overhaul/makeover that respects the greatness of Elgar and his masterwork and thus allows us to marvel anew at this most moving and affecting of not only English choral works but one of the greatest choral works ever written.

Stephen Dickinson

1 Letter from Elgar to Jaeger, August 1900, quoted in Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* 2nd Edition (London, Oxford University Press, 1982), 114.



Elgar Country

Peter Sutton

This book of poems follows an Elgarian precedent of sorts. There can only be a few composers who have attracted poetry about their art as well as their character and the landscape in which they flourished. Elgar, it turns out, is one of those *few* for in 1962, in the volume of poetry *The Gate*, Cecil Day Lewis published his fine poem *Edward Elgar 1957 – 1934*. His words certainly seem to encapsulate Elgar's life, art and the country that nurtured him.

Black Pear Press

ISBN

978-1-913418-60-1

38 pages

Genius alone can move by singular ways
Yet home to the heart of all, the common chord;
Beat to its own time, timelessly make heard
A long-breathed statement or a hesitant phrase.¹

Earlier, Siegfried Sassoon, who met Elgar at The Hut at Bray, reacted emotionally to the Violin Concerto after hearing it in January 1917:

I have seen Christ, when music wove
Exulting vision; storms of prayer
Deep-voiced within me marched and strove.
The sorrows of the world were there.

O music undeterred by death,
And darkness closing on your flame,
Christ whispers in your dying breath,
And haunts you with his tragic name.²

This may be an intense reaction to the music but, if it is placed within the context of Sassoon's life at the time, it makes sense. Peter Sutton's volume displays a different response without diminishing the obvious love he has for Elgar's music. A series of poems considers various aspects and moments of and in Elgar's life in a beautifully presented paper-back publication. The cover is adorned with a photograph of the Malvern Hills. Over the spine the hills flow: the opening six bars of the *Enigma Variations*, *cresc.* pointing to a climb and *dim.* a descent.

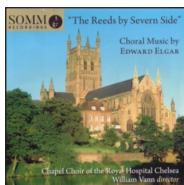
Poetry seems to flow through Sutton's veins. He has translated into modern verse *Piers Plowman* and there are echoes of Kipling in some of the 27 poems in this book. The first poem reminds me of the beginning of *Beowulf*: 'Let us begin' and we are drawn into Elgar's world as Sutton references his sayings

- 1 The poem is reproduced in *The Elgar Society Newsletter*, May 1974 (Issue No 3).
- 2 The concert which Sassoon attended was in Liverpool (he was stationed at Litherland on Merseyside). His poem and his reaction on hearing Elgar's Concerto might form the basis of a future article in the Journal. It is worth noting that he was reading, at the time, the novel about Christ, *The Brook of Kerith*, by George Moore.

and attitudes: ‘There is a kindly spirit in the air’. There is wit in his poem *Enigma* and in his portrait of Worcester, and the poem *The Railway* recalls Flanders and Swann as the words spin slowly alongside a train as it trundles on into Herefordshire, the county where Elgar composed more great music than anywhere. The Hereford, Malvern, and Worcester statues come alive as they contemplate nature, their next composition and those who perform it and give it life. Two are life-like while the one in Worcester’s centre now seems strangely remote; it could be any academic wearing his robes as he considers his next lecture.

I missed Sutton’s play, *Elgar and Alice*, in 2007 so it is good to become acquainted with him through this charming volume. This is not for everyone as the appreciation of poetry is subjective and there are those who will respond more than others to this collection; for my part, knowing its likely audience, I commend it whole-heartedly.

Andrew Neill



CD REVIEWS

‘The Reeds by Severnside’

Choral Music by Edward Elgar

Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea; Joshua Ryan, organ;

William Vann, director

(Supported by The Elgar Society with funds from the Kay Family Trust)

SOMM Recordings

SOMMCD 0278

We have on this timely and so well-produced release a fascinating guide through Elgar’s progress from journeyman to great composer, taking us through the choral music he produced during his long career. No massive oratorios, cantatas or odes here, but a survey of some of his more modest works, often for unaccompanied chorus (William Vann directing the Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea). Andrew Neill’s remarkably detailed and informative insert-notes guide us through this journey, which begins with the touching works the teenaged Elgar composed for the Roman Catholic St George’s Church in Worcester (barely a stone’s throw from the Anglican Cathedral where so many of his greatest triumphs would be celebrated) where he succeeded his father as organist.

The very early Gloria perfumed with Catholic incense and the influence of Mozart, reproducing the sounds the young Elgar would have heard at Mass. Joshua Ryan provides lovely organ registrations, and the stereo separation of the choristers is magnificently engineered.

After this comes the *Credo*, simply astounding in its references to several Beethoven symphonies (only those to the Ninth are unconvincing). Surely the teenage Elgar could never have heard all these works in performance in tucked-away Worcester; he must have soaked them up from the scores he stuffed into his pocket along with the bread and cheese he devoured during lunchtimes away from his father’s shop. This is a remarkable achievement.

The *Drakes Broughton* hymn-tune, named after a hamlet near Pershore (I wonder why?) looks forward to the very end of Elgar’s life, and its inclusion in the poignant *Nursery Suite*, composed for the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. Three liturgical offerings follow, often with delicious organ interplay: *O Salutaris Hostia*, genuinely-felt; *Jesu, Lord of Life and Mercy*, with its incense-swaying ending, and *Jesu, meek and lowly*, with a sweet soprano solo.

We then leap across dozens of opus numbers before arriving at ‘As Torrents in Summer’, coming at the conclusion of the cantata *King Olaf* Elgar composed for Hanley in 1896. There is too much of the Anglican restraint here, something one would never have heard at the work’s premiere at the North Staffordshire Festival, but this account under William Vann is beautifully balanced and finely textured.

There is Sweet Music is famous for its bitonality, women answering men as

though from above, and eventually combining. This is a more than wonderful example of Elgar's four-part vocal writing, and the ending is utterly atmospheric. The chants of *Psalm 68* pass by with little lasting impression, but the *Angelus*, Elgar allegedly translating the text from its Tuscan original, is traced with delicate filigree, with wonderful interplay between sopranos and tenors.

They are at Rest, setting a text from John Henry Newman, figuring again in Elgar's output after *Gerontius*, composed for the tenth anniversary of the death of Queen Victoria, is simple and chaste, yet charged with the typically yearning, descending phrases so characteristic of the composer.

The plaintive, humble supplications of *Intende voci orationis meae* are short and sweet, preceding the grandeur of *Give unto the Lord* (Psalm 29), with its big opening, large-scale vision, and busy, important organ part. Textures here are almost orchestral (and unwittingly remind of the 'Fate' leitmotif in Wagner's *Ring*). There are also some self-borrowings here, mirroring *The Music Makers*.

Fear Not, O Land is confident, Elgar masterly in his writing for this medium after so many decades, as is *I Sing the Birth*, with its medieval atmosphere, solo voices answered by chorus. Was a tinge of sycophancy involved in *Good Morrow – A simple carol for His Majesty's happy recovery*? I guess there was, and the memory of the continually social-climbing Alice Elgar was surely behind it. The piece seems workaday in its pen-pushing, and one wonders how much of Elgar's creative heart was in this.

Queen Alexandra's Memorial Ode (how old-fashioned that now sounds to our modern sensibilities, after the transforming 70 years of Queen Elizabeth II on the throne) has a Purcellian opening with its extended organ introduction, and its assured vocal writing reveals Elgar's genuine sentiment, perhaps thinking back to the 1904 Elgar Festival in which Queen Alexandra and her husband, King Edward VII, took so much interest.

This is an historically fascinating, well-performed and scrupulously-produced release. Some of the music may be uneven in quality, but this overview of Elgar throughout his long career remains a valuable document.

Christopher Morley

Elgar: Cello Concerto in E minor, op39
Variations on an Original Theme for Orchestra 'Enigma', op36
Pomp & Circumstance March No.1, op39

Giovanni Sollima, cello, Orchestra Filarmonica della Calabria, Filippo Arlia

I welcome recordings of the work from Italian forces (and, in another review in this *Journal*, pan-European forces). For those who do not know him, Giovanni Sollima was born in Palermo in 1962 and, still a teenager, embarked on a brilliant international career as a cellist, collaborating with Claudio Abbado, Martha Argerich, Jorg Demus and Giuseppe Sinopoli. Alongside



Brilliant Classics

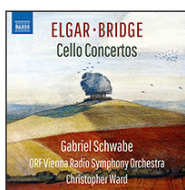
96039

his playing career, he is a widely-played composer, his music having been performed by classical performers such as Yo-Yo Ma, Riccardo Muti, Daniele Gatti, Gidon Kremer, Mischa Maisky, Viktoria Mullova, Ruggero Raimondi, Mario Brunello, Bruno Canino, Yuri Bashmet, Katia Labeque, international orchestras and the pop stars Patti Smith, Larry Coryell, Mauro Pagani and Stefano Bollani.

I assume – because, at the time of writing, the discography collated by John Knowles was unavailable for consultation – Elgar is not so established in Italy, so a recording of his major ‘hits’ is not joining a saturated market in that country. The P&C march sounded frankly thin and the tension before the final reprise of the big tune was drawn out to a hitherto unimagined degree. However, the recording came alive with the cello concerto. Sollima dwells longer in the first movement than Julian Lloyd Webber, although the impetus never flags; he takes less time in the Adagio but never sounds rushed. This is a mature, deeply considered, first-rate solo interpretation and the orchestra plays better and sounds fuller than in the P&C march.

If the musicians here are less imbued with Elgar than those in Britain and Germany, then the Enigma recording is a fine achievement. Personal preference may wish for the orchestra to be weightier, Variation X to be faster or Variation Y to be gayer but this is an enjoyable, coherent interpretation and the orchestra delivers a persuasive performance, if never with a richness found in other versions. Whilst no individual performance may knock off its perch anybody’s personal favourite version of each work, this is a fresh and most enjoyable recording and I shall listen to Sollima’s performance often in the future.

Steven Halls



Elgar: Cello Concerto in E minor, op.39

Frank Bridge: Oration (Concerto Elegiaco) 1930

Gabriel Schwabe, cello, ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra,
Christopher Ward

Recorded in December 2020, one wonders how Covid restrictions that crippled British music-making could be accommodated to allow the then 32-years-old, German-Spanish cellist and the British-born, Aachen-based conductor to rendezvous with a Viennese orchestra to produce this fine disc. I never expected to have two recordings to review in the same few months and I prefer, perversely, not to compare these two with each other but to triangulate them with my personal favourite, Julian Lloyd Webber’s with the RPO under Yehudi Menuhin. In my review last year of *The Singing Strad*, celebrating our former President’s 70th birthday, I wrote ‘Any fan of the concerto should already have a recording of the JLW/Menuhin version, which remains a giant amongst all recordings of the work, lent an inchoate “authenticity” by the

Naxos

8.574320

presence of Menuhin himself forming an unbroken link with the composer. I have long believed that the work suffers (along with Saint-Saëns' first cello concerto), from being one of the first major concerti learnt by any aspiring young cellist yet it requires a wisdom and depth of interpretation that can only be plumbed from one's third decade onward. Recording this in 1985, Julian was thus ideally placed to combine youthful energy with his own and Menuhin's maturity in a recording that still remains my favourite in an ever-expanding market'. That still holds but these new recordings each have virtues, not least the beautiful tone and playing of the soloists. JLW was 34 when he recorded the Elgar concerto so Gabriel Schwalbe was a couple of years younger but his is an intensely considered, mature interpretation which loses nothing in comparison with the older maestro.

The Schwabe/Ward interpretation is considerably brisker than JLW's, the first movement lasting a full minute less but not rushed or lacking in drama, and the accompaniment is rich. The second is as 'standard' in speed as JLW's and Sollima's and both 'new' soloists take the Adagio faster than JLW's 5'15" although Schwabe again takes a full minute less than Lloyd Webber. He is nearly a minute faster in the finale to round off a passionate and fiery, but never rushed, interpretation that has much to recommend it, especially given its companion piece on the recording.

For me, the highlight is the Bridge *Oration*, as there are so many fine versions of the Elgar concerto available, whereas the Bridge waited six years after composition for its first performance, had only one other performance in the composer's lifetime (albeit a BBC recording in 1936), was 'discovered' in the 1970s, reassessed as the masterpiece it is and recorded splendidly by Julian Lloyd Webber. This new version is the equal of its predecessor and persuades us anew that this is one of Bridge's finest, major works. Just as the Elgar can be seen as tempered by the Great War, and a passionate lament for the lost pre-war world, so Florence Hooton, the performer of the work's premiere, asserted that Bridge changed the title from 'Concerto Elegiaco' – descriptive enough, one would have thought - to *Oration* to emphasise the purpose of the work as a funeral address and a protest at the futility of war, the cello being the orator.

So I believe this is an important recording, you get a fine interpretation of the Elgar and all at a bargain price.

And I leave you with one further connection between the two works: apparently Felix Salmond, the soloist at the Elgar's first performance, was approached to premiere the Bridge, but he turned the piece down, leaving the young, Scarborough-born Florence Hooton to have that honour.

Steven Halls



Ian King (1962-2020): Music for Gloucester Cathedral
The Gloucester Service: Magnificat, Nunc dimittis; Five Collects for a capella SATB choir; O clap your hands; Jubilate; *The Gloucester Girls' Service: Magnificat, Nunc dimittis; The Christmas Truce; The St John Passion

Gloucester Cathedral Choir/Adrian Partington /*Nia Llewelyn
Jonathan Hope (organ)

SOMM

SOMMCD
0649

[The connection between Elgar and the music recorded on this CD may be slight but is, nevertheless, obvious. This review is included in line with our policy of reviewing recordings we feel will be of interest to our readers. Eds]

Self-taught as a composer, the musical career of Ian King, who died in 2020 aged just 58, came full circle only in 2011. After a boyhood as a cathedral chorister in his native Hereford, then as an organ pupil of Roy Massey before going on to read music at Oxford University, the folk music bug bit him to the extent that the next 25 years saw him as founder-performer of *Kings*, a folk band familiar on the local circuit. The Damascene Road back to sacred choral music began with a 2011 song-cycle for Worcester Three Choirs, and some of what followed is recorded here, all of it written for Gloucester Cathedral.

This is repertoire populated with many baleful ghosts, and who knows what King would have gone on to achieve had he been granted another twenty or thirty years of composing life. As it is, there is a great deal of attractive and approachable music here. The voice is sincere and devout, the craftsmanship at its best highly accomplished. One of the most engaging settings comes at the opening of this well-filled disc (82'23", not the 66'40" specified in the booklet) with the C major exuberance of a *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* written in 2016 for Evensong at that year's Gloucester Three Choirs Festival. Syncopated dance rhythms are much in evidence, with shadows falling across the closing bars of the *Magnificat* as it segues into the *Nunc dimittis*. Both settings fade away with a tonic open fifth – a moving effect, especially in the acoustic for which the piece was written.

It was Adrian Partington's suggestion that King provide the five Collects on this disc for Gloucester Cathedral's Choir. They are SATB settings of simplicity, sung and conducted here with understanding and polish. Particularly lovely is the Epiphany Collect *O God, who by the leading of a star*, in which the range of tonality exhibits an inner ear and imagination of a high order. Similarly resourceful is King's setting of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* for the first anniversary of the inauguration of Gloucester Cathedral's Girl Choristers: with a choral texture that is mostly unison, only occasionally filling out into thirds, the writing might at first be thought on the plain side but for the ear-catching harmonic richness of the organ part. I must confess to being less taken with what I hear in *Jubilate* as rather formulaic and repetitive syncopations which characterise the unison writing for boys, and the happy-clappy finish (not the only such moment on this disc) is not for me! Others

will react differently.

Of the two most substantial pieces recorded here, *The Christmas Truce*, set to Carol Ann Duffy's poem relating the informal truce across enemy lines at Christmas 1914, contains some of the most imaginative music. The opening, sung in unison by the men is particularly haunting (although I suspect that time or stamina at this point prevented a retake to improve on a couple of bars of below-pitch singing). King sets the whole poem, which is arguably a mixed blessing when he resorts to certain lines being spoken rather than sung – to these ears it *does* sound like a resort, however sincere the impulse.

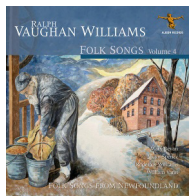
With the setting of *The St John Passion*, commissioned for Gloucester in 2014 by Canon Neil Heavisides, it is only fair that we leave comparisons at the door. Some listeners will be taken with its simple austerity, while I fear others - myself among them - may be irritated by the repetitive nature and plainness of the three solo vocal lines (alto, tenor and bass) in which natural speech rhythms are eschewed in favour of an unvaried, regular metre. It all sounds rather deadpan to me. The story is told solely via the Gospel text and there are no choruses or arias to grip the attention, to vary the pace of the action. Yet might hearing this setting at one of its annual outings in the cathedral itself as darkness falls induce a completely different, more involved emotional response? I wouldn't be surprised.

The performances under Gloucester Cathedral's distinguished Director of Music are as polished and as authentic in feeling as we've come to expect, while the ring and majesty of the Gloucester acoustic is excellently captured by engineer Ben Connellan. SOMM's owner Siva Oke is to be congratulated on releasing repertoire which may otherwise have not seen the light of day other than at Gloucester. More would have been the pity.

Andrew Keener

Ralph Vaughan Williams: Folk Songs Volume 4

Mary Bevan (soprano) Nicky Spence (tenor)
Roderick Williams (baritone), William Vann (piano)



Albion Records

ALBCD 045

We arrive at the finale of this four-part project by the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and Albion Records to record all 81 of the folk songs in English that RVW arranged for voice and piano or violin. Keen-eyed readers will notice that I had previously cited 80 songs, but Albion tells us they had overlooked one so, lucky us, we now have an unexpected addition. On this disc, we are told, 13 of the 19 tracks are world premieres. Entitled *Folk Songs from Newfoundland*, the works were part of a larger body (some folk dances and 201 tunes for folk songs) collected by the indefatigable Maud Karpeles in Newfoundland in 1929 and 1930 and she and RVW selected fifteen of these songs for arrangement for voice and piano. Maud commissioned other composers to set a further fifteen songs but RVW's were not published until

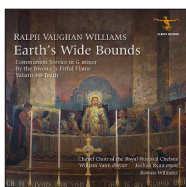
1968 and 150 tunes for 89 songs were not published until 1970 in *Folk Songs of Newfoundland*. The friction between the formidable Maud and stubborn Ralph was amusingly described in the notes to Volume 3 in the series.

The same soloists feature from the earlier recordings in the project and William Vann is again the pianist (he's been busy in Lockdown, directing the Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea in Somm's splendid new release *The Reeds by Severn Side*). The notes appositely emphasise the excellence of RVW's piano accompaniments – 'they are always innovative, fresh and beautiful' – and one must listen to these with the same attention (and delight) as to the words and their interpretation. I write this review fresh from performing RVW's *Six Studies in English Folk Song* for cello and piano and can attest these miniatures are rendered exquisite by the sensitive and careful complement to the cello line.

To whet your appetites, the disc starts with the remaining four English traditional songs and then we voyage a long way to hear the fifteen songs mediated by a distance of two thousand miles and removal from the mother lode and then adapted to the local environment. I shall not pick out my own favourite, but Maud Karpeles said that her life would have been worthwhile if collecting *She's like the Swallow* had been all that she had done.

It is difficult to add anything further to my reviews of this recording's three predecessors in the series. The songs are a revelation, the singing and interpretations are as consistently gorgeous as before, the accompaniments unfailingly varied and expertly delivered, Deborah Spanton's engineering superb and John Francis's well written notes authoritative and informative. To repeat myself, this series is 'a splendid survey of the art, artlessness and artifice of the constituent parts of the twentieth century folk music revival, amply illustrated by a treasure trove of first-rate music making'. So go out and buy all four discs, and discover the joy I have.

Steven Halls



Albion Records

ALBCD051

'Earth's Wide Bounds'

Hymns, Anthems, and other Choral music by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital; Joshua Ryan, organ;

The Ten Commandments read by Dr Rowan Williams

William Vann, director

RVW's attitude towards religion seems to have been fairly fluid. He appears to have been at best 'agnostic' but, notwithstanding, wrote many choral works on religious themes and produced a number of fine hymn tunes. Indeed, with Percy Dearmer he was the editor of *The English Hymnal*, retaining many established hymns whilst quietly disposing of some 'horrors' that he felt were no longer worthy of a place. New tunes by the likes of Martin Shaw were incorporated, but he also supplied some himself – usually as 'anon'. Later, he was also involved (again with Dearmer but this time also with Martin Shaw)

in another hymnal, *Songs of Praise*, now largely forgotten but certainly in use in my school in the 1950s and 60s.

On this new CD we have a number of RVW's finest hymns. *Down Ampney* ('Come Down O Love Divine') named after his birthplace in Gloucestershire; *Kingsfold* ('I heard the Voice of Jesus Say'), and many others. They all marry fine words to a 'singable' and memorable tune – some, but not all, based on folk songs. The contrast with many of today's modern 'worship songs' is clear; so many of these are banal with awful words and a trite melody, although no doubt many have their place in some services. But even these are preferable to traditional hymns being 'jazzed up' with a strong beat, guitars and a singer 'crooning' in a quite inappropriate transatlantic style, as sometimes heard on Radio 4 on Sunday mornings – heard that is until I reach the 'off' switch. No chance of any of that with these excellent performances by William Vann and his superb choir from the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The singers are all young professionals but they sing in a fresh and unaffected way, unlike *some* professional choruses, with pinpoint accuracy of intonation and meaning to the words. Vann gets it all absolutely right for the most part – the exception being that I did feel his speed for *Sine Nomine* ('For all the Saints') was slightly too fast – this is a 'processional' hymn and at this speed it would be a somewhat undignified progress. If CD timing was an issue, it would have been better to omit some verses.

But there is much more than hymns on this well filled (78'05") CD. The longest item is the Communion Service in G minor, well known in its original form as the Mass in G minor with Latin words, but here adapted by Maurice Jacobson in 1923 (and later revised by RVW) for the Anglican church, with (of course) English words. This is the first recording of the complete service in this revision. There are some musical changes to fit the changed words and the movements are in a different order. There is a very small amount of new music – the responses to the Ten Commandments (here read by Dr Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury) with various combinations of singers drawn from the choir. Interesting to hear this version, and it seems almost superfluous to say it is given an exemplary performance.

The exquisite short anthem *O Taste and See* (written for the Coronation Service in 1953) and the motet *Prayer to The Father of Heaven* (composed for the 100th anniversary of Parry's birth and first performed in 1948) are beautifully sung. The *Te Deum* performed at the start of this well-filled CD is not the *Festive Te Deum* written for the 1937 Coronation, but the 1928 version for Cosmo Lang's enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury. It is antiphonal in parts ('Dec' and 'Can') and is performed with considerable élan.

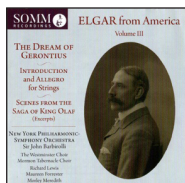
The same can be said about the performances of *O Clap your Hands* and *Let all the World* (the latter being the *Antiphon* from *Five Mystical Songs*), both in vigorous and joyful settings and performances. *Valiant for Truth* (written by RVW in memory of his friend Dorothy Longman in 1940) is different in mood, written at a time when the world (and the UK in particular) was in a particularly perilous state. Although it is always unwise to impose 'meanings' retrospectively, would RVW not have been influenced (even

subconsciously) by such imminent peril? As John Francis wonders in his notes ‘Do the trumpets sound in defiance, or in hope?’

The CD finishes with the first recording of a *Nocturne*, *By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame* for words by Walt Whitman. The music is based on a 1904 *Ballade* and *Scherzo* for String Quintet, reworked in 1906 when the *Ballade* was revised as a *Nocturne* – the latter being the basis for this choral setting. The manuscript was missing a final page for sopranos: this has been reconstructed by P J Clulow from the piano reduction and some earlier passages. Written at a time when RVW had not yet found his mature voice as a composer but, as befits the words (taken from the 1865 *Drum Taps* exploring Whitman’s experiences in war), the music is deeply atmospheric, solemn and restrained, although no less powerful. RVW never ceased to love Whitman’s poetry. This is a moving and very interesting addition to the VW recorded canon.

Where an organ part is required, Joshua Ryan accompanies with panache and most apt registrations, on the splendid Willis organ of St Jude, Hampstead Garden Suburb. The performances and recording are first class and, as always, the notes by John Francis are exemplary – and scholarly. Really, one only has to say this is an Albion presentation (the recording arm of the RVW Society) and it can be safely assumed that performance and production standards will be extremely high. I have thoroughly enjoyed listening to these excellent performances and warmly recommend this CD. A feast of wonderful choral music.

David Morris



Elgar from America: Volume III **Introduction and Allegro for String Quartet and String Orchestra (Op. 47)** **The Dream of Gerontius (Op. 38)**

Richard Lewis, Maureen Forrester, Morley Meredith

New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli
Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf (Op. 30)

Mormon Tabernacle Choir conducted by J. Spencer Cornwall

SOMM Recordings
ARIADNE 5015-2

In this third volume of SOMM’s Elgar from America CD series we move forward from the war-torn 1940s, when the Volume I and Volume II broadcasts were recorded, to the post-war 1950s, chiefly the broadcast recordings from Sir John Barbirolli’s triumphant return to New York City in 1959. The cast of characters had changed. John was now Sir John. He had arrived in America in 1936 with a back-home reputation as top of the second division. Now his greatness as the Hallé’s permanent conductor was beyond dispute. Gone was his nemesis, the *uber*-influential *New York Times* critic Olin Downes who loathed Barbirolli for reasons described in my review of Volume II.

Gone too were the clashes arising from Barbirolli’s role as successor to Toscanini’s daemonic rule of the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. For seven years (1936-1942) Barbirolli led his orchestra from Carnegie Hall in the shadow of the autocrat conducting nearby at the NBC

Studio. Michael Kennedy wryly summed up the status: ‘...some of the artificial and excitement-craving New York public, egged on by the critics, regarded this as a gladiatorial contest, with Toscanini as the Lion and Barbirolli as the Christian’.

The lion-versus-Christian contrast of their interpretations is evident in the Somm volume II accounts of Elgar’s *Introduction and Allegro*. Volume II includes a 1940 broadcast of the work with Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra. Volume III begins with the 1959 broadcast of the piece with Barbirolli conducting the New York Philharmonic. Toscanini’s interpretation is relentless, hell-for-leather, full of nervous electricity. Sir John’s phrasing is stately, self-assured, expressing a grandeur that brings to mind Elgar’s response to Barbirolli’s 1927 recording: ‘I never realized it was such a *big* work’. Self-assurance is what marks Barbirolli’s broadcast performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* recorded live at Carnegie Hall on January 25, 1959 with the New York Philharmonic and the Westminster Choir from Princeton, New Jersey.

He came late to the work, conducting *Gerontius* for the first time in 1945 when in middle age, ‘I began to realize for the first time the great delicacy, imagination and subtlety of much of the scoring’. But thenceforward, *The Dream*, as he referred to the work, took on a central importance to Barbirolli’s musical life.

Making his New York debut Richard Lewis, Sir John’s go-to Gerontius from 1950 onwards, gives a powerful performance, confirming Barbirolli’s view, shared by many, that Lewis was arguably the finest Gerontius of his generation. Canadians Maureen Forrester and Morley Meredith give first-rate performances. Sir John wrote of his particular pleasure in the fact that the work attracted sold-out audiences at all three performances, ‘You see, once people hear this music they cannot withstand the fascination and beauty of it’.

Volume III includes two excerpts from *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* both recorded with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir conducted by J. Spencer Cornwall. ‘The Challenge of Thor’ recorded circa 1953, offers a rare chance to hear the choral work with organ accompaniment. ‘As Torrents in Summer’ is unaccompanied, as written.

The third volume of Elgar from America admirably complements Volumes I and II to extend a unique musical journey made possible by Lani Spahr’s painstaking audio restoration. My Elgarian music library is certainly richer for the three volumes.

Arthur Reynolds

OTHER SELECTED CD ISSUES

N.B. Inclusion of recordings here does not preclude a full review at a later date



Warner 90229643842
(7 CDs)

Barbirolli Conducts Elgar

Elgarians will no doubt be familiar with JB's Elgar recordings. This collection has two excerpts from *Caractacus* with Peter Dawson dating from 1928, but the majority were made between 1962 and 1966, when Sir John returned to EMI. Here are his renowned recordings of the Cello Concerto, *Sea Pictures*, *The Dream of Gerontius*, the *Variations*, *Introduction and Allegro*, *Froissart* and the five *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches, together with the two symphonies. No collection of Elgar recordings should be without his masterly 1964 rendition of *Falstaff*. It is one of the finest things Sir John did and indeed one of the greatest of all Elgar recordings. Even if you already have these works, Barbirolli's loving interpretations – at a bargain price – are not to be missed. NB These CDs are extracted from the 109-CD set previously reviewed in the *Journal*.



Decca 4851717
(36 CDs)

Solti in London: The London Orchestral Recordings

This substantial set contains *inter alia* his fine recordings of the two Elgar symphonies, the Violin Concerto, the *Variations*, *In the South*, *Falstaff* and the five *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches.



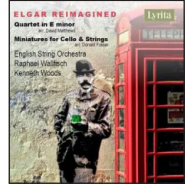
Pristine PASC 653

Sir Adrian Boult

Here are Boult's early recordings of the symphonies, the *Variations* and *The Nursery Suite*, all recorded between 1944 and 1955. They have been remastered by Andrew Rose and are available directly from Pristine Classics. (<https://pristinestreaming.com/app/browse/albums/1873>)

Elgar Reimagined: English String Orchestra/Kenneth Woods with Raphael Wallfisch (cello)

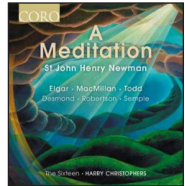
David Mathews has arranged Elgar’s String Quartet for orchestra and there are 11 miniatures arranged by Donald Fraser for Cello and Strings.



Lyrita SRC 394

St John Henry Newman: A Meditation The Sixteen/Harry Christophers

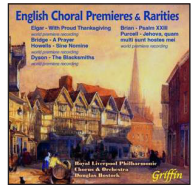
A disc of choral works with (mainly) settings of Newman. It includes *They are at Rest*, *Give Unto the Lord* and *Great is the Lord*.



CORO COR16191

English Choral Premieres and Rarities RLPO/Douglas Bostock

Here amongst other choral pieces are Elgar’s *With Proud Thanksgiving* and his arrangement of Purcell’s *Jehova quam multi sunt hostes mei*. NB This appears to be a re-issue of a CD originally issued in 2002 on the Classico label.



Griffin GCCD 4086

The Sweet and Merry Month: Music for May Morning

A recital of vocal music inspired by the May Morning tradition in Oxford, including *As Torrents in Summer*.



Opus Arte OACD 9049D

Kevin Mitchell

LETTERS

Introduction and Allegro for Strings

From Christopher Morley

What a brilliant, well-researched piece of writing is Andrew Neill's 'Majestic but fiendishly demanding' discussion in the April 2022 Journal of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*. This is a valuable source-document with all its perceptive insights from players and conductors, as well as its fascinating documentation. It deserves a wider currency than merely to Elgar Society members.

From Stuart Freed

I was delighted to read Andrew Neill's collection of views collected from various musicians and others about Elgar's string masterpiece the *Introduction and Allegro* in the April Journal.

Whilst it is true that the *Introduction and Allegro* is programmed far too infrequently in the UK and even more rarely overseas, it is equally true to say that, over the years, it has been well served by the recording industry. With this in mind, in 2012 I compiled a presentation entitled *Elgar and the Critical Ear*; in which the audience is invited to choose, in *Record Review* style, one of eighteen recordings that they feel best serves the music. I have given this presentation to seven branches (some of which no longer exist), most recently to the Yorkshire and North-East Branch, with some surprising results. Recordings that have risen to the top are the London Festival Orchestra (Pople), ASMF (Marriner), VPO (John Eliot Gardiner), RPO (Wordsworth), LPO (Handley) and ECO (Britten) twice. What is remarkable about these results is that two really big hitters, Boult and Barbirolli, have never featured and yet would almost certainly appear in most people's list of great recordings of this music.

After giving this presentation, I am invariably asked about my own favourite and the answer is always the same, the mid 50s Hallé recording. I am not sure whether or not it is great Elgar, but it is magnificent Barbirolli and that's more than enough for me.

100 YEARS AGO ...

After the performance of *The Apostles* in Leeds, Elgar spent the first days of April 1922 at Perryfield, his sister Pollie's home near Bromsgrove, and had planned to be in London on 3 April for The Music Club dinner to honour Landon Ronald. However, a chill caused him to remain and he returned to London on 6 April, writing to Alice Stuart of Wortley the following day that he 'was back & *really* all right again only I feel somewhat bored with life & want to be lonely – it suits me best & it is evidently intended by the fates that I am to be so ...' but a few days later he attended Sunday lunch at her Cheyne Walk home, along with Frank Schuster, Mina Beresford and Lady Colefax. He visited Carice and her husband at their farm in Chilworth, Surrey on 13 April and went to Bournemouth on 19th and 20th where he conducted the First Symphony. Billy Reed was also there and conducted his short orchestral work *The Lincoln Imp* (originally written for the 1921 Hereford Three Choirs Festival) and Elgar reported to Carice that it 'had a good reception'.

On 1 May Elgar went to Covent Garden to see *La Boheme*, produced by the British National Opera Company: Percy Pitt conducted and Miriam Licette and Tudor Davies sang the main roles of Mimi and Rodolfo. He saw *Parsifal* there on 3 May, accompanied by Alice Stuart of Wortley.

Dame Ethel Smyth was vociferous in her efforts to obtain a knighthood for Dan Godfrey, the conductor of the Bournemouth Orchestra, and in March she had written to Elgar to seek his support which he gladly gave. In May she wrote again to ask if the Liberal Prime Minister Lloyd George was moving in the right direction. Elgar beautifully replied on 22 May: 'I know the magic of your own name would be sufficiently thaumaturgic to influence an ordinary P.M., but, like Falstaff, I fear the Welsh fairy: he may turn D.G. (who sings no hymns) to a piece of cheese: but we must hope'. Godfrey obtained his knighthood that year.

On 23 May he told Carice: 'I am working writing very hard at the arrg of the Bach Prelude & orchg that thing of poor dear Parry's for Leeds festival not an easy thing to do well. I have been to a few theatres - nothing to tell'. He was working on the Bach *Fantasia* to accompany the *Fugue* and he was also orchestrating Parry's *Jerusalem*.

Mina Beresford, the wife of Admiral Sir Charles Beresford died suddenly on 26 May and Elgar had to arrange the music and the service for her funeral at All Saints, Margaret Street on 30 May which involved 'much racing about & telephoning for two days as the exec[uto]rs knew nothing of such things and I less...'. Also, on that day Elgar invited the violinist Micha Elman to visit him and as he told Carice he 'was an infant prodigy, is now grown up & a very fine artist & is working at the Concerto'.

He spent some time with Schuster at The Hut along with Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Nichols,¹ Glyn Philpot² and Claude Phillips³ and 'of course, the N. Zealander', 'Anzy' Wyld and reported to Alice Stuart of Wortley that 'some "odd" people tead' during his visit.

Evidence of Elgar's discomfort at The Hut is provided by Sassoon, relating an incident on 6 June, when in a 'crescendo climax of rudeness' Elgar attacked Lady Mary Warrender on the subject of Queen Mary's Doll House. He recorded him saying: 'We all know that the King and Queen are incapable of appreciating anything artistic: they have never asked for the full score of my Second Symphony to be added to the Library at Windsor. But as the crown of my career I'm asked

1 Robert Nichols (1893-1944) poet and playwright.

2 Glyn Philpot (1884-1937) painter and sculptor.

3 Claude Phillips (1846-1924) writer, art historian and critic.

to contribute to – a *Doll's House* for the Queen! I've been a monkey-on-a-stick for you people long enough. Now I'm getting off the stick. I wrote and said that I hoped they wouldn't have the impertinence to press the matter on me any further. I consider it an insult for an artist to be asked to mix himself up in such nonsense'. Elgar's diatribe is unfair to Queen Mary who was interested in the arts, and in 1911 Sir John Fortescue, librarian at Windsor Castle *did* request a manuscript from Elgar, who surprisingly chose not to send the manuscript of the Second Symphony (dedicated to King Edward VII) but sent the anthem *Oh harken thou* which had been sung at the Coronation.

Henry Embleton's second sponsored performance of *The Apostles* was given in Queen's Hall on 8 June, which attracted a small audience. Bernard Shaw and his wife attended and afterwards he wrote disgustedly to the press: 'Other couples were visible at intervals. One of the couples consisted of the Princess Mary and Viscount Lascelles ... I distinctly saw six people in the stalls, probably with complimentary tickets ... I apologise to posterity for living in a country where the capacity and tastes of schoolboys and sporting costermongers are the measure of metropolitan culture'.

Following a third performance in Canterbury Cathedral on 9 June. Elgar received one letter, from Alice Stuart of Wortley, and he replied on 14 June: 'I have seen no one, *no one* has written or taken the *slightest* notice & I have read nothing & seen no papers: truly I *am* a lonely person if I liked to think so ...'.

Yet he was not always lonely for on 4 July Elgar dined at the Garrick Club, following an invitation from Arthur Pinero,⁴ along with Squire Bancroft,⁵ E.V. Lucas,⁶ Edward Marshall-Hall,⁷ Alfred Sutro,⁸ Lord Barham and one of Dickens' sons. He was entreated to join the Club and did so in October after being unanimously elected.

On 7 July Elgar attended the AGM of the London Library, where he seconded the vote of thanks to the Chairman, the Earl of Balfour, for presiding. He returned to Perryfield where he 'saw in the hay & picked mushrooms & heard larks singing'. Back in London he saw the 'cabaret entertainment' *Pot Luck* at the Vaudeville Theatre starring Jack Hulbert and Miss Beatrice Lilley on 18 July. He thought Lady Stuart should see it and accompany him, but when writing to her he questioned whether it would 'be 'proper' to take you to a cabaret show?' It appears that she went to the revue on 1 August. He also ventured to take her to *A to Z* at the Prince of Wales Theatre, a show with music by Ivor Novello.

Kevin Mitchell

4 Sir Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934) playwright.

5 Sir Squire Bancroft (1841-1926) actor-manager.

6 Edward Verrall Lucas (1868-1938) novelist, poet, playwright, publisher and editor.

7 Sir Edward Marshall Hall, K.C., (1858-1927) barrister.

8 Alfred Sutro (1863-1933) author, dramatist and translator.

RVW 100 YEARS AGO ...

A Pastoral Symphony was first performed on 26 January 1922 in the Queen's Hall, with Adrian Boult directing the Orchestra of the Royal Philharmonic Society. The second performance followed on 17 February at the Royal College of Music.

In 1921 Vaughan Williams had become Musical Director of the Bach Choir following Sir Hugh Allen's resignation and his first concert was given on 14 December 1921, with another on 7 April 1922 which included Byrd's motet *Christ is Risen Again*, Holst's *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda* (1st group) and Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*.

RVW became involved in less formal music-making when a friend sought his advice for a new music festival in Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire – he chose the music and went to Stinchcombe to judge the competitions, after which he was involved with final rehearsals for three concerts of the Leith Hill Musical Festival, where Adeline Vaughan Williams (his wife) presented the certificates and Holst was a judge.

1922 saw the publication of the part-song *It was a Lover and his Lass* for two voices and pianoforte and an arrangement of *Ca' the Yowes*, the Scottish folk song, with words by Robert Burns. For Dr R. R. Terry's fine Westminster Cathedral Choir, he wrote the motet *O vos omnes* (words from the Office of Tenebrae for Maundy Thursday) which was sung in the Cathedral on 13 April 1922.

At the end of May, RVW and Adeline travelled to America as they had been invited by Carl Stoeckel, a millionaire who had built the Music Shed to give concerts for the people of Litchfield County, Norfolk, Connecticut, where at the request of his wealthy patron Ralph was to give the American premiere of *A Pastoral Symphony*. Adeline reported that the performance on 7 June 'went very beautifully and he had a good voice for the end'. The audience of about 1,500 people camped on the grass: 'They were mostly country people and factory hands, all very well dressed'. The New England villages, with names familiar from histories of the civil war and from Walt Whitman, pleased him as did the buildings in New York, which impressed him more than the Niagara Falls, as he discovered he could 'sit all day and look out of my windows (16 floors up) at the skyscrapers ...' - but he found having a wealthy patron 'too wearing'.

On returning home, they attended a performance on 11 July of *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* in the Parry Theatre at the Royal College of Music, conducted by Arthur Bliss in the presence of Queen Mary. This was followed by a holiday in a house at Tetsworth near Oxford and the Chilterns. Ursula Vaughan Williams wrote: 'Ralph loved the Chiltern country and had long solitary bicycle rides as well as making a twice-weekly shopping expedition for the household'. The house had a tame badger who ate porridge – 'a lovely sight'.

On 12 October RVW celebrated his 50th birthday. One of Holst's pupils, Jane Joseph, wrote a part-song to celebrate the event, which was performed outside 13 Cheyne Walk by Holst and other friends to RVW's surprise, who then invited the singers inside for an improvised party.

The end of the year saw the first performance of the Mass in G minor and even though it was written with Terry's Westminster Cathedral Choir in mind, the first performance took place in Birmingham Town Hall on 6 December with the City of Birmingham Choir conducted by Joseph Lewis, although Terry did give the first liturgical performance on 12 March 1923 in Westminster Cathedral. The work was dedicated to Gustav Holst and his Whitsuntide Singers and when subsequently the dedicatees sang the Mass, Holst wrote that they '[sang] the Mass itself with a fiery intensity that made the music glow'.

Kevin Mitchell

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