

The Society

Elgar

pp
JOURNAL



119
p espress.
div.
p espress.
August 2021 Vol.22, No. 5



The Elgar Society Journal

37 Mapledene, Kennal Road, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 6LX
Email: journal@elgarsociety.org

August 2021 Vol. 22, No. 5

President
Sir Mark Elder, CH, CBE

Vice-President & Past President
Julian Lloyd Webber, OBE

Vice-Presidents
Diana McVeagh
Dame Janet Baker, CH, DBE
Leonard Slatkin
Sir Andrew Davis, CBE
Christopher Robinson, CVO, CBE
Andrew Neill
Martyn Brabbins
Tasmin Little, OBE

Vice-Chairman & Acting Chairman
Stuart Freed

Treasurer
Peter Smith

Secretary
George Smart

Editorial	3
<i>The Black Knight: Elgar's first Symphony?</i> <i>Julian Rushton</i>	5
Celebrating Ashton's <i>Enigma Variations</i> <i>Andrew Neill</i>	16
Elgar and his Transcribers <i>Tom Higgins</i>	30
'Piers Plowman – Elgar's Bible' <i>Peter Sutton</i>	37
Book Reviews <i>David Ll. Jones, Martin T. Yates, Andrew Neill</i> <i>Kevin Mitchell, Kevin Allen, Richard Bratby</i>	40
DVD Review <i>Richard Edmonds</i>	59
CD Reviews <i>Andrew Neill, Relf Clark, Andrew Keener</i> <i>David Morris, Steven Halls</i>	61
100 Years Ago... <i>Kevin Mitchell</i>	72

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

Front Cover: Paul Kay as Hew David Steuart-Powell
Rear Cover: Artists of the Royal Ballet in *Enigma Variations*
The Royal Ballet (c) 2019 ROH. Photographs by Tristram Kenton.

Notes for Contributors. Please adhere to these as far as possible if you deliver writing (as is much preferred) in Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format.

Copyright: it is the contributor's responsibility to be reasonably sure that copyright permissions, if required, are obtained.

Illustrations (pictures, short music examples) are welcome, but *please ensure* they are pertinent, cued into the text, and have captions.

The Editors have a policy of not publishing possible solutions to the 'hidden theme' in the Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma') or the 'Dorabella cypher'.

Presentation of written text:

Subheadings: longer articles benefit from judicious use of these.

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

Plurals: no apostrophe (CDs not CD's).

Foreign words: if well established in English (sic, crescendo) in Roman, otherwise italics.

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

Quotations: in 'single quotes' as standard. Double quotes for quotes within quotes.

Longer quotations in a separate paragraph, *not* in italic, *not* in quotes; please leave a blank line before and after.

Emphasis: ensure emphasis is attributed as '[original emphasis]' or '[my emphasis]'. Emphasized text *italic*.

References: Please position footnote markers *after* punctuation – wherever possible at the end of a sentence.

In footnotes, please adhere as far as possible to these forms (more fully expounded in the longer version of these notes):

Books: Author, *Title* (Place of publication: Publisher, year of publication), page[s]. Thus: Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 199.

Periodicals: Author, 'Title of article', *Title of periodical*, issue number and date sufficient to identify, page[s]. Thus: Michael Allis, 'Elgar, Lytton, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 84', *Music & Letters*, 85 (May 2004), 198.

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:

https://elgarsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Notes-for-Contributors_longer-version_February-2017.pdf

Editorial

At the first performance of Elgar's new orchestral work on 19 June 1899, it was described in the programme as *Variations for Full Orchestra*. It was only Elgar's third major work written for full orchestra alone - the concert overture *Froissart* of 1890 and the *Imperial March* from 1897 being the first and second - although the choral works of the 1890s contained music for orchestra throughout, where Elgar was able to hone and refine his skills as an orchestrator of genius.

Elgar's fellow composers immediately realised its importance. Parry noted excitedly in his diary: 'Elgar's Variations first rate. Quite brilliantly clever: and genuine orchestral music'. Vaughan Williams on hearing the piece found himself 'absorbed in the music' and Holst later wrote that for him it signified the true start of the English Musical Renaissance. On hearing the *Variations*, Bernard Shaw exclaimed that he 'knew we had got it last'. Foreign conductors also appreciated its significance. Julius Butts on seeing the score exclaimed, "'Hats off" to such artistry' and he gave the first German performance in Dusseldorf on 7 February 1902. Fritz Steinbach and the Meiningen Orchestra performed the *Variations* in London on 20 November 1902. 'Here,' he said, 'is an unexpected genius and pathbreaker in the field of orchestration'. Other European conductors, such as Felix Weingartner took it up, and Gustav Mahler gave two performances in Carnegie Hall, New York on 29 November and 2 December 1910.

Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov were 'particularly pleased' with the *Variations* following Alexander Siloti's first Russian performance in St Petersburg in 1904. Years later Elgar told Troyte Griffith that if the *Variations* had been composed by a Russian, they would have 'long ago' been staged as ballet and he envisaged a veiled dancer as the Enigma, moving through a banquetting hall as the setting. Even though Beecham contemptuously dismissed the work by snorting 'Ballet music my dear Sir', the epigrammatic nature of the vignettes – akin to the series of dances in sections of Tchaikovsky's ballets – does give some credence to his opinion. That the work was suitable for dance was recognised, years after Elgar's comment, when Sir Frederick Ashton devised his ballet *Enigma Variations* first produced in 1968.

A new DVD of the Royal Ballet production taken from a performance in 2019 called for a detailed examination of the ballet, which has been undertaken by Andrew Neill. Diana McVeagh produced a file of documents and reviews relating to the original production, including a letter to her from Carice Elgar Blake, and we thank her for permitting us to use this material including her own review from *The Musical Times*. Alas the cost of quoting in full from other contemporary reviews proved prohibitive. We have also been able to draw on recollections from those who saw the ballet over 50 years ago, and we thank those members who vividly recalled their memories of evenings at Covent Garden and who provided copies of programmes and other original documents, which has greatly added to this history. The DVD with its triple bill, is reviewed by Richard Edmonds.

Julian Rushton concludes his series of articles on *The Black Knight*, with a third dealing with the question whether the cantata can be considered a proto-symphony. Tom Higgins has contributed an article on those who transcribed some of Elgar's music for military band and we have a further note from Peter Sutton on *Piers Plowman*, being an addendum to his article in the *Journal* of August 2017.

51 years after his death the spirit of Sir John Barbirolli hovers benignly over Elgarian matters and The Barbirolli Society continues to issue treasures. Years ago, Michael Kennedy when writing of Elgar's interpreters, wished for a recording of a JB live performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*, which for him would be memorable and true to the conductor's genius. The Barbirolli Society has just re-issued a live performance recorded in Rome in November 1957 (previously available on the Arkadia label) with John Vickers, Constance Shacklock and Marian Nowkowski, and this striking interpretation – a supplement to his 1964 EMI recording – is reviewed by Andrew Neill. Raymond Holden who has already written two books on Sir John, now provides a third, *Maestro Glorioso* comprising ten essays on aspects of the conductor's career, which includes a chapter on Elgar with particular emphasis on Barbirolli's performances of *In the South*: the book is reviewed by David Ll. Jones, who in turn has made a particular and comprehensive study of Barbirolli's recording career from 1911 to 1970, and we also review his revised Barbirolli discography.

Although we have no book on Elgar to consider, there is a short but fine study of Sir Arthur Sullivan reviewed by Martin T. Yates, Chairman of the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society. Our reviewer Christopher Morley has completed his autobiography, *Confessions of a Music Critic*, which is reviewed by Andrew Neill and by distinguished fellow critic Richard Bratby. Kevin Allen looks at the *History of Worcester Festival Choral Society*.

The First World War was a fault-line for creative artists who lived through it, both for those who experienced it on the 'home front' and naturally for those who fought and died in it; many were permanently haunted, marked and scarred by those years and so writers, dramatists, poets, painters, composers. and film makers all subsequently had to come to terms with its consequences. Vaughan Williams was one - he served in Salonika, France and Germany - whose wartime experiences, the effect on his creativity and the compositions which flowed from that experience, are fully explored in Stephen Connock's pioneering study *The Edge of Beyond* issued by the RVW Society and reviewed by Andrew Neill. It could be argued that the anger and aggression in RVW's Fourth Symphony may possibly reflect (in part) those war years, and a magnificent recording of that symphony, coupled with the Sixth Symphony, under Sir Antonio Pappano and the LSO is warmly reviewed by David Morris.

In his lifetime Sir Malcolm Sargent was not always given his due as an Elgarian – apart from his interpretation of *Gerontius* – but the *Variations* were a staple of his repertoire, and his 1953 Decca recording is reviewed by Relf Clark along with works by Albert and Eric Coates.

Andrew Keener reviews a two-CD set of important recordings of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Beethoven and others, with the NBC Symphony Orchestra and Sir Adrian Boult, recorded in 1938 and now issued for the first time, on the Pristine label.

To celebrate Julian Lloyd Webber's 70th birthday Decca has issued a three-CD set, including our Vice-President's acclaimed 1985 recording of the Elgar Concerto, which Steven Halls considers to be one of the finest available.

The enterprising label SOMM has issued a two-CD set of *The Forgotten Recordings*, made by George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra and marvellously remastered by Society member Lani Spahr: Andrew Neill provides a short review.

The deadline for contributions for the December issue is 15 October 2021.

Kevin Mitchell

With the editorial team of Andrew Dalton, David Morris and Andrew Neill

The Black Knight: Elgar's first Symphony?¹

Julian Rushton

In August 1898, five years after the first performance of *The Black Knight* and not long before the premiere of his new work for Leeds, Elgar wrote to August Jaeger, his chief contact at Novello:

I intended the work to be a sort of symphony in four divisions – different to anything, in structure, ever done before – where the 'picture' is fixable for a little time the words are repeated – in dramatic parts the words 'go on'; it's not a proper cantata as the orch. is too important [...]. Caractacus frightens me in places[.]²

What did Elgar mean by 'a proper cantata'? Cantatas, sacred or secular, are often dramatic in form, like *Caractacus*. Elgar's *The Light of Life* is a cantata with a New Testament subject, comparable to William Sterndale Bennett's *The Woman of Samaria* (Birmingham Festival, 1867). The *Black Knight* is secular, as is Bennett's *The May Queen*, subtitled 'A Pastoral' (Leeds Festival, 1858).³ Bennett's works, both published by Novello, show no aspiration towards the symphony; they employ solo voices, as does *The Light of Life*, but *The Black Knight* does not. As for the 'orch.', it is indeed important, although Elgar left the chorus unaccompanied, or only sparsely accompanied, in a few passages. Robin Holloway suggests that being choral throughout 'adds to the sense, paradoxically, of a quasi-instrumental continuity' – the kind of continuity enjoyed by symphonies without voices.⁴

Choral works without soloists have various names: generic, like some of Parry's Odes, or individual titles, like Brahms's *Schicksalslied* and *Gesang der Parzen*. The obvious generic label for *The Black Knight* is 'choral ballad', for which immediate precedents were Stanford's *The Revenge* (1886) and *The Battle of the Baltic* (1891), premiered respectively in Leeds and Hereford and published by Novello. In November 1890, *The Revenge* was performed in Worcester, conducted by Elgar's friend Hugh Blair, with Elgar among the violins. A year later Blair directed *The Battle of the Baltic*, which Elgar had already played in at Hereford.⁵ Since the genre was well

1 This is the last of three articles. To save space, I haven't reproduced music examples from the first two; these are identified in the footnotes, where I've also put supplementary details readers may prefer to ignore.

2 Letter of 1 March 1898 to August Jaeger. Moore (ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers*, vol. 1, 67.

3 Both works by Bennett were published by Novello.

4 Robin Holloway, 'The early Choral Works' in Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63–80; on *The Black Knight*, 64–7.

5 *The Revenge*, 25 November 1890; *The Battle of the Baltic*, 24 November 1891. See Martin Bird (ed.), *Provincial Musician. Diaries 1857–1896* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2013) m 117, 162; Kevin Allen, 'Hugh Blair: Worcester's Forgotten Organist', *Elgar Society Journal* 21/4 (April 2019), 3–17.

established, Elgar would have occasioned no surprise by calling *The Black Knight* a choral ballad. The spirit of emulation is strong in aspiring composers, and it may be no accident that Elgar, with encouragement from Blair, completed the work in 1892. Perhaps they discussed Stanford's works; perhaps they were a stimulus for Elgar; perhaps he thought he could do better (perhaps he did).

Nevertheless, the wording of his letter to Jaeger, when adapted as a preface to the reissued vocal score (1898), seems to distance itself from the concept of a 'choral ballad'. This preface also explain Elgar's intentions with respect to word-setting:

NOTE TO SECOND EDITION.

THIS Cantata is symphonic in design; the poem is divided into four sections, which are musically illustrated. Where a "picture" is suggested, the words are repeated; at the more dramatic points, the action is correspondingly rapid.

The work might be described as a "Symphony for Chorus and Orchestra founded upon Uhland's poem 'Der schwarze Ritter'" rather than as a Choral Ballad.

Several exceptional difficulties in the vocal parts, chiefly occurring in the second scene, have been removed and the work is now practicable for smaller choral societies.

E. E.

An arrangement of the orchestral parts for 1 Flute, 1 Oboe, 1 Clarinet, 1 Bassoon, 1 Horn, and Strings may be had on application to the Publishers.

A symphony is conventionally divided into 'movements'. Where Elgar had called the four parts 'divisions', the preface has 'sections'. 'Cantata' is retained, perhaps to avoid puzzling potential customers (including choral directors), while distancing itself from the nationalistic nature of Stanford's choral ballads and Elgar's recent *The Banner of St George*. The claim of originality in the letter to Jaeger isn't repeated in the preface, but 'symphonic in design' sounds more confident than 'sort of symphony'.

Elgar's aspirations as a composer of symphonic music eventually produced works that are, unequivocally, masterpieces. But he didn't get there without a struggle, and after false starts in related genres (overtures before *Froissart*, string quartets); he abandoned the projected 'Gordon symphony' not long after the 1898 vocal score of *The Black Knight* appeared. In the first Elgar biography, Robert Buckley included an interesting list of his works:

EDWARD ELGAR'S WORKS 93

48. MS.

49. *The Apostles*: oratorio.

50. *In the South*: concert overture.

Of the unpublished works with opus number the early ones are: Quintet for Wind, String Quartet, and Sonata for pianoforte and violin.

The later ones are: *Falstaff*, concert overture; a String Quartet; and the unnamed pendant to *Cockaigne*, showing the reverse of the joyous picture therein drawn.

Several short works have been published without opus number, and a large number exist in manuscript in addition to the list given above, which has the approval of Dr. Elgar.

Buckley's informant was Elgar himself, yet *Falstaff* wasn't completed until 1913. Of other works listed as if complete, 'Quintet for Wind' might be 'Shed' music, but the rest survive only as sketches and drafts, and a brief jotting for the 'pendant' or anti-*Cockaigne*, associated with James Thomson's poem *City of Dreadful Night*.⁶

'Symphonic' is an inclusive adjective. Beside the overtures, *Falstaff*, the concertos, and the *Variations*, there is a case for calling choral works such as *The Dream of Gerontius* 'symphonic', just as Wagner's later operas are symphonic. But 'symphony' is less inclusive. A simple definition might be 'sonata for orchestra'. Six Elgar works *could* be called symphonies: *The Black Knight*; the Organ Sonata, which might have been titled 'Organ Symphony' like Widor's (composed earlier than Elgar's sonata) and becomes a sort of symphony when orchestrated; the First, Second, and (in Anthony Payne's elaboration of sketches) the Third; and, arguably, the *Severn Suite*.⁷ But for Elgar, conscious of the high status the symphony enjoyed in critical discourse, a true symphony was special. Parry's article 'Symphony' in the first edition (1889) of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* is mainly a historical narrative, viewing the genre through a lens of progress, from the classics, then Beethoven, to Brahms. Parry adds 'We can hardly hope that even the greatest composers of the future will surpass the symphonic triumphs of the past, whatever they may do in other fields of composition'.⁸ Nevertheless he and Stanford, undeterred, each composed three more symphonies after 1889, coincidentally the year Elgar began work on *The Black Knight*.

If *The Black Knight* is a symphony, however, it's clearly programmatic, although we usually think of 'programme music' (like *Falstaff*) as instrumental. Parry considered programme music perfectly valid, but distinct from the 'pure' [or 'abstract'], symphony without a programme. Elgar

6 The jotting is transcribed in Sarah Thompson (ed.), *Overtures* (Elgar Society Edition vol. 24), 266; see also the Foreword, x.

7 The case is argued by Stephen Arthur Allen, 'Sepia tints or ghosts pictured within: late style and Elgar's *The Severn Suite*', in *The Musical Times* 160 (Spring 2019), 77–107. Though 'Suite' is a perfectly respectable generic title, there are precedents for symphonies in more than four movements (Beethoven, Berlioz, Schumann, Mahler).

8 Parry, 'Symphony', in George Grove (ed.), *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians (A.D. 1450–1880)*, Vol. 4 (London: Macmillan, 1889), 10–43.

in one of his Birmingham lectures went so far as to claim that the symphony without a programme is ‘the height of music’.⁹

In claiming symphonic status for *The Black Knight*, it seems Elgar wanted to associate it with this prestigious genre. The ballad has four scenes, convenient for setting in four movements, and Elgar’s work follows recent common practice by being ‘cyclic’, a symphony in which themes appear in more than one movement.¹⁰ *The Black Knight* lays this claim to connection with late-Romantic symphonic practice by returns, in the third movement and finale, of themes originating in the first and second movements. Nothing in the poem *compelled* Elgar to do this; that he did it shows that his ambition to compose a ‘sort of symphony’ is grounded in musical facts.

Having four movements corresponds to the normal tally in a symphony: a substantial first movement; middle movements, one slow and one fast (a dance or Scherzo, which may be light or sinister as in Beethoven’s Fifth); and consummation in the finale. In placing particular weight on the finale – the longest movement by far – Elgar could point to precedents in Beethoven (notably the ‘Choral’ Ninth) and Mendelssohn (the choral *Lobgesang*), and to instrumental symphonies with big finales: Mozart’s ‘Jupiter’, Beethoven’s Fifth, Brahms’s First, and the double finale of Mendelssohn’s ‘Scottish’.

Symphonic first movements are customarily in ‘sonata form’, divided into Exposition (settling in a different key), Development (sometimes an area of struggle), and Recapitulation (when ideas from the exposition’s secondary key-area return, but in the main key, the ‘tonic’). Post-1800, the form was subjected to theoretical review and drawing up of ‘rules’. But genius, as Immanuel Kant asserted, makes its own rules; Beethoven would have agreed and so, surely, would Elgar.

Ex. 1

Altos Sopranos

When woods and fields, when woods and fields...

mf

The opening theme, ‘Pentecost’, is like a courtly dance (Minuet), presented as a classical ‘sentence’ of sixteen bars: the first eight close on a dominant chord (D), the second eight on the tonic (G).¹¹ There follows a new and lovely idea (Ex. 1), shifting the key towards D (the dominant), as is usual in sonata form. Elgar dwells on the first two lines, which form a grammatical sentence:

9 According to the report in *The Birmingham Post*. Elgar (ed. Percy M. Young), *A Future for English Music and other Lectures* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1968), 98, 105.

10 Others with a strong cyclic element from around this time are César Franck’s symphony (1886), and Dvořák’s Ninth (1894).

11 The theme, dating from 1879, is discussed in my first article on *The Black Knight*; this *Journal* Vol. 22 No. 3 (December 2020), 5–17.

‘Twas Pentecost, the Feast of Gladness / When woods and fields put off all sadness.’

Elgar develops this second theme straight away, mingled with elements of ‘Pentecost’, before proceeding to line 3: ‘Then began the king, and spake’.

At this point, ‘cantata’ overrules ‘symphony’. The first reported speech demanded something new, so at bar 50 Elgar changes to four beats in a bar, with flowing triplets and a slightly faster pulse (prescribed by metronome marks). Something fresh as a subsidiary theme is not unprecedented, although Ex. 1 already seems to claim that status; however, its development, mingled with ‘Pentecost’, allows us to hear it as a rich, complex theme ‘group’. So far so good; but if the music of the king’s speech is considered as the ‘subsidiary theme’ of a sonata form, it’s in the wrong key – the tonic rather than, according to rule, another key, usually the dominant.¹² The speech starts on a monotone D (‘From the halls / Of ancient Hofburg’s walls’), and blossoms in response to ‘A luxuriant Spring shall break’.

Ex. 2

Sop., Altos

Drums and trumpets echo loud[ly]

Tenors

Solo trumpet

Strings pizzicato

p, marcato, cresc.

ff

Elgar then moves on to stanza two. Filled with the joy of spring, the only struggle the first movement provides is the prince’s successful jousting, which stands in for a development section, but requires completely different music: ‘Drums and trumpets echo loud’ (especially trumpets), with a return to the original metre, 3/4, but a faster tempo than the opening (Ex. 2).

Enough has been said to relate Elgar’s setting of stanzas one and two to sonata form in a manner that would have aroused critical consternation if offered as the first movement of an instrumental symphony. At least there is a recapitulation; the movement is rounded off by returning to ‘Pentecost’ at the end of stanza two (‘Before the monarch’s stalwart son’), whereupon Elgar returns to the first lines of stanza one while working his way back to a grand reprise of the opening, a little slower (‘Molto maestoso’).¹³ However, sonata form is flouted because neither Ex. 1 nor the other candidate for ‘subsidiary theme’ (the king’s speech) returns in the tonic. The optional extra (coda) ends with the chorus calling ‘Pentecost’ loudly, and repeated almost in a whisper. The opening theme fades, with chromatic harmonies that for Jerrold Northrop Moore look ‘towards the

12 Twelve bars of a bass D do not make D the key-note; the Cs are natural, and the tonal centre is back to G.

13 The metronome reading (104) is a little faster than the opening (100), but slower than the jousting music.

sinister events to come'.¹⁴

If the first movement at least has the dimensions typical of a regular symphony, the middle movements are problematic in this respect. Each is split in half by the demands of the narrative, and neither is a slow movement or scherzo, although the third is based on dance measures.

The second movement begins in a rhythmically pointed C major, more march than dance or scherzo, and confident-sounding, bar some scary harmony just before the choral entry.¹⁵ The Herald challenges the new arrival ('Sir knight! Your name and scutcheon? Say!'). The Black Knight's reply ('Should I speak it here / Ye would stand aghast with fear; / I am a prince of mighty sway') shatters the mood and musical continuity; his words are punctuated by silence, a hollow echo, and fragments of the opening theme, leading to a return of the scary harmony (bars 38–9) and the Black Knight's (Death's) Wagnerian *Leitmotiv*.¹⁶ The opening mood never returns; how could it? The rest of the movement is much faster, and mostly in C minor. The frightening joust music is developed, and supernatural phenomena are represented by an upheaval worthy of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. The 'Death' motif reappears; then with the prince's fall comes the first appearance of the 'stricken children' motif.¹⁷ This is the main material for the movement's fading embers, with fragments of the jousting; a sombre close, a horn hanging on, offers no respite; there is no return to the opening music as Elgar did in the first movement.

Being predominantly fast, the second movement might stand in for a scherzo; the third has to do duty as slow movement and dance. It too is split down the middle to match the narrative. In another departure from standard practice, its two dances are in different keys: the courtly dance (again like a Minuet) is in D, but the exotic, sinister dance of the Black Knight and the princess is in G minor, with a modal inflection (Ex.3).¹⁸ The orchestra has 57 bars before the chorus enters for 'Pipe and viol call the dance', a delightful section, at first unaccompanied then with flute. This section has an unusual metrical arrangement of phrases that add up to thirteen beats: each consists of three bars of 3/4 plus one of 4/4.¹⁹ The strings (not actual viols) re-enter, and the section is rounded off, still repeating the first two lines of stanza five, with a reprise of the introduction, this time with added chorus.

Unlike the second movement, the division in the third doesn't coincide with a new stanza. As shadows fall in the transitional bars (see Ex. 3), stanza five is still incomplete; its last line follows the first bars of the new dance, which stanza six will identify as a 'measure weird and dark'. Neither the key nor the motifs of the first dance return; narrative has priority over symphonic form.

Ex.3

Tenors: With man - ner bland Doth ask the mai - den's
sha - dow in;

Violas

Clarinet

134 hand,

wind instruments

ppp rit.

139 Moderato Solo oboe

ff pp pp

143 pp

Doth with her the dance be - gin;

Horn

14 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 163.

15 The diminished seventh and syncopated chords, bar 14, following touches of minor harmony.

16 See the first article in this series. The 'Leitmotiv' aspect of Elgar is fully explored in Florian Csizmadia, *Leitmotivik und verwandte Techniken in den Chorwerken von Edward Elgar* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Köster, 2017); chapter 7 is on *The Black Knight* (pp. 190–202).

17 'Stricken children', and 'Death' (the Black Knight's motif) are identified in my first article.

18 In the Phrygian mode, the second degree is flattened (A flat in G minor). Solo oboe is a common choice to evoke an oriental instrument. The accompaniment, although in 3/4, is reminiscent of Carmen's Habanera, seductive as well as sinister.

19 As noted by Robin Holloway 'The Early Choral Works' (see note 9), 65; see also Edward Green 'Sir Edward Elgar: master of rhythm', this *Journal* 14/4 (March 2006).

The finale, setting the last four stanzas, recalls ideas from earlier movements for dramatic reasons, but the movement has a potentially symphonic outline: introduction, main section, somewhat disjointed peroration, coda. The introduction, a 39-bar *Andante*, sets the first two lines of stanza seven: the revellers assemble for the feast. This introduction is not, however, integrated into the rest (as happens in Elgar's First Symphony); it stands alone, uncertain in key but not in the sort-of-symphony's tonic (G major).²⁰ The main central action, *Allegretto*, is also insecure in key; it starts in C minor and arrives at the eventual tonic, G, but in the minor, as the children drink the 'golden wine'. Hence Elgar has reached a point where he could close in G, but the *Allegretto* has only reached the end of stanza eight. The last two stanzas require several musical changes to narrate the children's death, the king's terrible cry, and the Black Knight's cynical response. The central section makes the strongest claim within the finale to be symphonic. Elgar manipulates two main motifs (A and B in Exx. 4 and 5) symphonically, over no fewer than 199 bars. Ex. 4 shows motif A in its original form; a modest enough idea, all the better for development as the action unfolds.²¹ The falling fourth in the third bar is taken on its own (indicated by arrows in Ex. 4), and also generates the more energetic motif B, shifted to the strong first half of the bar; it enters combined with motif A – true symphonic thinking.²²

Ex. 4 Motif A (violins) Chorus (lower voices omitted) Flute

p dolce e mesto Twixt son and daugh-ter all dis traught,

50 With mourn-ful, mourn-ful mind The an-cient king re-

58 Clarinet Flute

clin'd. *cresc.* *f*

Motif B in the bass

Motif 'A' accompanies the description of the royal trio, 'all distraught', the children pale, the king mournful, as if they know what's coming. Motif B makes a sudden crescendo; perhaps the Black Knight has risen to his feet. The chorus ends stanza seven ('Gazed at them in silent thought') and

20 The *Andante maestoso* begins in A flat, perhaps alluding to the Phrygian A flat of movement three. It settles into E flat (Elgar changes the key-signature before the choral entry), but ends hovering on an A flat chord, then a lone A flat, preparing the C minor *Allegretto* (main section).

21 In Ex.4 the first ten bars show only the soprano (the full chorus is involved) and the orchestral treble developing motif A; it is accompanied by a firm bass (entered from bar 60) and delicate staccato inner parts.

22 The omitted bars repeat the previous line of text to similar music.

continues with the first line of stanza eight ('Pale the children both did look'). The combined A and B recur (bar 94), then an outburst leads to motif B *fortissimo* in G minor, as the Knight moves into action ('But the guest a beaker took'). This motif is vigorously developed until the orchestra seems to break into diabolical laughter (Ex. 5; the demons in *Gerontius* were only a few years away).²³

Ex. 5 Motif B

But the guest a bea-ker took,

Diabolical laughter

120 A flat to D (tritone)

This central section continues its development, with more thematic integration: motif A is again combined with B (now in G minor, bar 156) before its clinching combination with 'Death' and 'Stricken children'.²⁴ The elimination of motifs A and B, with organ ('vox angelica') and muted strings, suggest the poisoning (the children's last words: 'that draught was very cool!') may be painless. The main section fails to resolve in its original key (or that of the introduction), ending with whimpers of the two-note figure, sinister harmonies, and halting on a mild dissonance (the dominant of E flat).

Now comes the dénouement, disjointed only in a symphonic sense. The children die to a slower tempo, *Larghetto*, in the major key just prepared (E flat).²⁵ Each beautiful unaccompanied choral phrase is sorrowfully echoed by a horn, a descending fourth like the arrowed motif in Ex.4, in a lower register than the melody. The children 'colourless grow utterly'; their 'stricken' motive returns (bar 252). The passage, of nearly unbearable beauty, uses a solo violin rising and falling over nearly three octaves.

The king's outburst requires something more vigorous (*Allegro molto*, the fastest music of the finale), but soon gets slower (*Andante*); he is too distraught for the music to be coherent, but it is gestural, responding to words like operatic recitative. At 'in the joy of youth', Elgar brings back 'Pentecost', a cruel irony (bar 296). The same scary harmony from the second movement plunges to the depths; the music slows to *Lento*. The thematic combination places a version of 'Death' above the 'stricken children' – for death has triumphed (Ex. 6). Beneath the choral monotone, used for the knight's first words (second movement), is the same curious chord, *sforzando*, on a lugubrious combination of bass clarinet and horns.

23 The abrupt harmonic shift between A flat and D (with seventh): the chords alternate, emphasizing the 'devil's interval', the tritone (as in Berlioz's 'Marche au supplice' in *Symphonie fantastique*).

24 The combination of motif A, 'Death', and 'Stricken children' is quoted in my first article, p. 12.

25 The 'major happy, minor sad' opposition is simplistic; Donald Tovey remarked of Gluck that his highest pathos is in the major (for example 'Che faro senza Euridice' from *Orfeo*); Handel's Dead March (*Saul*) is in C major.

Ex . 6

Lento $\text{♩} = 60$

'Death' Choral monotone: Spake the
 'stricken children'

316 grim Guest, From his hol-low, ca-ver-nous breast, [Roses in the spring I gather.]

pp *sfp* *sfp* *pp*

This passage is immediately followed by the Knight's sneering response: 'Greis! Im Frühling brech' ich Rosen'.²⁶ 'Roses' is accompanied by a version of 'Pentecost', but in recalling that once happy theme, the unaccompanied voices, *pianissimo*, are not the voice of Death. This comes orchestrally, with a terrifying crescendo and another gestural *Allegro molto* – only five bars! – with the 'Death' *Leitmotiv* now where it belongs, in the bass, and 'stricken children' above.²⁷ This is pure Wagnerian music-drama, as is the exquisite ending, the dying of joy in Pentecost and spring, the violins' ascent as if to heaven, with the basses' final pizzicato a sombre full stop.

The finale returns us to the question: how symphonic, really, is *The Black Knight*? It closes in the key of its first movement, and returns to its opening theme, like Brahms's Third Symphony, a work Elgar loved, deeply understood, and lectured on (though a closer parallel is his own Second Symphony). But when themes from the first two movements return in the finale, there is no symphonic apotheosis. 'Pentecost', 'Death', and 'stricken children' are representative themes (*Leitmotiven*), and their return and their use in combination is undertaken in the spirit of music-drama, rather than as 'abstract' symphonic thinking. Yet Wagner's system was already based on the appropriation for dramatic purposes of symphonic development and transformation of themes; Elgar here brings off his first exercise in post-Wagnerian music-drama. Finally, instrumental symphonies may have movements that end quietly, usually the slow movement, by way of contrast with applause-generating loud endings; but *The Black Knight* is exceptional in that *all four movements* end quietly.

So: a symphony? Yes and no. But 'a sort of symphony', certainly. *The Black Knight*, I suggest, is also more than just a stage in Elgar's progress towards the masterpieces of his fifth and sixth decades. The definition of 'masterpiece' is subject to individual preferences; undoubtedly,

26 The setting of 'Roses in the spring I gather' is shown in my first article, p. 16. The translation, in which Longfellow omitted the word 'Greis', is discussed in the second article, this *Journal* Vol. 23 No. 1 (April 2021).

27 The key here (bar 332) is E minor, relative to G major in which the work ends, whereas these motives have previously been heard in flat keys; the effect is devastating.

however, *The Black Knight* was the work of one endowed with musical and dramatic imagination, and remarkable skill in realizing an original formal conception, and in handling a large orchestra: at the very least, the work of a master in the making.

Julian Rushton, Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Leeds, edited the Elgar Society Journal (2006–10), and Elgar's music for string orchestra and orchestral songs for the Elgar Complete Edition. He has written several articles and chapters concerned with Elgar, including contributions to books he jointly edited: the Cambridge Companion to Elgar (with Daniel M. Grimley) and Elgar Studies (with J. P. E. Harper-Scott).

Celebrating Ashton's *Enigma Variations*

Andrew Neill

On Monday, 28 October 1968 *The Financial Times* published Andrew Porter's thoughtful and considered review of the Royal Ballet's production of Sir Frederick Ashton's new ballet. Porter ended his piece: '*Enigma Variations* strikes me as a masterpiece: one of the most sensitive comments on Elgar ever made; and a heart-rending work of art'. Since the ballet's first night (25 October 1968) it has sustained itself in the repertoire and the recent release of a DVD of 2019 performances has prompted this opportunity to consider the impact of the ballet and to review how it is remembered by those who attended performances when the ballet was still new.

In 1940 the Rambert and London Ballets jointly presented a ballet using Elgar's *Enigma Variations*; a production which made no reference to 'friends pictured within' but was 'an abstract treatment of the music'.¹ So, in many ways, when Ashton produced his version in 1968, he was treading on new ground, as the ballet critic of *The Times* John Percival perceived when he wrote after the first night: 'There have been plenty of ballets about love, but friendship as a subject is rare'. That year, two other important events relating to Elgar's music took place: the publication of Michael Kennedy's *Portrait of Elgar* and EMI's recording of *The Kingdom* which was released the following year. The rehabilitation of Elgar's post-war reputation, if not complete, was now well advanced.

Even with the passing of 53 years, Ashton's extraordinary production at Covent Garden's Royal Opera House still seems an exceptional event. For the twenty years after World War II, when Elgar's reputation was at its lowest, the *Enigma Variations* sustained its hold on concert programmes - even the Glock regime at the BBC could not silence Elgar's music completely. Recently, a distinguished musician and I agreed that the two greatest sets of orchestral variations composed since the death of Beethoven were those by Elgar and Rachmaninov, his *Paganini Variations*. I appreciate not all readers will agree but the point is that both composers survived the obloquy of those who believed they knew better and, perhaps to their surprise, found that in 1968 the Royal Ballet was to perform - to Elgar's music - a new ballet choreographed by the great Sir Frederick Ashton. In early 1969 a film was made of the ballet, directed by James Archibald but, although certainly better than nothing it is, as David Vaughan observed, 'no more satisfactory than most filmed ballets but does preserve some record of the performances of the original cast'.²

1 David Vaughan, *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets* (London: Dance Books, 1977), 356. The ballet was choreographed by Frank Staff.

2 Vaughan, 263.

On 25 October 1968 the *Enigma Variations* ballet began its run at the Royal Opera House, the first of three ballets Ashton would choreograph to Elgar's music.³ This was at the 'height of the swinging sixties' as Patricia Linton reminds us in her essay for the new DVD release - we are pleased to publish this as part of this article. However, Ashton's devotion to the music and the loving and, to my eyes, exquisite production, would 'easily outlive the ephemera of Carnaby Street, 1960's pop and the satire of the time'. Indeed, how can we forget, for it was Julia Trevelyan Oman who, even as a student, was responsible for the genesis of the ballet having created some original drawings which were sent to Dame Ninette de Valois⁴ who, in turn, passed them to Ashton. Somehow, Oman achieved a form of Arcadian bliss set 70 years before which, for those who know and love the *Enigma Variations*, remains perfect for our perceptions of life then, notwithstanding our knowledge that bliss was and is only of the moment and that squalor and poverty lurked beneath the surface.

Ashton's perceptive understanding of Elgar's character is evident in the portrayal he choreographed for Derek Rencher, which included the composer's attractiveness to women and his susceptibility to female charm and beauty. The characters are portrayed under the watchful eye of C.A.E. (The Lady) who understood, and anyway usually befriended, those on whom her husband's eye fell. Although the dancers in both the 1969 and 2019 films are too tall for Alice this does not really matter for much of her personality is portrayed and was understood by Ashton. His insight into the characters is made clear by his biographer:

Always chattering and laughing, [Antoinette] Sibley worshipped Ashton (who referred to her as his 'Beloved Dorabella'). 'He knew that I just adored him and would try anything for him'.

Dame Antoinette portrayed Dorabella more as a teenager than a young lady.

Sibley danced the role convinced that Dorabella was infatuated with the composer and vice versa. It is this intimation of hidden yearning - for Elgar, the lure of youth and beauty, which Ashton understood so well - that cuts through the girlish winsomeness of the variation.⁵

Jerrold Northrop Moore has memories of more than one performance in the original production, stirred by a recent viewing of the film made then. He recalls

a magical effect in the actual performance, not included in the film. For the three-asterisked thirteenth variation 'Romanza', a floor-covering mist from offstage dry ice hid the dancer's small-stepping feet: so she appeared to float now closer, now farther from the Elgar-dancer. This made the point that here is a figure different from all the preceding friends. (It may have been omitted in filming for its danger of obscuring the camera close-up lens.) The film does capture to perfection the dancer's sudden vanishing at the end of her variation with all her amorphous veils through the tiniest of doors at the back of the stage.

3 The other works are *Salut d'amour* choreographed for Dame Margot Fonteyn's 60th birthday in 1979 and *Nursery Suite* choreographed for another 60th birthday, that of H M the Queen (now the last living dedicatee of an Elgar composition) in 1986.

4 Ninette de Valois (1898-2001) founder of The Royal Ballet and Royal Ballet school.

5 Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses The Life of Frederick Ashton* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 504. In the 1969 film the part of Dorabella was danced by Ann Jenner. Dame Antoinette was born in 1939. Dorabella was 24 in 1898.

The film's E.D.U. Finale camera-work damages the actual performances' magical Romanza-figure's projection in a different way. Where the Covent Garden spectator saw all from the constant distance of his seat, the film's close-up editorialising nudges a spectator's elbow with its contradicting physicalities reducing the 'Romanza' back to the status of the others.⁶

In the performance, Dr Moore remembers the Romanza dancer 'as a far more exiguous figure weaving her distancing magic amongst them all'.

There is no substitute for the experience of being there but a film or television broadcast is, of course, 'better than nothing'. There is no completely satisfactory alternative to live music making and, in this case, dance. However, it is a film (DVD) release we are celebrating and the reason for this retrospect.

Elgar portrayed two professional musicians of the thirteen 'friends pictured within' (Jaeger and G.R.S.) but most 'variations' were from Alice's circle and most were amateur musicians, some of whom were, I suspect, of more than average competence. Only the cellist B.G.N. is shown playing an instrument and his variation is given to the dancing of Alice and Edward. In the Royal Ballet programme John Lanchbery explained the decision behind one of the musical choices:

The Enigma Variations have been played ever since [Elgar] extended [the] ending, but because Sir Frederick Ashton wanted a shorter finale, I have copied the original ending from Elgar's manuscript, and it is used here in this ballet. (It has not been played, hitherto, since 1899). I would like to thank Michael Kennedy for his help in suggesting where to look for it and Miss Pamela Willets of the British Museum for helping me find it.

This did not satisfy all those who attended, one correspondent writing to Ashton: 'that sudden feeble ending came as a great shock – a kind of musical coitus interruptus'!

6 From a note to the author, 2021.



**The Lady – Elgar's wife (C.A.E.) – Svetlana Beriosova
& Edward Elgar (E.D.U.) – Derek Rencher
Conrad Blakemore/ ArenaPAL**

Critical Reception

Carice Elgar Blake, who attended the first night, was impressed telling Ashton 'I don't know how you did it because they were exactly like that'.⁷ Carice, who celebrated her eighth birthday in August 1898, would have had a memory of the characters brought to life on the stage. It seems that few had time for a little Victorian girl for she recalled only Troyte with any affection. Diana McVeagh, who wrote the review of the ballet for *The Musical Times*, recalls sitting between Sir Adrian Boult and Joy Finzi, before meeting Carice afterwards. A few days later she received a charming letter from the only person who could recall the time of the ballet's setting and the people it portrayed:

Oct 29th 1968

Dear Miss McVeagh

It was a great pleasure to meet you again – I am so sorry I did not realise at once who you were – may I say that part of the pleasure was seeing you look so well & so happy.

It was a unique and quite unforgettable experience – to see all those people portrayed – part of one's life as it were – & so beautifully done. I first could not imagine how it was going to work out - it never struck me it could be so marvellous. It's so odd looking back – you see at the age of 8 or 9 as I was, I thought, as children always do, that all these people were at least 50! & when I went back to Worcs in the late twenty or early thirties, I was staggered to find they were still alive!

Thank you very much for the Financial Times – I shall see it when the cutting people function but one always has to wait – so I was very glad to have it – as you say it is most perceptive. Caroline doesn't really matter a bit⁸ – except that my mother hated it! Personally I prefer it to Alice! It was an unforgettable experience – Sir Frederick is wonderful - & the drawings by Miss O were most skilful and perceptive.

Nice to have your address & thank you again for writing.

Yours affectly
Carice Elgar Blake⁹

Although the ballet largely met with critical approval there were some cavils. A V Coton in *The Daily Telegraph* felt that 'the character-drawing is cautious and conventional rather than acutely revelatory' and in *The Observer* Alexander Bland ended 'their' review with the comment that the production was 'unmistakably Ashtonian, a charming album of memories of the wispy poetic-nostalgic-romantic style of the thirties'.¹⁰ James Kennedy in *The Guardian* wondered if it was 'quite big enough and strong enough to make a ballet which can really live . . . with this music'. Having said that he acknowledged that 'the performance last night . . . was beyond reproach'. The writer and critic Richard Buckle attempted satire whilst approving of the enterprise. Although this approach is rarely successful, he suggests that with the arrival of the telegram: 'John Lanchbery in the pit looks disappointed. He thought he was going to conduct it!'

7 Kavanagh, 508.

8 The *Financial Times* reviewer had referred to Lady Elgar as Caroline rather than Alice.

9 We are grateful to Miss McVeagh for giving permission to reproduce this letter in full.

10 Alexander Bland was the *nom de plume* of husband and wife Nigel and Maude Gosling who more or less 'adopted' Nureyev when he came to Britain.

Nevertheless, most critics were unstinting in their praise of the ballet, Clement Crisp in *The Financial Times*, writing: 'how truly the Royal Ballet's artists catch the deeper implications of the work, notably Derek Rencher as Elgar, and Desmond Doyle as Jaeger...' John Percival, also wrote a perceptive, sympathetic review which was published in *The Times* on Saturday, 26 October 1968. Percival saw clearly what the production was attempting to achieve as well as the music. He understood Elgar's character and that of Ashton too. He does not patronise his readers, but he presumes they know the subject and their Elgar. A week later Percival was able to consider the ballet in greater depth (*The Times* 2 November 1968). This included a photograph of the final (group) scene in the production and he also took on the gainsayers. In this later reflection Percival realised the heart of Ashton's achievement: 'These are people, not just sketches, and the marvellous thing is that Ashton is portraying them in dance, not acting'. What is so infectious is that Percival clearly greatly enjoyed what he witnessed; he was not just there as a critic. He ended his second essay: 'What a pleasure it is, after so many ballets about fairy-tale characters and melodramatic situations, to see credible, adult characters like these on the stage of the Opera House. This is what makes the ballet to me, and many others, so irresistible'.

Diana McVeagh, for the *Musical Times*, contributed a review under the heading 'Music in London'. We are grateful to her for granting permission to reprint it.

Ashton's ballet to Elgar's *Variations on an Original Theme* op 36 seems to me a masterpiece. On the simplest level, it is a set of illustrations for the well-known 'programme'; but it is comment and interpretation too. Ashton has struck a most delicate balance between set dance and narrative, realistic and romantic convention. The first, overwhelming impression is that never has the music been so keenly felt. At a second, and a third performance, one goes on to read the details, follow the allusions, experience the symbols. For behind the deceptively simple stage-pictures is a criss-cross of emotions. As deftly as Elgar translated images and feelings into sound, so Ashton has re-translated them into sight, and, being also a poet, has added his own.

All Elgar's pictured friends are there, in costumes designed with loving accuracy by Julia Trevelyan Oman—to close the ballet, there is an album group photograph with HDS-P clicking his camera. To open it is a tableau of half-a-dozen people on Miss Oman's composite set of the house and garden in Worcestershire, 1898.

Elgar stands, score in hand, his face lighting up as he 'hears' his theme. Dorabella comes to visit, runs in, fails to distract him, then—diverting little playmate that she was—gaily bobs up in the circle of his arms between him and his music. Elgar hands the score, indicating the place, to a man sitting quietly at the study table—A. J. Jaeger of Novello. Alice Elgar welcomes Dorabella, then comes forward for CAE, her tender pas de deux with her husband. Ashton's phrasing arises so naturally from the music that one begins to hear with one's eyes: at the E flat modulation Alice runs towards Elgar and is carried above his head in a great lift as the theme strikes in *ff sostenuto*. Then, suddenly, at the drawn-out cadence, she has a glimpse of some wonder that makes her catch her breath—'she saw greatness in him before he had composed one great work...'

For HDS-P, a dancer's limbering exercises work as well as a pianists. RBT is put through the hoop in cheerful play with five children—shouldn't the programme note, as well as mentioning his voice and his tricycle, give the clue that RBT was made to act, 'much against his will', in amateur theatricals? WMB bounds down the stairs, with orders for the day, into his '*forcible*' solo (this is the only variation in which some music is repeated).

After CAE, Elgar and Dorabella had strolled off into the woods, as in real life they so often did. During HDS-P, he walks back, and for RBT stands on the edge of the group. In Derek Rencher, the Elgar of the photographs has come to life. But what point in his—or our—life? All these characters on

the stage were not so long ago real, living people; Elgar gave them immortality in his music; now here he is, sometimes partnering, sometimes observing, his own creations; sometimes (it almost seems) uncannily, watching Ashton's. It is a many-layered experience, this weaving in and out of time.

As RPA begins, Elgar looks across the distant countryside, then turns and amusedly watches the charming flirtation Ashton has devised for RPA and Ysobel. But there is not only that for us to watch; for, as in the music, so in the ballet, there is a graver counter-theme: Alice Elgar enters the study, examines the score on the now deserted table, clasps it to her heart, looks indulgently at the 'light-hearted badinage', and with that proud tilt to her chin that Beriosova makes unutterably moving, slowly mounts the stairs.

For Troyte's 'giddy' solo (Anthony Dowell), Elgar settles into the basket chair pictured in Dorabella's book—how exactly Rencher has caught the alert set of the head, the quizzical smile. Has anyone before Ashton heard the suggestion of *Nimrod* at the end of *Troyte*? Exactly on that cue (fig 29) comes Jaeger (Desmond Doyle) escorting WN (Georgina Parkinson). After her graceful dance he looks courteously after her, one arm outstretched (how soon will ballet audiences learn to read how Ashton has 'written' this tied note, and not break in with applause?).

And so to *Nimrod*. At this point Ashton takes leave of the facts and trusts to his heart. The 'incident known only to two persons' has become a trio, for Alice joins Elgar and Jaeger as gentle mediator. The variation begins realistically; there is conversation, argument. Then, as the noble melody soars up an octave, her lifts match its elevated spirit—again and again in this ballet Ashton simply and poetically puts metaphors to work on the stage. At the end, the three of them stand gazing at the audience with shining eyes; at the *diminuendo*, their arms slowly drop, the light dims. It is as direct, unselfconscious and heartfelt as the music.

After a delicious *Dorabella* (Antoinette Sibley) with whom Elgar begins to dance as the viola begins to play, and a hilarious *Sinclair/Dan*, comes Ashton's masterstroke. BGN is not given a dance. His passionate cello tune becomes a love duet for Elgar and his wife: or, rather, an expression of her devotion to him, for he, his soul with high music ringing, dwells a little apart. And ***, following at once on Alice's poignant, protective gestures, is made the true mystery of Ashton's ballet. This vision is not just Lady Mary Lygon, or any other woman he may have romantically inclined towards; not even Woman; but his Muse, the inspiration for which he must ever be waiting.

Sharply, the mood is broken. For EDU himself, Ashton wittily just suggests (for the final variation) the finale of a *variety* show, the men coming on in pairs, the four women with linked hands, till all the company, barring the principals, are on stage. Then so that the ending, like the beginning (with Dorabella's coming to stay), shall frame the ballet, we are back in Elgar's 'real' life. A telegram comes: Richter has agreed to conduct the first performance - of the music we have just seen composed! Jaeger opens it, and has his moment of triumph, but Ashton, wanting to close with Elgar and not the extended *Nimrod* peroration, has used the original ending (just after fig 76). Alice reads the telegram and Elgar drops on his knee before her: 'all that I have done...'

The ballet looks and sounds beautiful. William Bundy's lighting, the playing under John Lanchbery, are full of understanding. And over and through the friendships of these warm, lovable people, so precisely placed in their period, Ashton has made his timeless comment on the artist's creative vision. It would be pedantic now to refuse to call the work *Enigma Variations*; but it was never so called in early programmes, and not even the Novello score makes clear that Elgar wrote 'Enigma' against his theme only, directly above that curious first strain with its empty first beats. When he composed *The Music Makers* (1912) he admitted that his 'enigma' expressed the 'loneliness of the artist'. In his old age he hankered after a ballet set to the *Variations*. And now that idea has been gloriously fulfilled.



Edward Elgar



The Lady

Designs by Julia Trevelyan Oman for *Enigma Variations*



From the original 1968 Royal Ballet programme

Recollections

The issue of the DVD from the performances in 2019 prompted a number of those who remembered the original production to recall the occasions they attended and, at the same time, allow many of us to undertake a reconsideration of a production that surprised us by its skill, the beauty of its set and the use of Elgar's original ending. We are most grateful to Professor Richard Evans for agreeing to review the DVD for the *Journal*. Although never commercially issued, the film of the original production is well-known which enables us to 'compare and contrast' this with the new version. For me, who is no balletomane, but who has been enchanted by the great ballets of Tchaikovsky, some of the French masters and Prokofiev's masterpiece *Romeo and Juliet*, any thoughts I have on the ballet must be from a different angle, particularly as it is clearly the dancing and choreography that attract the ballet enthusiast, and this is nowhere more obvious than in this new film. In 1969, when the original film was made there was no audience present. The dancing was uninterrupted, with the music flowing naturally, sympathetically conducted by John Lanchbery. In 2019 many variations (the dancers) were applauded, thereby obscuring Elgar's music, the *segues* between variations and the logic of the musical connections. I found it distracting but others and, presumably, balletomanes may not be so concerned or even surprised.

Where better to start, as we look back, than with the memories of a dancer in that original production? For the production in 2019 Patricia Linton, who danced the role of the school-girl in 1969, wrote the following for the DVD booklet, under the heading: *Clean, True and Fresh*:

Elgar's own characterization of '*Enigma Variations*' was 'friends pictured within'. But it was Frederick Ashton, supported by a legendary cast of dancers, who captured visually, in dramatic movement, the friends that Elgar had immortalized musically. In Ashton's exquisite 'picturing' so much human depth is conveyed by a gentle gesture, by a hand reaching out or laid upon another, by a veiled signal missed, a shoulder turned, a tilted head, all speaking of feelings recognized or only half-recognized in a fleeting moment or missed, sadly, lost for ever. For Ashton, in contrast to the pyrotechnics we expect in ballet today, less is so often so much more.

The idea of a ballet, to music that had long been a staple of the concert hall, was actually mooted in the 1950s by the designer Julia Trevelyan Oman, but nothing came of it for more than a decade. By then it was the height of the Swinging Sixties, at which time Ashton's decision to mount a costume ballet, full of Victorian resonance, must have seemed to many to be positively perverse. We weren't then to know how Ashton's masterpiece would so easily outlive the ephemera of Carnaby Street, 1960s pop and the satire of the time.

However, as a young dancer in 1968, kitted out in the latest miniskirt and Vidal Sassoon haircut, chattering and jostling my way to The Royal Ballet's then rehearsal studios at Baron's Court, such counter-cultural thoughts couldn't have been further from my mind. We had heard something about the new ballet by Ashton being based on Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, but we had little clue as to what that enigma was! The most important thing was to get to the notice board and see if your name was down for a part, however small.

I remember that all the different sections of the ballet were rehearsed separately, more or less behind closed doors. After a while there came the moment when the doors were thrown open to the first full call. There was much excitement and tension in the air, compounded by the arrival of props, including bicycles and tricycles, pipes, books, baskets, long swishing skirts and even a cello, but nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to see.

Each 'picture' emerged with wit, beauty, grace and charm by turns, but the very heart of the ballet for me was the 'Nimrod' variation. The music here, tinged with sadness, loss, regret and deep,

deep feeling, seemed to be held back only finally to overflow in a great outpouring of love. Even remembering that *pas de trois*, with Svetlana Beriosova as Alice, Elgar's wife, Derek Rencher as Elgar himself and Desmond Doyle as A.J. Jaeger, Elgar's closest friend, makes me want to cry: a mood, a lifetime, all accomplished with a heartrending and humbling simplicity. Gently, mysteriously, throughout the ballet, layer upon layer of universal themes are woven together: success and failure, musical and other passions, the priceless love and friendship of different types and intensity, and underlying everything, the loneliness of the artist.

Now, in 2019, there are several fascinating accounts of Ashton and his ballets, which are well worth reading for what they tell us about the history and background of his choreography. However, the genius of Ashton resides in what he gives us in the moment of watching, and also in what he was able to draw out of the artists with whom he was working. As Alexander Grant, the original exuberant William Meath Baker, once said (of Ashton) 'he was completely aware of what was required theatrically for the public. He never wanted anything too long. We were lucky to have narrative ballets to have the chance to show our artistry, we were able to stand out both as characters and artists'.

What he (Ashton) did, he did with few words. The creation was all in the movement and what the movement could reveal psychologically and emotionally. Antoinette Sibley, the original Dorabella, explains: 'He never really said about the characters. It was really when you got the costumes that everything shifted a gear. The Dorabella solo was terribly exhausting, and I'm glad to discover that all the young dancers I've coached in it since, all find it so! There are lots of jumps on pointe and lots of shoulder movement and leaning forwards, sideways and backwards – an absolute nightmare!'

Nightmare or not, Sibley always made it look so easy and spontaneous. Ashton catches the mercurial nature of Dora Penny perfectly - gay and pensive by turns and with a bit of a stammer as well. How do you do that in movement, an impossible task it might seem, until we actually see it. As it happens the Dorabella we do see is not quite what Ashton originally envisaged. Sibley remembers that he wanted her to be a part of the 'Nimrod' variation, but by a series of happy flukes there was no girlish intrusion into that adult conversation.

Towards the end of the ballet, after Basil G. Nevinson has played his cello, comes Elgar's 'xxx', long assumed to be Lady Mary Lygon. Deanne Bergsma was Ashton's Lady Mary: 'I adored working with him and having him around so much made the "golden era" for me. He was a very warm personality and human and he would use your assets to great effect. He would watch and mould a piece around what you could do'. After the thrill of being asked to be in the ballet, she remembers being called to his office: 'Sir Fred was sitting behind his desk smoking and looking very nervous. Would I agree to take this role, if I ended up being just a silhouette? But when the first rehearsal came, we listened to the music and then he said *bouffée*, whereupon it all seemed to gel within an hour. I thought I was just going to stand at the back and it turned out to be a wonderful solo!'

Julia Trevelyan Oman's ingenious inside-outside set design and exquisite costumes were all constructed with meticulous care, to convey exactly the right feeling not just to the audience but, as she said, to the dancers themselves. I remember Julia telling me that she had dyed my skirt seven times to get just the right feel and texture and my part of the Schoolgirl was a tiny one in the context of the whole ballet. She lovingly framed each picture, each person, each life, although as Bergsma tells us, when her original costume was not 'floaty' enough, it was changed. Ashton, for all his apparent demurring, was definite enough when it mattered balletically.

In spite of being steeped in history, neither the music nor the ballet should be seen as aiming at biographical truth. The ballet is at least two removes from reality and would be valid even if the characters were entirely fictional, and maybe even if the music were seen as in a sense 'pure' music - though that Ashton was faithful to the music's spirit is confirmed by the great Elgarian, Adrian Boult, conducting some of the performances. What a fantastic moment it was for me as a young dancer to see him standing in the orchestra pit.

What the ballet does so vividly is to create a world we can recognize, but which is not our world. Ashton is sometimes compared to Chekhov, but in *Enigma Variations* there are no confessional outpourings or melodramatic moments. Elgar's - or is it Ashton's? - characters have deep feelings, but they are restrained, dignified, constrained by a sense of propriety, of duty, of fidelity.

The genius of Ashton, and of Elgar too, is that they can convey this world in such a way that we are caught up in it and feel it deeply - humour, manly gruffness and all - without condescension or mockery. I read once that Constable had written about a little work of Van Ruisdael's 'it haunts my mind and clings to my heart, the whole is so clean, true and fresh'. These words perfectly capture my feeling as the curtain falls on *Enigma Variations*, on that final photograph of the friends pictured within, behind the curtain, within the photograph, within ever receding memory.¹¹

Sometime in 1971 I used what little of my meagre salary I could spare to go to the Royal Opera House. What turned out to be a memorable evening also sprang several unforgettable surprises. The first was, of course, Oman's set and then the use of Elgar's original ending. This made dramatic sense as well as suggesting to me that it would have been more or less impossible to choreograph the familiar ending and make it an ensemble piece. Indeed, Ashton said that he found it 'impossible to reach up to the full sonority of that ending'.¹² Nevertheless, hearing this for the first time was a shock, leaving me with the feeling of 'is that all'? However, there were the characters brought to life: H.D.S-P. on a bicycle (originally on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum) and R.B.T. on a tricycle pedalling in time to the music, Elgar looking like the composer and Jaeger quietly observing everything until 'Nimrod' and his production of the crucial telegram, everything concluding with the group photograph and *that finale!*¹³

There followed Jerome Robbins's *Dances at a Gathering* performed to the music of Chopin, the solo piano and pianist placed discreetly on the side of the stage. *Dances at a Gathering*, created for the New York Ballet in 1969, was even newer than the Ashton. It does not tell a story, but it implies one. I have seen it since and, to my inexperienced eyes is a masterpiece as is Kenneth MacMillan's *Concerto* which is also included on the new DVD. To my shame I had given no thought to the second half of the evening and was stunned to find I was watching the *crème* of the Royal Ballet on stage and the *crème de la crème* which was, of course, Rudolf Nureyev. So, I can tell my grand-children I saw the great man as well as Derek Rencher as Elgar! Those readers who saw the original production would know that Rencher's likeness to Elgar was astonishing and, even in close up, this likeness was not diminished.

I am not qualified to criticise or comment on the quality of the dancing in this DVD release. All three ballets were filmed in October and November 2019 and I will leave it to our critic to comment

11 Patricia Linton danced with The Royal Ballet in the 1960s and then taught at The Royal Ballet School for many years. She is now the Director of *Voices of British Ballet*. This article first appeared in the Royal Opera House programme for the 2019 performances of The Royal Ballet's *Enigma Variations*. Quotations from Alexander Grant, Antoinette Sibley and Deanne Bergsma are taken from conversations with Frank Freeman for *Voices of British Ballet*. We are grateful to The Royal Opera House for their permission to reproduce this essay.

12 Kavanagh, 509.

13 In the new DVD, the entrance of R.B.T. on his tricycle is almost obscured by the other dancers.

on the dancing and Ashton's choreography. When the curtain rose on that first evening over fifty years ago I, as do many others, remember the beauty of the set and Julia Trevelyan Oman's concept of a Worcestershire summer garden in 1898. John Lanchbery conducted the evening I attended. Other evenings were conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, particularly when the ballet was transferred to the Coliseum. Did Sir Adrian's mind go back nearly 50 years, I wonder, to the time he spent learning fourteen ballet scores over a few days for Sergei Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes? In any event, his mastery of the idiom was appreciated by the dancers and, as Clement Crisp observed in 1973, 'coax[ed] an interpretation of great subtlety from the orchestra which was mirrored in the stage performance'.¹⁴

Another member of the Society **Peter Smith** (Treasurer) 'worked at the Royal Opera House in the late 1970s. I remember watching Sir Adrian Boult rehearsing the *Enigma* ballet. I was particularly struck by one moment, when the dancers were telling him how fast a particular passage needed to go. Boult had been conducting the work since before most of the dancers were born but, gentleman that he was, he was happy to acquiesce'.

Tony Alman saw the production at Covent Garden in October 1970: 'Ballet is not my strong suit and the only names which strike my memory now are Wayne Sleep and Anthony Dowell.¹⁵ I remember the piece as having a very nostalgic feel visually with many autumn colours. Of course I was very familiar with the music and I felt a shade disappointed that they used the original short finale. John Lanchbery explains why in the programme notes. The second half was quite different - *Dances at a Gathering*, set to a succession of Chopin pieces. Rudolf Nureyev was in this item. My ticket in the balcony cost me the princely sum of one pound five shillings'. Mr Alman has a point: coming to the ballet with no prior knowledge would place anyone at a considerable disadvantage: who are these characters, what are they doing and why and what is the meaning of that telegram? Without 'knowing', the *Enigma Variations* can be a recondite work, as can the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. With no knowledge of the play would any audience member understand the many layers of the story beyond the obvious love between Juliet and Romeo?

The consequences of attending such cultural events can have lasting consequences! The late **Peter Ainsworth** did not recall the exact date he attended 'but I was about 12 years old, so it might well have been 1968. To say that it was an influential experience would be an understatement. I had never seen a ballet before and was only dimly aware of Elgar and his music. I absolutely loved it and rushed out the next day to buy the Colin Davis LP. Thus began a relationship with Elgar from which I have never escaped. Whilst still at school I was introduced to Jerrold Northrop Moore, who was then working on his monumental *Elgar: A Creative Life*. Several years later I sneaked off from a cricket match at New Road (my father was playing in a WCCC veterans' match and had got himself out) and went to Lower Broadheath. There I met Jack McKenzie and Vivienne - custodians at the time - who said that they could do with some help with visitors during the upcoming Three Choirs Festival. I took up an unpaid holiday job with them, showing tourists round and spending my nights sleeping on the floor of the tiny kitchen which I shared with a friendly fourteen-year-old Labrador whose gaseous nocturnal emissions were, and remain, memorable. I returned next summer for a second stint - this time I had the kitchen to myself'.¹⁶

14 *Financial Times*, 29 May 1973.

15 Sleep danced G.R.S. and Anthony Dowell Troyte.

16 Ainsworth, by then MP for East Surrey, succeeded David Bowerman as Chairman of the Elgar Foundation. These edited recollections were based on a longer note sent to the author shortly before Peter's untimely death.

David Morris caught a later performance: 'In 1972 I was just 25 and relatively impecunious. Trips to Covent Garden were possible only because of its 'Young Friends' scheme which allowed discounted ticket prices and admission to dress rehearsals. Most visits were for opera performances: I am not a balletomane and don't pretend to understand the technical aspects of the dancing - ballets with no scenery/story don't appeal. However, the grand spectacles of the likes of *Swan Lake*, bringing together wonderful music, costumes, scenery, and a reasonably coherent story, have always attracted me. On 1 March 1972 I attended a performance of the *Enigma Variations* ballet for the first time. This was part of a quadruple bill, and Rudolph Nureyev danced in two of the other ballets. I have to say that to my great regret I have absolutely no recollection of seeing this famous dancer but do remember being entranced by the *Variations* ballet from the moment the curtains opened! Very attractive designs by Julia Trevelyan-Oman, scenery and costumes entirely appropriate to the period of the ballet, and incredible dancing - even if I didn't appreciate all the finer points. Anthony Dowell in particular was beyond praise - surely even Nureyev could not have been better. I was at an early stage in my discovery of Elgar's music, but the ballet opened up my understanding and appreciation of both the music and the characters of the 'friends pictured within'. Since then I have attended three further performances by the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House and one at the London Coliseum by Birmingham Royal Ballet - so its charms have not diminished! Its nostalgic mood appealed to me even as a young man, and this has not lessened as the years have passed. It is of course an imaginary scenario as not all the 'friends' necessarily knew each other, let alone visited the Elgars at the same time, but the ballet remains for me a delight - a great work by designer, choreographer and - of course - composer'.

2019

The critic Graham Watt said of the 2019 performance: 'Elgar's motivations for what became the *Enigma Variations* were the various "friends pictured within" with each musical passage representing biographical themes and reflections. It cannot, however, be argued to be timeless and without prior knowledge of the provenance and purpose it is also rather inaccessible. Ashton has provided some delicious cameos, none more so than by Laura Morera, the epitome of delicate serenity as The Lady (C.A.E). Bennet Gartside was a noble A.J Jaeger, sharing the soaring Nimrod variation with Elgar (Christopher Saunders) in a marvellous display of choreography that is counter-intuitive to the expectations of the music'.¹⁷

Indeed this is exactly what Ashton intended: "'I did several versions and in the end I eliminated more and more and just let the music speak for itself and created a mood". He confines the men's dancing to a semi-walking, slightly querulous "question and answer" sequence; and, when they are joined by Lady Elgar, she seems to smooth their dissent and draw them all together'.¹⁸

17 From a review by Graham Watt. Bachtrack, 23 October 2019. We are grateful to Bachtrack for permission to quote from Mr Watt's review.

18 Kavanagh, 507.

Last Words

‘Only a poet could have conceived a ballet like *Enigma*, and only the audacity of genius could have brought it off, this use of the resources of classic ballet to achieve a nobility of discourse and carry a weight of metaphor that many would say are beyond its scope - but it is his faith in these resources that makes Ashton a great poet’.¹⁹ To me, an observer of an art I did not appreciate in its complexity and subtleness, this comment by an expert rings true. That *Enigma Variations* is still performed and that it is the only ballet choreographed by Ashton to be included in Lincoln Kirstein’s *Movement and Metaphor*²⁰ seems to confirm that Ashton had that rare ability to perceive, conceive and produce a work of lasting art; an achievement that he shares with Elgar and which might have surprised him.

Without Elgar’s music this ballet would not exist but then a group of disparate friends of the composer in turn helped inspire a great work of art. His *Enigma Variations* remains as fresh and original a composition as it did in 1899, the wonderful scoring bringing each character to life without any loss of their individuality (in fact the reverse). Sir Fredrick Ashton let the music and the dancing speak for itself. He solved a problem by using Elgar’s original ending, thereby giving us, the listeners, a new and perplexing perspective on the piece. We should be thankful.

(I am grateful to Wendy and Bernard Hill for their helpful advice and their memories of showing the original film of ‘Enigma Variations’ as part of an AGM weekend. Patrick Palmer, a member in Johannesburg, sent me his interesting and, at times, iconoclastic opinions which certainly caused me to stop and think!)

Andrew Neill is a former Chairman of the Society.

19 Vaughan, 363.

20 This tells the history of ballet in terms of ‘fifty seminal works’.

From the original 1968 Royal Ballet programme

Enigma Variations Music by EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934)
(My Friends Pictured Within) By arrangement with Novello & Company Limited
Choreography by FREDERICK ASHTON
Scenery and Costumes by JULIA TREVELYAN OMAN
Lighting by WILLIAM BUNDY

EDWARD ELGAR (E.D.U.) DEREK RENCHER
THE LADY—Elgar’s wife SVETLANA BERIOSOVA (C.A.E.)
“Whose life was a romantic and delicate inspiration”
HEW DAVID STEUART- POWELL (H.D.S.-P.) RONALD EMBLEN
One of Elgar’s chamber-music cronies
RICHARD BAXTER TOWNSHEND (R.B.T.) BRIAN SHAW
An amiable reedy-voiced eccentric who rode about on a tricycle
WILLIAM MEATH BAKER (W.M.B.) ALEXANDER GRANT
“With a slip of paper in his hand forcibly read out the arrangements for the day and hurriedly left with a bang”
RICHARD P. ARNOLD (R.P.A.) ROBERT MEAD
Son of Matthew Arnold, a quiet contemplative scholar
ISABEL FITTON (Isobel) VYVYAN LORRAYNE
Charming and romantic
ARTHUR TROYTE GRIFFITH (Troyte) ANTHONY DOWELL
A very close friend, outspoken and brusque though “the boisterous mood is mere banter”
WINIFRED NORBURY (W.N.) GEORGINA PARKINSON
“Her gracious personality is sedately shown”
A. J. JAEGER (Nimrod) DESMOND DOYLE
This variation recalls a summer evening’s talk about Beethoven and, further, reveals the depth of a friendship
DORA PENNY (Dorabella) ANN JENNER
“The movement suggests a dance-like lightness.” An intimate portrait of a gay but pensive girl with an endearing hesitation in her speech
GEORGE ROBERTSON SINGLAIR (G.R.S.) WAYNE SLEEP
Or rather “his bulldog Dan who fell into the river and barked rejoicing on landing. G.R.S. said “Set that to music.” I did; here it is”
BASIL G. NEVISON (B.G.N.) LESLIE EDWARDS
“An amateur cello player of distinction— a serious and devoted friend”
LADY MARY LYGON (***) CHRISTINE BECKLEY
“The asterisks take the place of the name of a lady who was, at the time of the composition, on a sea voyage”
E.D.U. (Edward Elgar)
“Written at a time when friends were dubious and generally discouraging as to the composer’s musical future, this variation is merely to show what he intended to do. References to Alice Elgar and to Nimrod, two great influences on the life and art of the composer, are entirely fitting to the intention of the piece.”

Elgar and his Transcribers

Tom Higgins

During Elgar's lifetime his fame was enhanced through the expertise of transcribers who ensured his music reached a wider audience.

Soon it will be 100 years since Dan Godfrey (1868-1939) was knighted 'for valuable services to British music'. His 'valuable services' were identified as the part he played in the success of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – he founded it, gave it a policy of championing British music and by the early 1920s had directed it for 30 years. Posterity decrees that Godfrey is best remembered as the conductor who brought high-level music-making to Britain's south coast. To raise a municipal ensemble to the status of a leading orchestra would have been enough for most conductors, but Godfrey was too talented to concentrate on one thing.

Beneath his public position lay a skill which he shared with a number of contemporaries. During Godfrey's early career his name began to appear regularly on military band versions of orchestral works. In company with other experienced arrangers, he received commissions from publishers to take popular works from the concert hall and produce transcriptions for bands. Their knowledge of wind band instrumentation was exceptional and ensured that the original music retained its integrity and could be played by a band without loss of quality.

Undeniably, this was a commercial enterprise, yet there was also a sense of mission. This fact should assist in understanding those military musicians who have always patted themselves on the back by reminding us that most members of the general public discovered classical music from hearing a band in the park or on a seaside promenade. As the twentieth century turned, the British military band reached the zenith of its popularity where it stayed for many decades to come. Having 'Military' in the title was important, as it distinguished this instrumental group of reed, brass and percussion from a brass band, an altogether different institution.

Collectively, there have always been more names engaged in military band transcriptions than you can realistically evaluate. For reasons of space I have decided to concentrate on a handful of prominent cases, partly because they were among the most prolific of the transcribers, but mainly because a body of their Elgar transcriptions is still in use and valued today. Beyond that, they were all contemporaries of Elgar with Godfrey having the luck to be among the composer's circle of acquaintances. How close the relationship was may be judged by an anecdote from the composer Eric Coates, who claims that during one of Elgar's visits to Bournemouth it was Godfrey who initiated Elgar's late-flowering passion for horse-racing.

Godfrey, like the other transcribers selected for this survey, came from a military band background. His ancestry of mostly bandmasters in the Brigade of Guards, stretched back several generations. It was a continuing family tradition, but Godfrey had other ideas. His move to become Bournemouth's music director in the early 1890s took him away from an army environment and into civilian music. Yet his knowledge of wind instrumentation was too valuable for him to stay idle

and he maintained his links to bands, producing a steady stream of transcriptions.

He was in good company with his contemporary family relative Charles Godfrey, another important transcriber, and as their list of transcriptions grew, so did the demand to hear band versions of Elgar. Working separately, but always towards the same goal, their work began to include Elgar, thus adding his name to the band repertoire and augmenting his reputation. It all added up to showing what Elgar pieces were especially popular with the public. Early editions produced by the Godfreys include the suite *Three Bavarian Dances*, the *Imperial March*, the second *Wand of Youth Suite* and *Three Characteristic Pieces*. Among Dan Godfrey's non-Elgar transcriptions – and of special note as it appeared towards the end of his life – was Sir Arthur Bliss's suite from the film, *Things to Come*.



The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, Twickenham. Photo: Tom Higgins.

Frank Winterbottom

Like the two Godfreys, Frank Winterbottom (1861-1930) also drew on a military band background, but he and his family went further, identifying with both the Army and the Royal Marines. Again, there is an impressive list of bandmasters with Frank himself serving from 1890 to 1910 as director of the Plymouth Division. In the field of military band programming, transcriptions of symphonic and operatic works were as popular in the Royal Marines as in the Army, leaving Winterbottom and his relatives a free hand to create new repertoire from old. Mendelssohn, Wagner and Rimsky-Korsakov all benefited from Winterbottom's skill in transcription, not to forget *Sevillana* – the first work of Elgar's to be heard in London at the Crystal Palace.

But it was much later that his name became firmly attached to Elgar's when, after World War I, plans were made for the 1920 Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph. Elgar was commissioned

to provide a work for the open-air ceremony. He decided to refashion 'For the Fallen', the third movement of his earlier cantata, *The Spirit of England* – a setting of poems by Laurence Binyon. The result was a one-movement choral work which Elgar renamed, *With Proud Thanksgiving*. It required a military band accompaniment and for this Elgar sought help from Winterbottom. By this time Winterbottom was Professor of Instrumentation at the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall and it was he who made the required transcription.

Like all experienced transcribers, Winterbottom knew he had to keep an eye on a key suitable for wind instruments. Elgar's original was pitched in A minor, which is unfavourable for some transposing instruments. Winterbottom chose to transpose the piece down to G minor. Unfortunately for Elgar and Winterbottom's joint efforts, the ceremony's main focus on November 11 became centred on Westminster Abbey and the burial of the Unknown Warrior. Changes to the timescale ensured that the event at the Cenotaph was shortened and *With Proud Thanksgiving* fell victim to the cut.

Winterbottom's military band version remained unperformed until the early 21st century when the late Andrew Lyle turned his attention to reviving it. He edited Winterbottom's original score and, with the assistance of the Elgar Society and past Chairman Andrew Neill, I recorded it on the SOMM label (CD 0170 *Elgar and his Peers*) in 2016. The artists involved included the London Symphonic Concert Band and the Joyful Company of Singers, director Peter Broadbent.



Tom Higgins conducting The Joyful Company of Singers and The London Symphonic Concert Band in their recording of the Queen Alexandra Memorial Ode - St John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood 24 September 2016. Photo: Andrew Neill.

The recording incidentally provided an excellent opportunity to incorporate other transcriptions of Elgar. His other military band choral work, *So Many True Princesses Who Have Gone* (*Queen Alexandra's Memorial Ode*) was also very much in need of a revisit, but unlike *With Proud Thanksgiving*, became a more involved undertaking as will be shown below.

In early 1932 Elgar received a commission to provide music for King George V to unveil a memorial to his mother Queen Alexandra at Marlborough House. He responded with *So Many True Princesses Who Have Gone*, an Ode set to words by John Masefield. On 8 June that same year, the children of the Chapel Royal and the choir of Westminster Abbey assembled close to the memorial, as did the Band of the Welsh Guards, all under the direction of Elgar.

Captain Harris (later Major Harris), the Welsh Guards' Director of Music, had arranged the work for band. Incredible as it now seems, Harris's score and parts went missing after the ceremony. Happily Elgar's short score was still to hand and this enabled me to prepare a military band version for this premier recording. Going back a few years, the resurrection of this beautiful work was already underway when the late Anthony Payne was commissioned to prepare an orchestral version for the 2002 Aldeburgh Festival.



Major Andrew Harris MVO, Director of Music, Band of the Welsh Guards 1915-1938 (Band Archive). Major Harris was Director of Music for the premiere of The Queen Alexandra Memorial Ode, conducted by Elgar on 8 June 1932 outside Marlborough House, London.

Among the remaining transcriptions recorded were Henry Geehl's *The Severn Suite* and my own arrangement of *Pomp and Circumstance March No 5*. Occupying the CD's first track was a reminder that the other *Pomp and Circumstance* marches had also been transcribed, but by an earlier hand.

Michael Retford

Michael Retford (1853 -1924) came from Dublin. He was a prodigious arranger for band and, starting in his mid-teens, had an army career stretching over nearly 25 years, from the 98th Regiment of Foot to the Band of the Coldstream Guards. When civilian life followed he was ultimately responsible for transcribing the first four *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. We recorded his *No 2*. Foreshadowing Winterbottom's transposition of *With Proud Thanksgiving*, Retford also lowered the original key of *Pomp and Circumstance No 2* from A minor to G minor.

Retford's long service career took him to several parts of the British Empire at a time when its army and regimental bands extended around the world. In an equally long retirement, Retford transcribed music for home consumption, reflecting no doubt that his work was also destined to be heard by audiences abroad. Distanced by thousands of miles, bands were a reminder of all that was best back home.

Select bands gained international reputations and received invitations to make guest appearances. When, in 1925, New Zealand organised its six-month long South Seas Exhibition, a military band was dispatched from Britain to supply the music. The exhibition was international, but New Zealand's ties with Scotland were strong and the Band of the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was engaged to perform in Dunedin – the site of the festivities.

New Zealand's press reported that a 'famous band' had been engaged and that the Bandmaster, Mr. F.J. Ricketts (otherwise known as Kenneth Alford), was the composer of the legendary *Colonel Bogey* march. Ricketts and his band had a fine reputation and they were almost certainly a draw in themselves with their daily programmes. The exhibition concluded by recording a total of over three million visitors.

In that same decade, the BBC responded to popular mood when it created its BBC Wireless Military Band. By now the concept that bands were a major influence on popularising classical music was well established. With that in mind, it is worth noting that the BBC formed the band in the late 1920s before it launched its symphony orchestra under Adrian (later Sir Adrian) Boult, in 1930. The BBC's military band was a high-quality group of wind players directed by Bertram Walton O'Donnell, a musician more than capable of constructing a challenging programme and conducting it with excitement and finesse. As might be expected Elgar had his place on the band's broadcasts, but he shared it with the likes of Rossini's *Tancredi* Overture, Gounod's Ballet Music from *Faust* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Dance of the Tumblers*.

The United States of America

In America today, where there is still respect for the British military band tradition, a generation of indigenous composers and arrangers has emerged who not only produce original works for band, but are also expert transcribers. They are acquainted with the work of the Godfreys, Winterbottom and Retford – and with their skills ensure that this golden age lives on.

Alfred Reed, an American composer and eminent band transcriber, demonstrated his appreciation of those times when he recently edited Retford's canon of *Pomp and Circumstance*

Marches Nos 1-4. Retford's realisation for wind instruments is still expert and viable, but Reed makes the point that the concert band has moved on. He makes full use of modern American instrumentation and in his editor's notes gives us detailed reasons why.

One area of special note is the saxophone. A century ago in Britain, and probably America also, the normal complement was two – the Alto and Tenor. Contemporary scores now embrace the whole family, including the Soprano and Baritone. Emphasising that Retford's band was comparatively smaller than today's, Reed, with his larger and more varied forces, aims for a greater range of tone colour. And in transcribing Elgar he has discovered what *not* (my emphasis) to transcribe. He decided to leave Elgar's percussion parts unchanged from the original orchestral score for, as might be expected, the composer's expertise in this instrumental department as in others remains unassailable.

A similar regard for Elgar comes from another noted American musician, Dr. Paul Noble of Virginia who has associations with leading American universities, especially Shenandoah Conservatory of Music, Indiana University School of Music and the Catholic University of America. He is a conductor and teacher with more than 60 years' experience. In addition he is the founder of the online publishing house, Bandmusicpdf.net. His catalogue lists over 350 of his own arrangements, and among the 25 featured composers Elgar is prominent. For Noble, teaching an instrument goes hand-in-hand with instruction in the history of music. He explains:

This is where transcriptions of music from other media and other times can be of value. Some teachers, especially at the university level, take a musical 'purist' attitude, playing only music originally conceived for that combination of instruments. The reality is that many composers themselves have transcribed their own music for different sets of instruments and they also wrote their music for whatever assortment of instruments they might have had at the time.

In short, Noble makes the point that transcriptions fill the need to bring the rich history of music to a wider audience and in regard to the United States says:

While middle schools, junior high schools, high schools and universities generally have bands, all do not have orchestras.

He observes that skilful arrangements of Elgar can be made to sound as though they were originally conceived and composed for the Concert Wind Band. Elgar deserves to be better known, says Noble, not just to audiences, but to players themselves.

Those transcribers who belonged to Britain's pre-World War I era turned orchestral items into superior military band repertoire and probably never thought of themselves as anything special. They were simply joining a long line of craftsmen. A generation before them Franz Liszt in Germany made piano transcriptions from Wagner operas. A generation after them Leopold Stokowski in America popularised orchestrations of Johann Sebastian Bach's organ works. Liszt and Stokowski were flamboyant figures on an international scale, yet their purpose was the same as the British band transcribers, which was to give works from the concert hall and opera house a wider field of appreciation. Listeners often assert that a transcription reveals textures not previously apparent.

The Godfreys, Winterbottom and Retford are names coupled to an important stage in the development of the military band. As it advanced in technique and versatility, it gave more scope to transcribers. Overseeing these improvements was the Royal Military School of Music, which took

steps to standardise instrumentation.

Now more than ever, transcriptions are an accepted part of concert planning. In the 1920s Vaughan Williams, Holst and many others were added to publishers' catalogues. Either existing works were transcribed, or new works started to appear. Of special note, Percy Grainger's highly original *Lincolnshire Posy* was premiered in America in 1937.

Back in Elgar's lifetime the lighter side of his output quickly came to the attention of the military band. His marches, suites and salon pieces were perfectly suited to the genre. In all probability it is doubtful if he ever objected to band editions of his own music. They helped popularise his name faster than the concert hall ever could. In Elgar's interview with the *Strand Magazine* in 1904, he intimated that he saw himself as a man of the people. He said he had given people tunes. Band transcriptions demonstrated that his tunes were wanted and well received.

Tom Higgins studied conducting at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and with James Lockhart. He has appeared at London's Opera Holland Park, where he directed the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In Germany he has conducted the New Year's Day Concert with Dresden's Staatsoperetten Orchestra followed by a series of concerts in Berlin. He released through the BBC Music Magazine the world premiere recording of Sullivan's comic opera The Rose of Persia and recorded Elgar's The Fringes of the Fleet (SOMMCD 243) with Roderick Williams and the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra. This was the work's first professional recording since Elgar's own and drew praise from biographer, Michael Kennedy. In 2011 he conducted the Sir Charles Mackerras Memorial Concert at the Royal Academy of Music.

'Piers Plowman – Elgar's Bible'

A note on the article in the Elgar Society Journal Vol. 20, No. 2, August 2017, pp. 3-16.

Peter Sutton

In my article in the *Journal* in 2017 I quoted from Jerrold Northrop Moore - 'For Christmas [1900] Edward...sent Jaeger a copy of *Sea Pictures*, and wrote on the last day of the old year and the old century: "I have given up sending cards, so sent the score of the miserable Mal de Mer – I forget what quotation I put on – from Piers Plowman's Vision I expect – that's my Bible, a marvellous book."¹

Thanks to Arthur Reynolds, I have now seen a scan of the relevant score of *Sea Pictures*, which he has kindly permitted me to reproduce here. The quotation in question is indeed from *Piers Plowman* and reads: 'A. J. Jaeger. With much love from Edward Elgar: Dec. 25th 1900 "Waryn Wisdome wynked uppon Mede" Piers the Plowman'.

For an explanation of the medieval poem now known as *Piers Plowman*, I refer readers to my article of 2017, but a brief comment on Wisdom winking at 'Mede' may help to explain why Elgar thought it a marvellous book.

After the line about Wisdom winking, the poem continues:

[Wisdome] seide, 'Madame, I am youre man what so my mouth jangleth;
I falle in floreines,' quod that freke 'an faile speche ofte.'

Or, in the modern English of my translation of the poem:

I witnessed [Wisdom] wink at her and whisper:
'Good Madam, I'm your man, no matter what I say,
And I lose my voice if I'm fed a few florins.'²

Since 'Mede' means payment or reward, including unmerited reward, and the character of Wisdom is a lawyer, the line that Elgar chose to quote says that wisdom and the law are often subverted by money. Perhaps he was thinking of music royalties, or of family inheritances.

In my article I also say 'We do not know which edition of the poem Edward read' but thanks to the above scan of *Sea Pictures* we can now make an informed guess.

1 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 341.

2 William Langland, trans. Peter Sutton. *William Langland. Piers Plowman. A Modern Verse Translation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014), Step IV lines 154-156.

A. J. Jaeger.
With much love
SUNG BY *from Edward Elgar:*
MISS CLARA BUTT.

Dec. 25: 1900
"Waryn Wisdome wyknked upon Mede"
Piers the Plowman

SEA-PICTURES

A Cycle of Five Songs for Contralto.

1. SEA SLUMBER SONG Words by THE HON: RODEN NOEL
2. IN HAVEN (Capri) C.A. ELGAR
3. SABBATH MORNING AT SEA From a Poem by M^{RS} BROWNING
4. WHERE CORALS LIE RICHARD GARNETT
5. THE SWIMMER From a Poem by ADAM LINDSAY GORDON

With
German Translation by Dr WILHELM HENZEN,
and
French Words by GEORGE PETILLEAU.
The Music by

EDWARD ELGAR.

(OP. 37.)

FULL ORCHESTRAL SCORE
PRICE 12/- NET.

BAND PARTS 15/- NET.

EDITIONS IN VOCAL SCORE:
ENGLISH, -(SEA-PICTURES), with the Original Words.
GERMAN, -(SEE-BILDER), with Words by Dr. WILHELM HENZEN.
FRENCH, -(MARINES), with Words by GEORGE PETILLEAU.
Price 4/- each net.

BOOSEY & C^o
295, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.
AND
9 EAST SEVENTEENTH STREET, NEW YORK.

There are three possibilities. The first is the edition first published by Thomas Wright in 1842 and reissued in 1887. This is the version used by the Rev. Dr Isaac Smith of Great Malvern Priory in his 1895 series of talks on *Piers Plowman* that were printed in the *Malvern Advertiser* and probably read by the Elgars.³ There the line, split in two, reads: 'Waryn Wisdom / Wynked upon Mede', which is not quite as Elgar wrote it out for Jaeger.

The second is an edition by the Rev. Walter W. Skeat, who published three separate versions of the poem between 1867 and 1885, and followed them up with a comparative edition of all three.⁴ The spelling of Skeat's edition of the 1370s version matches that of the Jaeger quotation, which suggests that Elgar was drawing on Skeat: why else would he write 'uppon' with two Ps?

That would seem to decide the matter, but there is a third possibility. In the 1860s Skeat had issued a shorter edition of the first half of the poem only, and the spelling matches here too. If this was in fact the version that Elgar read, then much of the content of the poem which I describe in my 2017 article would have been unfamiliar to him.

The quotation from *Piers Plowman* that headed the *Musical Times* article by F.G. Edwards 'at Edward's suggestion' in 1900 does not help in this respect since, like Wisdom winking, it is taken from the opening of the poem and, although clearly from a Skeat edition, it could be from any of them.⁵ The same applies to the line from the poem that Elgar inscribed on the score of *Cockaigne* in 1901: 'Metelees and monelees on Malverne hulles'.⁶

On the other hand, I suggest in my article that the description of the Passion that occurs towards the end of the longer versions of the poem may have helped to inspire *The Apostles*. We may therefore like to think that, perhaps motivated by the enthusiasm of the Rev. Dr Smith, Elgar bought the complete Skeat edition, or at the very least, the longer 1370s text.

Unless we can reconstruct his extensive library we shall never know which edition he read, and even then we might be mistaken. By the mid-1890s, for example, the London Library held a copy of the complete Skeat, to which the Elgars would have had access. Although Edward did not join the Library until 1921, Alice had been a provincial subscriber since 1885, following the example of her mother.⁷ This suggests that Edward may have read books borrowed on his wife's ticket, and have taken over the membership after her death. Perhaps she even called his attention to the poem.

Peter Sutton is the author of the play Elgar and Alice, and his modern verse translation of the poem 'Piers Plowman' was published by McFarland of North Carolina in 2014. He is a freelance writer, translator and editor and former Head of Publications at the Unesco Institute for Education.

3 Aldwynus Malvernensis, *Malvern's Monk: a series of articles on the vision of Piers Plowman*. Reprinted from the *Malvern Advertiser* (Malvern: Malvern Advertiser, 1895).

4 Skeat, W.W. (ed.) William Langland, *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts together with Richard the Redeless*. Vol. I: Text; Vol. II: Notes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, f.p. 1886, 10th ed., 1923, reprinted 1968), Passus B IV lines 133-156.

5 Moore, op. cit., 323-324.

6 Moore, op. cit., 346.

7 Information kindly supplied by the London Library, March 2021.



BOOK REVIEWS

Maestro Glorioso – Ten Essays in Celebration of Sir John Barbirolli Raymond Holden

The Barbirolli Society

ISBN:
9780955671043

206 pages

Raymond Holden is Emeritus Professor of Music at the Royal Academy of Music, London. He has worked as a conductor, writer, broadcaster and lecturer, and is an acknowledged authority on Sir John Barbirolli. In the preface to this new book, Professor Holden explains why and how it came to be written and I can do no better than quote directly from it:

When I was asked by the Barbirolli Society to write a book to mark the fiftieth anniversary of J.B.'s death, I was adamant that it should not be a biography. Both Charles Reid and Michael Kennedy had written marvellous accounts of Barbirolli's life in the early 1970s and it seemed to me to be pointless and impertinent to try and compete with these beautifully crafted and meticulously researched documents. I was keen, however, to explore key elements of J.B.'s performance style and felt that the best way of doing this was in essay form.

Essay One: In Defence of The Realm: Barbirolli and British Music (Part One) – Boy Cellist to Novice Music Director. Here, Holden describes how Barbirolli was a committed interpreter of British Music from his earliest years and he goes on to set out, in detail, the young Barbirolli's early performances of British music, first as a cello student at The Royal Academy of Music, and then professionally as a solo cellist, as a member of various string quartets, with his own and other chamber orchestras, and for recordings with The National Gramophonic Society and HMV. Following his appointment as Music Director of the Scottish Orchestra in 1933 (his first permanent appointment as conductor of a symphony orchestra) and despite the need to keep a cautious eye on the box-office receipts (as part of his administrative duties) Barbirolli, during his four years with them, nevertheless performed a significant number of works by British composers.

Essay Two: A Knight at the Opera – Barbirolli and the Lyric Theatre - shows how, in 1916, Barbirolli was introduced to professional theatre life as a member of Thomas Beecham's and Carl Rosa's opera bands, and then during 1919 following demobilisation after army service, he joined the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House. Subsequently, in 1926, he was engaged by the British National Opera Company as a staff conductor and Holden ends with a description of how Barbirolli finally fulfilled his ambition to conduct opera in Italy by conducting a series of performances of *Aida* in Rome in 1966.

Essay Three: In Defence of The Realm: Barbirolli and British Music (Part Two) From New York to Manchester – Holden describes the huge commitment which J.B. gave to the study, promotion and performance of a considerable number of works by British composers throughout the rest of his career. He shows (with much supporting evidence) how, although works by Delius, Elgar and Vaughan Williams were predominant, very many other British composers were included. He regularly programmed British composers when conducting abroad.

Essay Four: A Life Recorded: Barbirolli and the Gramophone – In the opening paragraph, we have a summary of Barbirolli's considerable achievements, which audiences at the time were able to witness. The paragraph then ends with this statement with which I think few readers will disagree:

But for those listeners who were unable to experience these great achievements at first hand, it is surely his formidable discography of no fewer than 452 commercial recordings for at least thirty-two labels over a period of nearly sixty years that has secured his place in their personal pantheon of great conductors.

Essay Five: A Cockney Down Under: Sir John Barbirolli in Australia – As an Australian, born in Sydney, Raymond Holden obviously has a personal interest in Barbirolli's two visits to conduct Australian orchestras in 1950-51 and 1955. With access to source material and details relating to these visits which have not been published before, we are given a fascinating and detailed account of the long gestation period during which plans for these visits were developed - starting as early as 1946. During his first visit (1950-1951) Barbirolli conducted in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide. For the second visit in 1955, Perth was added to the itinerary. Both visits were undoubtedly a great success, both artistically and financially.

Essay Six: From the Cradle to the Grave: Barbirolli, Elgar and *In the South (Alassio)* – This essay opens with a quotation from an article written by Barbirolli during the centenary of Elgar's birth in 1957 in which Barbirolli says '... from the age of ten onwards the music of Elgar has meant more to me than I can say ...' This statement suggests that he was taken to concerts in which Elgar's music featured. Holden goes on to explain that the first record of any professional performance of an Elgar work in which Barbirolli was involved is documented in January 1921, when he was the soloist in a performance of the Cello Concerto given by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra conducted by Dan Godfrey. He also tells us that in October 1925 Barbirolli conducted a work by Elgar for the first time, with his chamber orchestra at the New Chenil Galleries, Chelsea, when the work played was *Elegy for Strings*. He then conducted the *Introduction and Allegro for Strings* with them, in October 1926, and first recorded the work for the National Gramophonic Society in October 1927. The essay goes on to describe

Barbirolli's first performance of a major orchestral work by Elgar - the oft-quoted occasion when, on 12 December 1927, he deputised at short notice for an indisposed Thomas Beecham and conducted Elgar's Second Symphony with the LSO to critical acclaim – a career-changing event which resulted in Fred Gaisberg of HMV engaging him to record for the company. We learn how, as Music Director of the Scottish Orchestra from 1933, Barbirolli had his first real opportunity to explore Elgar's symphonic works in detail and how, from that time onwards, he promoted Elgar's music by frequently conducting a significant number of his works both in Britain and throughout the world. Holden's narrative (perhaps, here, of special interest to Elgarians) makes use of many illustrative examples of the occasions on which Elgar's works featured in Barbirolli's concert programmes and recording sessions,

Prof. Holden introduces the remaining section of this essay with these words:

For a conductor whose antecedents were Mediterranean, and for a musician who had been a committed Elgarian from his earliest years, it is nothing short of bewildering that Barbirolli never performed *In The South* (*Alassio*) publicly until the last months of his life ...

He then goes on to describe the only three occasions, between 30 April and 20 May 1970, on which J.B. conducted the work, with his beloved Hallé Orchestra, at concerts in Manchester, Sheffield and London – the London performance being the last occasion on which he would conduct a concert in the city of his birth. Fortunately, that historic performance was recorded by the BBC and it has since been released commercially on the BBC Legends Label. Fortunately also, Barbirolli's marked score of *In the South* is also extant. Holden describes it as 'A richly detailed artefact that documents many of his working practices; it also acted as a kind of musical confessional for the conductor' He later goes on to say, 'Acting as a kind of musical roadmap that charts Barbirolli's technical demands, aesthetic observations and emotional responses, his working score of *In the South* contains multiple expression, tempo, beating, balance and bowing instructions ...' In the concluding section of this sixth essay, Holden does enter into a more detailed analysis of Barbirolli's performance style, which may require the indulgence of the broad readership, but nevertheless it does provide a fascinating insight into J.B.'s working methods and it will be especially interesting to those readers with some musical knowledge and insight.

Essay Seven: Bruckner 8: Sir John's London Swansong – This essay opens with a reference to Barbirolli's London 'swansong', when he conducted a Bruckner work (the Eighth Symphony) for the last time and it refers to the long uphill struggle which he endured in his efforts to get orchestral players, critics, promoters and audiences to appreciate the merits of Bruckner's symphonies.

Barbirolli conducted a work by Bruckner for the first time in January 1940,

in his third season as Music Director of New York's Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. The work was the Seventh Symphony. It was the first of his 29 performances of it. During that first performance, half the Carnegie Hall audience walked out. Barbirolli did not attempt to programme Bruckner's technically demanding symphonies with the Hallé until March 1947 when, once again, it was the Seventh Symphony that he conducted. The critics made derogatory remarks about the work but praised the performance and admitted that the audience had revelled in it. Encouraged by the Mancunian audience's response, Barbirolli then began to perform Bruckner symphonies in earnest and eventually conducted no fewer than 72 performances of five of Bruckner's symphonies (the Third, Fourth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth) during his career. The Seventh was the symphony which he programmed most frequently, but his final performance was of the Eighth, with the Hallé Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall on 20 May 1970, when it was coupled with Elgar's *In the South*. The concert was recorded by the BBC and both works have now been issued on CD.

Essay Eight: What the Papers Say: Barbirolli, Sibelius and The Critics

– This essay opens with a quotation from words spoken by Sir Mark Elder on the differing national responses to Sibelius's symphonies and how the composer's works soon found a second home in Britain. Holden follows with this assessment: 'Inspired by Wood, Beecham and others, Barbirolli also committed himself to the composer's music from early in his career and was soon recognised as yet another distinguished British Sibelius interpreter'. The uphill struggle which J.B. experienced in getting the New York audiences and critics to appreciate the composer's oeuvre and, in particular, the ambivalence of the orchestra and management to Sibelius's symphonies was disappointing, but he persisted and, in addition to conducting the first three symphonies he expanded his repertoire and introduced his New York audiences to *The Swan of Tuonela*, *Lemminkäinen's Return*, *Finlandia*, *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Valse Triste*. Following his appointment to the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, Barbirolli expanded his repertoire further to include all seven symphonies of Sibelius and many of the other orchestral works. Holden suggests that it is his comprehensive set of symphonies, tone poems and short orchestral works recorded for EMI between 1966 and 1970 'that is his greatest legacy as a Sibelian'.

Essay Nine: From Mystery to Monument: Barbirolli, Mahler and The Second Symphony

– Holden opens by quoting the scathing words which Barbirolli wrote about Mahler's Fourth Symphony in 1930 and adds '[which] might seem surprising coming from an artist who would later go on to become one of the greatest Mahlerians of his age'. Under the subheading 'Performance History' we are given an overview of Barbirolli's gradually expanding Mahlerian repertoire after returning to Britain in 1943, and how, 'After giving twelve performances of *Das Lied von Der Erde* and the *Adagietto* from the Fifth Symphony with the Hallé Orchestra in 1946, [and encouraged

by Neville Cardus in the mid-1950s], he went on to conduct a further seventy-eight readings of the composer's symphonies with the orchestra over the next twenty-three years'. There follows an overview of the works by Mahler which Barbirolli conducted abroad, ending with his magnificent final performance of Mahler's Second Symphony, in Stuttgart on 5 April 1970. Barbirolli's commercial recordings of Mahler's works are considered under a separate subheading beginning with his recording of the First Symphony with the Hallé Orchestra for Pye in 1957. Seven years later, Barbirolli recorded the Ninth Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra for HMV, followed by the Sixth Symphony (1967) and Fifth Symphony (1969), with the New Philharmonia Orchestra. *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, *Kindertotenlieder* [and *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen* (No. 3 of the *Rückert Lieder*)] were recorded with Janet Baker and the Hallé Orchestra in 1967 followed by the complete *Rückert Lieder* with Janet Baker and the New Philharmonia Orchestra in 1969. Holden then devotes a separate section of this essay to Barbirolli's performances of the Second Symphony pointing out that it was the Second which spoke with the greatest intensity to Barbirolli and that '[this] symphony reflected J.B.'s own understanding of Christian faith and had a directness and grandeur that appealed to his wider artistic sensibilities'. Holden relates how, shortly before his death, Barbirolli reflected on his feelings about what Mahler meant to him personally and artistically, and in his explanation to the German Newspaper *Die Welt*, Barbirolli concluded with these words: 'Mahler's name is no longer a mystery – he has at last become a monument'.

Essay Ten: Barbirolli on the Art and Craft of Conducting – Holden begins this essay by referring to the still imponderable mystery of how two conductors conducting the same piece with the same orchestra under similar conditions can produce different sounds. This is relevant to any discussion of the phenomenon of 'The Barbirolli Sound'. He then turns to the many practical decision-making processes that require judgements and the less-than-glamorous elements of the conducting profession which are 'the basis for the craft, if not the art of conducting'. Turning to interpretative issues, we learn that Barbirolli was a passionate advocate of ideas on tempo and *melos* which are addressed in Richard Wagner's 1869 article, *On Conducting*. We have already seen in the previous four essays how important his extensive and detailed annotation of scores was in his preparatory work and how his meticulous bowing instructions played their part in realising what came to be known as the 'Barbirolli Sound'.

Appendix One and Appendix Two - Contain tempo charts and score examples relating to the Essays on Bruckner's Eighth Symphony and Mahler's Second Symphony.

*

Maestro Glorioso is an outstanding achievement from an author who has spent much time during many years of his professional life studying the remarkable life and career of Sir John Barbirolli. Holden reveals his personal feelings about the protagonist in these essays in two telling comments:

'... As a young musician growing up in far-off Australia ... [I] soon found myself enthralled by the diminutive man with the big sound'. And: '... it is no exaggeration to say that my life in music would have been far less rich had I not encountered the artistry of that remarkable Englishman with the Italian name all those years ago'. It is that rich combination of objectivity and subjectivity which makes this book so appealing. This book is intended for a broad readership but the essays on Elgar, Bruckner and Mahler, have concluding sections which contain many technical details which do require a scholarly approach.

The appendices on Bruckner and Mahler are intended for use in conjunction with the related essays. There is a wealth of information in the ten essays, which is supplemented by the numerous endnote citations. I can wholeheartedly recommend this new and engrossing book.

David Ll. Jones

(This book and the Discography reviewed separately can both be obtained from The Barbirolli Society - <https://barbirollisociety.co.uk/> Eds)

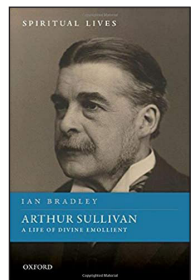
Arthur Sullivan - A Life of Divine Emollient

Ian Bradley

The *Spiritual Lives* series features biographies of prominent men and women whose eminence is not primarily based on a specific religious contribution. Each volume presents a general account of the figure's life and thought, while giving special attention to his or her religious contexts, convictions, doubts, objections, ideas and actions . . .

In the above Introduction to his new book Ian Bradley clearly sets out the aim of this slender volume, and I feel he has succeeded. I like this volume very much and enjoyed reading about many aspects of Sullivan's life and works that I had not seriously considered before. Bradley has presented the 'real' Sullivan far more clearly, and I might add more succinctly, than many previous writers and has modern scholarship on matters such as Sullivan's under-rated yet marvellous conducting career. I believe this book can be enjoyed on many levels other than just the religious. It covers all aspects of Sullivan's life and has clearly defined chapters for each decade or period.

Bradley presents the composer's life in decades but clearly outlines



Oxford University Press

ISBN-10 0198863268

240 pp

and features those works which particularly correspond and connect with the composer's religious beliefs. Whereas we have been accustomed to a diminishing of Sullivan's beliefs, Bradley turns the table on many such ideas and presents a clear alternative. For example, he does not shy away from rejecting the views of David Eden, who believed that the Chapel Royal training Sullivan received was 'regarded as the most grievous blow ever suffered by English music, for it tainted him with the spiritual bankruptcy of Victorian Anglicanism'. It is enlightening to read Bradley countering these assumptions and arriving at an opposite conclusion, which I have to say he does rather convincingly!

I am thrilled that the book opens with an acknowledgement of the success of the recording of *The Light of the World* (initiated and made possible by the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society), with a particular stress on the startling effect it has had on critical opinions of the work. The Savoy Operas are also treated 'seriously'. Bradley mentions many aspects not always evident to those associated with them. As with most books, certain mistakes or omissions creep in and I picked up on one or two. A personal gripe concerns terminology. I never use the word 'operetta' concerning Sullivan's works. 'Light opera' or 'comic opera' or just 'opera' are my preference. When discussing *The Emerald Isle*, Bradley calls this work an 'operetta' yet on the very next page terms it a 'comic opera'!

Bradley is very brave to state (regarding the Hymn 'Nearer my God to Thee') that *Propior Deo*, Sullivan's hymn tune, 'was almost certainly the one used by the musicians on board the R.M.S. Titanic when they played the hymn shortly before the liner went down'. It is certainly quoted on the memorial to the band leader Wallace Hartley, because he was a Methodist. But if a hymn-tune was played at all, it was probably the *Horbury* tune.

I think there was a missed opportunity to stress the composer's support of the younger generation of composers. Sullivan's tenure as Principal of the National Training School for Music (1876-1882) is consigned to one short paragraph.

Bradley, who writes a clear reflection and exploration of the seemingly close relationship between the young Sullivan and the older George Grove, might perhaps have mentioned the relationship between Sullivan and his talented pupil at the National Training School, Frederic Cliffe. The other 'outsider' to whom Sullivan gave unstinting support is Edward Elgar. Bradley covers the 1898 Leeds Festival in which Elgar's *Caractacus* was premiered and, during a rehearsal, instead of resting, Sullivan stayed and made notes to help the composer with the performance. Afterwards Elgar wrote a warm letter to thank Sullivan for his support and made direct reference to this kindness being a distinct contrast 'with what some people do to a person unconnected with the schools, friendless and alone'. It is sad that Elgar's hope to include Sullivan as one of the 'friends pictured within' the *Enigma Variations* did not materialise. I suspect that Elgar found it as difficult to pinpoint Sullivan's character as did the actors who played the composer in films like *The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan* and *Topsy-Turvy*.

The final decade of Sullivan's life is well covered by Bradley, especially in the last section headed by the subtitle 'Death, Funeral and Tributes'. Bradley

could have so easily added the word 'Insults' to the list above as the section also covers Sullivan's posthumous reputation and the emergence of those disgraceful opinions which have so severely affected his reputation over the 121 years since his death. Elgar called the 1901 obituary in the *Cornhill Magazine* by *The Times* Music Critic Fuller Maitland 'foul' and representing 'the shady side of musical criticism'.

The conclusion of the book neatly ties all the strands together and presents the man as he was: if you want a succinct and readable description of Sullivan's spiritual life and how it affected his music and attitudes to life, this book can be highly recommended.

Martin T. Yates

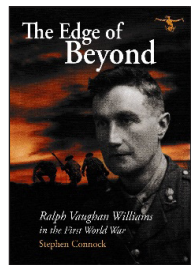
Chairman of the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society

(This is an edited version of the review that will appear in the Sullivan Society's Magazine)

The Edge of Beyond
Ralph Vaughan Williams in the First World War
 Stephen Connock

Ascribing the word 'great' to a work of art or an individual can be controversial. Indeed it is an over-used word merely reflecting an opinion. Over many years when I had the privilege of talking to Michael Kennedy, he made it clear that he considered Ralph Vaughan Williams (RVW) to be the 'greatest' man he had met. Kennedy was applying the word 'great' to the *character* of RVW; his greatness as a composer went without saying. Applying the word 'great' to the character of a composer is arguably an irrelevancy, for we are principally interested in them because of their art. However, their lives influenced what they created. For me, one of the other composers whose character might be considered 'great' was Giuseppe Verdi, who overcame the early death of his wife and children to live life more or less on his own terms, ignoring the morality and, where, possible, the politics of his time. This book, I feel, demonstrates why RVW was a 'great' man, and also shows why he was a great composer.

Stephen Connock makes the point: 'he would share the discomforts endured by others with humour and good grace'. The word 'discomforts' is hardly adequate to describe the conditions under which RVW survived during the winter of 1916/17 in Greece, and on the voyage across the Mediterranean after his time in France. These conditions, which 'other ranks' were forced to suffer during the voyage, were virtually as bad as if they had been the crew of a Royal Navy vessel 100 years before. Whether if the Great War had not happened RVW would have become a great composer, is a question that is impossible to answer, for all artists respond to their times and circumstances



ISBN: 978-0-9956284-5-8

Albion Music Ltd

245 pages

as did, for example, Beethoven and Shostakovich. In RVW's case, I have little doubt the answer is 'yes'; but he would have been a different composer.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on 12 October 1872, fifteen years and four months after Edward Elgar. What a difference fifteen years makes: on 4 August 1914, Elgar was 57 years old whilst Vaughan Williams was 42. Elgar was too old to be called to active service but Vaughan Williams would have been subject to conscription when it was extended to 50-year-old men in 1918. However, later conscription was irrelevant because he did something extraordinary and volunteered for military service on New Year's Eve 1914. His background and social position could well have qualified him for officer training, but he became a private soldier in the RAMC, a position which, as Connock points out, probably saved his life.¹ Fortunately, RVW did not join that list of 'what might they have composed' musicians such as Butterworth, Farrar, Granados and Stephan. Others responded very differently, as RVW noted in a letter to Gustav Holst in June 1916: 'Did you see that Rutland Boughton applied for exemption on the grounds that he was doing work of national importance at Glastonbury!'

Stephen Connock begins with a brief biography of RVW up to the outbreak of war and his eventual enlistment. He points out the range of music RVW had composed before then, as well as the extraordinary and wide-ranging family and social connections that RVW enjoyed through his own family and the Fishers, the family into which he married. To name but two, there was Captain, later Admiral, Sir William Wordsworth and the historian H.A.L. Fisher, who was elected to Charles Stuart Wortley's Sheffield constituency in 1916 following the latter's elevation to the peerage. It is testament to RVW's strength of character that he did not take advantage of the connections his family gave him. Like Elgar, RVW joined the Special Constabulary on the outbreak of war but it is there that any similarities end. It says so much about RVW's character that he accepted his position as a private soldier, tolerating the tedium of army life, and the repeated drills and practice designed so that the least competent member of a group could manage - repeated and repeated for the eighteen months before he was sent to France. Here was RVW, slightly dishevelled, his cap askew, his ungainly frame hidden in his ill-fitting uniform, diagnosed with flat feet but enduring enforced marches - on arrival in France he marched sixteen miles in about four hours; how fit he must have been.²

1 RAMC: Royal Army Medical Corps. The attrition rate among subalterns during the war was very great: even taking into account that RVW was frequently in danger as an orderly, he was not in a front-line trench leading futile platoon attacks across 'no-man's land'.

2 Sometime after RVW was commissioned his application for promotion to Lieutenant was rejected on the grounds that 'he is not as smart as might be expected. I also particularly noticed that he was most untidy in his ways and dress'. Major Stanley Smith, who wrote the letter and who had agreed that RVW was 'a most reliable and energetic officer' was incapable of looking beyond the obvious. One suspects that had RVW been 42 in 1940, the 'system' would have co-opted him into something much more suitable to his talents.

This book is as good as any in describing the role of RAMC wagon orderlies, the dangers they faced, and the appalling conditions under which they had to operate. Connock has visited virtually every stretch of England and France that RVW must have trod on and the buildings he slept in, and it shows. RVW's time in France only lasted a few months, before the hell of the northern Greek winter and the battle (still in wintry conditions) of Lake Doiran. By then RVW's 'energy and spirit were draining away', the tasks assigned to him so mundane and so petty (painting bricks red) that he applied for a Commission at the end of March 1917; in the June he was on his way back to Britain. It was clear, though, that he came to miss the camaraderie of those with whom he had shared so much. So it was that he was admitted to the Royal Garrison Artillery and travelled to Maresfield Park in Sussex. This was to be a long war for RVW, now 45 years old. Space does not permit me to dwell on what was another period back in France and then in Germany but it was no picnic!

This is undoubtedly a valuable book throwing a penetrating light onto RVW's time as a soldier. He was not a natural: he was the sort of person who never suited a uniform, but his lack of promotion (probably for the wrong reasons) adds to the impression that he was out of place when, in many ways, the contrary was the case. However, any prolonged period of service of this nature will leave a lasting impression on any creative artist, and the result in RVW's case is clear. Connock is good at describing RVW's time in France before Greece and gives an excellent summary of the little-known campaign there. You will learn everything you need to know about the 60-pounder gun, with which RVW was closely involved on his return to France as a 2nd Lieutenant. Through his time as a member of the Army of Occupation in Germany and his effective demobilisation in February 1919 we are given a detailed idea of his life and those of others; the respect in which he was held, the music he organised and how he coped as a loyal, determined, courteous, conscientious but, at times rather obviously, 'fish out of water'.

Then there is Chapter Seven: '*With rue my heart is laden*' - *War and the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. This, I feel, is where the book has been heading and is the chapter Connock has long wanted to write; here it has its context. Connock's deep love (passion) for RVW's music sometimes gets in the way in earlier chapters as he peppers his text with adjectives such as 'lovely' and 'beautiful' but not here for he gets to the heart of the music as in this description of the *Mass in G minor* (1920/1): 'music that is subtle, sincere, comforting and compassionate'. Then follows a short but brilliant analysis of *A Pastoral Symphony* - one of the great symphonies of the last century in my opinion, and now, at last, understood. I am inclined to disagree with Connock's suggestion that a near parallel work is Bliss's *Morning Heroes* from 1930. For me, it took Bliss another 25 years to put the ghosts of the war behind him in his *Meditations on a Theme of John Blow* (1955) - just listen to that extraordinary ending!

RVW's song cycle *Along the Field* is shown to be another seminal work; the words of Housman once again proving to be a mine worth quarrying. The

eighth and final song gives the chapter its heading and the book its epitaph:³

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a light foot lad.

If I have a criticism or two; these are minor. I cannot understand the modern practice of removing footnotes to endnotes and, unfortunately, this is the case here. Furthermore, it is as if Connock is trying to avoid the word 'Elgar' (it appears twice only). As he ends his book with a short but excellent biography post WW1, and therefore covers RVW's activities in WW2 a comparison between the two leading composers, Elgar in WW1 and RVW in WW2, might have been of interest. Connock mentions virtually every other contemporary British composer of the time, but it was Elgar who was working – often very hard – on the Home Front, and who composed the only really worthwhile music during the four years of conflict. Connock, in his bibliography does not list Lewis Foreman's anthology *Oh My Horses!* either.

This book, though, is not about Elgar. It is about another great creative artist who did what he thought was right for his country and his conscience. He made some unlikely friends (comrades) clearly at ease with those less well educated than himself. Connock publishes a charming memory by Harry Steggles, his mouth-organ-playing comrade who wrote, comparing themselves: '... myself of London County Old Kent Road School. What a contrast; old enough in years to be my father, yet young enough in heart to be my comrade'.

I would not question Connock's view that three compositions are key to understanding RVW's music in the post-war period (*A Pastoral Symphony*, *Riders to the Sea* and *Sancta Civitas*). However, in these pieces I miss that sense of unconstrained open-heartedness that, it seems to me, permeates works such as *A Sea Symphony*, the *Tallis Fantasia* and the *Songs of Travel*. War changes everything and it changed RVW.

Andrew Neill

3 The title of the book is from the words of one of RVW's colleagues in France in 1916 as he describes finding his way in the dark in the trenches: '...I realised for the first time the hopelessness of that distant place known as the Edge of Beyond...'

Sir John Barbirolli: A Career on Record

David Ll. Jones

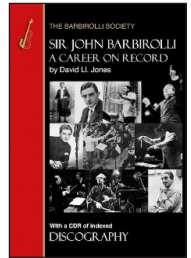
It is a daunting task to assemble a discography covering a period of almost 60 years, with 583 documented items, plus more live and 'off-air' recordings that have become increasingly available in recent years, yet David Jones has done that: truly a labour of love. His discography on a CD-ROM first appeared in 2011 and the second edition, incorporating all further recordings issued since then, and especially warranted by the CDs released last year – the complete RCA and Columbia recordings from Sony and the complete UK recordings from 1928 to 1970 by Warner Classics – has just been issued.

The new CD-ROM¹ gives a chronological account of all the commercial and live recordings released to date. Each entry shows the recording date for the work in question, the name of the recording company and the venue. This is followed by the name of the work, the composer and the date of composition. As many details as are known about the session are then set out, including the matrix numbers, the number of takes (used and not used), the side number for 78 rpm discs and the company issue number for LPs, followed by the identity of the producer and recording engineer. The identity of the players - orchestras, soloists and choirs - is then given before a list of all the commercial issues in chronological order. This section of the discography covers 291 electronic pages, but there is more. Four indices follow: first an alphabetical list of each composer represented, followed by the work and reference to the page number where the detailed entry is to be found. Secondly, the same for artists and there follows a list of the orchestras with which he recorded. The discography then concludes with a list of the record companies who issued Sir John's recordings. In total the CD-ROM discography runs to an amazing 384 pages. So here is everything you could possibly need to know about Sir John's extensive recording career and David Jones, who has amassed a huge collection of Barbirolli's recordings, is to be congratulated for his industry and attention to detail. The result, after years of detailed research is astounding.

In addition, he has written a meticulous account of Barbirolli's career in the recording studio, which commenced in October 1911 for the Edison Bell Company when as a boy cellist he recorded four pieces with his sister Rosa playing the piano, and concluded in the Kingsway Hall on 17 July 1970 when he completed his recordings of Delius's *Appalachia* and *Brigg Fair* for EMI. Yet that was not quite the end, as there was to be a final recording of a live event: the penultimate concert of his life, in St Nicholas's Chapel, Kings Lynn on 24 July, was an all-Elgar programme recorded by the BBC.

Calling on a vast range of archive material, including Barbirolli's personal diaries, David Jones has provided a unique insight into the way Sir John organised his heavy recording schedule around his demanding concert engagements both in the UK and abroad – his workload was staggering and

1 It is understood that those without CD drives on their computers may be able to obtain a downloadable PDF version from The Barbirolli Society



The Barbirolli Society

ISBN 978-0-9556710-1-2

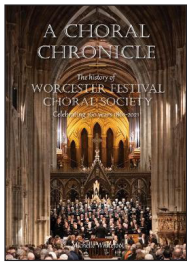
126 pages plus a CD-ROM

incessant. Interestingly he shows how increasingly in later years Barbirolli carefully arranged, well in advance, a series of rehearsals and concert performances of pieces scheduled for recording, so that his players were very well prepared when they came to set them down in the recording studio.

Naturally, full attention is given to Barbirolli's Elgar recordings. Much detail is offered into the planning and eventual recording, over four days in December 1964, of Sir John's celebrated interpretation of *The Dream of Gerontius*: the recordings of the First Symphony (1962), the Second Symphony (1964) - particularly the climax of the slow movement - and the Symphonic Study *Falstaff*, are rightly singled out for high praise.

Barbirolli's recording career was hugely significant, not only due to the range of musicians he worked with and the number of orchestras he conducted, both in the UK and abroad, but also due to the breadth of his repertoire and the substantial number of inspirational recordings he made. All those interested in this remarkable conductor, and the history of recording in the twentieth century, should seek out this comprehensive and brilliant discography.

Kevin Mitchell



**A Choral Chronicle:
The History of Worcester Festival Choral Society 1861-2021**
Michelle Whitefoot

The Worcester Festival Choral Society began life in the 1860s but failed to outlast the decade; since its reconstitution in the late 1880s on the initiative of Hugh Blair it has survived and thrived, world wars, finances and a pandemic notwithstanding. Its conductorship is usually an *ex officio* post of the Cathedral organist, as is the artistic directorship of the Worcester Three Choirs Festival. If that Festival has provided one reason for the Society's longevity, Edward Elgar has provided another; not every provincial choral society can boast the presence of a local musical genius. Despite his occasional complaints about the musical atmosphere of his home town, Elgar owed a good deal to the Festival Choral Society. As leader of the orchestral branch, it gave him scope to continue his self-education and exploration of repertoire, and provided him with guaranteed performances and guaranteed audiences - crucial opportunities for a budding composer. Many of the Society's personnel - William Done, Hugh Blair, Hubert Leicester, Ivor Atkins, Canon Cloughton, John Austin, Martina Hyde, Winifred Norbury - were among his earliest encouragers and supporters, and Elgar's music has been a touchstone of the Society's repertoire ever since. The special atmosphere of a performance of one of Elgar's major choral works in Worcester Cathedral remains unique.

Well timed to mark the Society's 160th anniversary, and to raise funds at a period of difficulty, this is an account from the inside, as it were, by a chorus member. The Society is well represented as a whole community, and the author has taken care to ensure that many of its members and officers

past and present receive honourable mention. But despite the inevitable tendency towards a narrowness of focus inherent in such a history, *A Choral Chronicle* offers more than a list of conductors (eleven) and concerts (358 by my reckoning) fully represented as they are in its pages. Perspectives on social as well as musical history emerge, extending from the days of horse-drawn carriages, no applause and a diet of Handel and the standard classics, to our world of come-and-sing, girl choristers, marketing, websites, a widely varied repertoire, and Covid-cancelled concerts. But old habits can die hard in a world inevitably dominated by its Victorian-Cathedral inheritance. It might be no surprise that it was not until 1954 that Cathedral audiences were seated facing down the nave, not in two rows facing each other across it, and that it was not until 1957 that David Willcocks managed to persuade the Dean and Chapter to permit a performance of *Belshazzar's Feast*. It was a performance of the same work under Christopher Robinson in 1966 that stimulated a first, spontaneous burst of applause from the audience, setting a pattern only grudgingly accepted by the authorities at first. And it was not until 1972 that the Society's concerts were first held on Saturdays, allowing a full choral and orchestral afternoon rehearsal. Previously concerts had usually taken place on Tuesday evenings, possibly an inheritance from Victorian times when chorus members of the leisured classes could be sure of attending a weekday afternoon rehearsal. Possibly, too, Tuesday was early-closing day, convenient for shopkeepers. The social mix of the Society at that period may have been wider than one suspects, even in a class-bound society. Cultural life in Victorian Worcester being largely run through the combined efforts of the aristocracy and gentry, the clergy, the professional and better-educated 'trade' classes, some investigation of the precise socio-economic make-up of the Society would have been of interest. Worcester was something of a stronghold of Freemasonry and it would be interesting too, to have some idea of the part this played in its musical life.

While a certain amount of a perfectly understandable sense of local pride in the Society's longevity and achievements emerges, *A Choral Chronicle* is refreshing in its acknowledgement of aspects of its internal politics and the human failings of some of its conductors. No doubt some of the best stories remain untold, but nevertheless one of the book's virtues for this reader lies in its avoidance of the kind of solemn tone so often evident in such histories. Instead there is a frank presentation of Hugh Blair's drinking, Ivor Atkins' unbending authoritarianism, Donald Hunt's increasing prickliness and reluctance to retire, and Peter Nardone's evident lack of interest in administration and unhappiness with certain aspects of the Cathedral's musical 'establishment'. Nevertheless, such situations went hand-in-hand with the pursuit of the highest standards, and it is good to see Blair's reputation restored as an ambitious pioneer of broad and varied programming, a policy continued by Atkins, who also made a point of inviting composers to conduct their own works. Donald Hunt famously took the Society's advocacy of Elgar to new heights, while the unassuming and popular Peter Nardone contributed his experience as a professional counter-tenor to the Society's

Available from:
[www.wfcs.online/
book](http://www.wfcs.online/book)

technical armoury.

It is one measure of Worcester's reputation as a musical centre that it has proved a career stepping-stone for so many of its leading figures. Atkins's 53 years in post, and Donald Hunt's 22 years, now seem out of the question if not inherently inadvisable. David Willcocks left after seven years for Cambridge, the Bach Choir, the Royal College of Music, and a Knighthood; Douglas Guest served a similar period before spending the remainder of his career at Westminster Abbey. Christopher Robinson served for eleven years before leaving for St George's Chapel Windsor, St John's College Cambridge, various conductorships and a CBE. And both Adrian Lucas and Peter Nardone have used their many and varied talents to pursue independent careers.

Conversely, Worcester has been able to attract young newcomers of great talent. Christopher Allsopp, part-time Assistant Organist and subsequently full-time Assistant Director of Music at the Cathedral between 2004 and 2018, had spent a year as Organ Scholar at St Martin-in-the-Fields as a teenager before proceeding to a scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge, and various subsequent posts, including one at St Philip's Cathedral Birmingham before coming to Worcester. As the Society's rehearsal accompanist, he was well placed to take over rehearsals and concerts when needed, leading to his appointment as Director of Music on a one-year contract on the unexpected departure of Peter Nardone. Allsopp's conducting of a performance of *The Creation* at just one day's notice has become something of a Society legend. His recently-appointed (2019) successor, Samuel Hudson has been both student and Director of Music at Girton College Cambridge, senior Organ Scholar at Wells Cathedral, and was appointed Director of Music at Blackburn Cathedral in his twenties, making him the youngest Cathedral Director of Music at that time. Sadly, and frustratingly for him and all concerned, the three planned Festival Choral Society concerts for 2020, including the *Sea Symphony*, *Gerontius* and *Messiah*, were cancelled, and the Worcester Three Choirs Festival postponed.

At the time of writing in mid-February it does indeed seem that there may be light at the end of that much-vaunted tunnel, that Covid-related restrictions will ease, live music-making return¹ and Worcester Festival Choral Society will be able to project its special Elgarian imprimatur onto that postponed cathedral performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* whenever it is undertaken. ('The building will do it,' Elgar told Jaeger.) Meanwhile Michelle Whitefoot has 'used well the interval'. This book offers a reminder of the Society's achievements for performers and audiences alike, and an optimistic focus on the future. *A Choral Chronicle* is a substantial, attractively designed, reader-friendly account with many superb colour photographs, with all profits going to the Choral Society. Warmly recommended.

Kevin Allen

¹ As we go to press there has indeed been continued progress and some live music-making is now taking place but regrettably amateur choral groups remain unable to perform pending further restrictions being eased. Eds

Confessions of a Music Critic

Christopher Morley

(All profits from the sale of this book will be donated to the Gwyn Williams Bursary for string players).

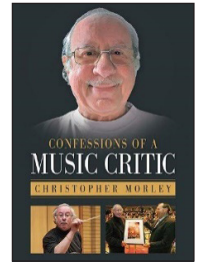
Christopher Morley has long been a friend of Elgar's music and has helped this Society in unseen ways over the years; this more than justifies why we are giving space to his charming book. Morley, embedded in one of the three most important cities of Elgar's career (Birmingham), has written a book which, although only occasionally about Elgar and his music, puts into context much of what has happened to performances of his music over recent years. The quality of his writing is clear in what is a random example:

Though simple looking on the page, the music is in fact alive with contrapuntal textures. The *Allegro* first movement begins innocently, its ten introductory notes merely outlining those of the tonic B-flat major chord, but the development section passes through a range of distantly related keys, beginning with D-flat major (an absolute rarity in Mozart, but what a gorgeously 'fat' sound it makes) before passing through a whole gamut of tonalities.

That short passage from booklet notes written by Morley describing Mozart's Piano Sonata No 17 K570¹, is an example of clear, helpful writing that should be of great assistance to anyone trying to understand what is being played.

Most critics are remembered for the wrong reasons. The deeply prejudiced Olin Downes in New York and Eduard Hanslick remain notorious. George Bernard Shaw is recalled for his wit and musical insights, often into music which was then brand-new but which is now well-known; however, his reviews remain relevant. Obviously, these writers were from a past time when readers turned to the music pages of *Neue Freie Presse* or *The New York Times* before consulting the headlines! Some critics can be a guide, opening doors and subtly suggesting other ways of listening. Shaw and Morley dislike Brahms' *German Requiem*, but I love it. I respect their opinions and, in the case of Morley would not expect his views to colour his opinion of a performance *per se*. Where we are united is in our dislike (a mild word) of *Carmina Burana* – so beloved of choirs around the world! Christopher Morley, who writes for the *Birmingham Post*, has managed that rare balancing act of objectivity but, at the same time, keeping the respect of those 'criticised': another fine example was the late Michael Kennedy. Living and working in that self-centred bubble that is London means that my experience of Morley's writing is limited. He has agreed to become an occasional reviewer for this *Journal* and has already demonstrated his musical knowledge, understanding, and

¹ Mozart Piano Sonatas, Volume 1 – Peter Donohoe (SOMMCD 0191).



ISBN:
978-1-85858-726-4

Brewin Books, 2020

148 pages

objectivity - something for which he is justly renowned and from which this Society will benefit.

In our increasingly homogenised world and in what is a relatively small country it is good that there are still important 'local' newspapers such as the *Birmingham Post* which continue with 'quality' journalism although like all newspapers it will, inevitably, be facing the challenge of new sources of information. Morley's book is full of anecdotes, meetings with or the observing of personalities, comments on an organisation close to his heart (the CBSO) and some penetrating observations on music and music making. Morley compares the eighteen-year relationship Sir Simon Rattle enjoyed with the CBSO with many other similar musical relationships and makes the point that these can become a 'huge source of pride for Birmingham (or Manchester and Philadelphia) and its citizens, even those who know little about music'. With regard to the CBSO he rightly makes the point that it has been unfairly used by some conductors as possible stepping-stones to other positions. Bearing in mind the close relationship he had developed with the then Principal Conductor Andris Nelsons, Morley says that it felt like 'a personal kick in the teeth' when Nelsons suddenly announced he was resigning to take up a similar position in Boston. Morley was also disappointed with the loss of Sakari Oramo, but his joy at seeing and hearing Mirga Grazinite-Tyla conduct for the first time (Beethoven's Seventh Symphony) is palpable. Her recordings for DG were beginning to remind the wider world that Birmingham remains home to a great orchestra. Alas, Morley's book went to press before the announcement that she, too, is stepping down. There are some personal reasons behind this decision but, as Sir Anthony Pappano implied recently, Brexit has not stopped music making in Britain.

Morley begins his book with a story – a hilarious tale of a hurried visit to Milan and then takes us through his musical upbringing and the starts and stops of his journey to become the *Post's* Chief Music Critic. On the way he settles a few scores but this is, largely, a joyful book, full of anecdotes. It is therefore appropriate that someone who knows Christopher better than I should offer a second review.

Andrew Neill

At every meeting of the Critics' Circle Music Section – when the nation's music scribblers gather behind an unmarked door in the West End to drink weak coffee and grumble about fees – there's a ritual. The Chair opens the meeting, moves to the first item on the agenda, and someone pipes up: 'Apologies have been received from Christopher Morley'. The old guard chuckles, and the newer members have it quietly explained to them that Mr Morley has never attended, and never will – until the Section agrees, even once in a decade, to hold a meeting somewhere other than London. So far, it never has. So far, Christopher has never attended. The secretary makes a note and the meeting moves on.

For the Chief Music Critic of the *Birmingham Post*, it's a matter of principle. Some might call it quixotic. I call it magnificent, even while I hop obediently onto the Pendolino to pay my dues down south. Chris is old-school in the best possible way. Supremely professional, staggeringly knowledgeable, huge fun to be around - but rightly insistent on the dignity and indispensability of the critic's art. In his seventh decade on the job, he remains unshakable in his belief that where Birmingham leads, the world follows – and that the musical life of the Midlands is as vital, and as important, as anything that happens in the Capital.

That pride (and that principle) animates every page of his new memoir. So too – it goes without saying - does his sense of humour (I'll bet he knew exactly what he was doing when he called it *Confessions of a Music Critic*). Here's the truth of his youthful journey from Brighton to Brum; the wartime love story of his Italian mother and his soldier dad, and the tale – still barely fathomable to anyone who can't imagine Birmingham's music scene without him – of how he was sacked by the *Birmingham Post* within months of starting.

He'd misremembered the name of a soloist – the kind of mistake that's swiftly pounced upon these days by every armchair blogger with logorrhoea and a Wikipedia habit. It's more understandable when you read his description of working conditions back when the *Post* published daily and every concert in Birmingham ended with the sight of its critic leaping, spring-loaded, for the nearest telephone – there to dictate a concise, word-perfect appraisal of the evening's performance within 30 minutes of the final cadence. And not just in Birmingham, either. There are tales here of trips to Italy, to Japan, to most of Eastern Europe. There's a twinkle in his eye as he recounts the time he accompanied the Birmingham Bach Choir to the Communist Bloc, and phoned in his column just the same:

'This is Christopher Morley, speaking from behind the Iron Curtain, and there's not much time. This is a review of the Birmingham Bach Choir in St Thomas's Church, Leipzig?'

'How'm yow spellink LOIPZIG, Chrees?' came back the lovely girl's measured tones. But the review was in the paper next morning...

That's just one incident in a story that embraces half a century of music in the Midlands – whether it's Simon Rattle opening Symphony Hall, or a village choral society going out of its way to make Christopher welcome (he's a passionate champion of amateur music-making). Susana Walton, Karlheinz Stockhausen and (unforgettably) Leonard Bernstein make cameo appearances. Two myths are shattered along the way: that critics are frustrated musicians (I can attest that Chris is pretty handy with a baton) and that the *Birmingham Post* has tended to give the 'home team' an easy ride. He's unsparing on the episode in 2013 when Andris Nelsons' agents scented dollars and tore him away from the CBSO for a shotgun marriage with an affluent but inferior US orchestra.

To be honest, there were moments when I wished he had been even less discreet, though it's not hard to guess the identity of the un-named Green Room bore with the 'plummy Nicholas Parsons-sounding voice' who spitefully attempted to skewer Chris's chances of a BBC career. But that would be untrue to the fundamental generosity of a man who's probably done as much as any musician to identify and support new talent (again, I write from personal experience), to fight Birmingham's corner, and to uphold the integrity of his role – recruiting a fiercely loyal team of colleagues who continue to fill the *Post* with first-rate classical music coverage long after the newspaper ceased to pay for it. Christopher Morley inspires that sort of loyalty, and this book shows you why.

Richard Bratby

Richard Bratby writes on music for The Spectator, Gramophone and The Arts Desk and is assistant music critic of the Birmingham Post, as well as a programme note writer for the BBC, the Salzburg Festival and many other promoters in Europe, America and Asia. He was formerly a manager of the CBSO and RLPO, and prior to that played the cello in the Sri Lanka Philharmonic Orchestra. His book Forward: 100 Years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra was published in 2019, and as 2020-21 Hogwood Fellow he is currently writing the official history of the Academy of Ancient Music. He is married to the theatre historian Annette Rubery and they live in Lichfield, Staffordshire with their cat Rusty.

DVD REVIEW

Enigma Variations: choreography by Frederick Ashton with Julia Trevelyan Oman, designer

Concerto: choreography by Kenneth MacMillan with Jürgen Rose, designer; Music: Dmitri Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No 2 with Kate Shipway, piano

Raymonda Act III: choreography by Rudolf Nureyev with Barry Kay the designer. Music: Alexander Glazunov.

Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Pavel Sorokin.



Opus Arte DVD
(OA1312D)

A few years ago, triple bills were regarded as a sometime thing. As the dance writer for *The Birmingham Post* I would turn up on review night for a Birmingham Royal Ballet triple bill only to find the Birmingham Hippodrome half empty. It was dismal for everybody, but most of all for the dancers. George Balanchine may have been thinking of this when he said: 'You could do "Swan Lake" every night of the year and you'd always sell tickets - but audiences tend to view experimental dance with suspicion'. Happily things have changed and this DVD is an absolute must have for anyone building a dance library, being both gently elegiac, transformingly elegant with barre exercises set to a Shostakovich score, and wittily regal with a stylish regard for the old Russian upper class, who liked to see themselves mirrored on stage.

But it is Frederick Ashton's extraordinary ballet *Enigma Variations* which first takes possession of the mind. Set, of course, to Elgar's enchanting score, Ashton's concept opens up the ballet rather like a novel, where dance takes over from speech. Much of it has a fleeting beauty as Elgar's Worcestershire garden fills with his friends and acquaintances. A young girl in a set of swift bourrées, whirls across the stage with ribbons flying, another young woman dreams away the afternoon in a sumptuous hammock until awoken by a young lover, children link together in round dances and Elgar and his wife (Laura Morera) move through what are known as *pas d'été*, steps of summer, delicacy within a luxurious classical bonding which emphasises marital happiness, but yet is restrained and thoughtful, reaching its climax when Elgar (thoughtfully danced by Christopher Saunders) receives from his devoted friend, A.J. Jaeger (Bennett Garside) the longed-for telegram which assures his future. Emotions here run very deep.

How Ashton combines classical dance with the formidable story told here is extraordinary. These are real people, unlike the characters in *Swan Lake* or *A Month In The Country*. How Ashton merges Edwardian realism into a classical dance tradition making these unlikely characters in their check jackets, gaiters and deerstalker caps, with their ear trumpets and bicycles into believable people is both astonishing and mysterious, and so has become,

inevitably, one of ballet's lost secrets.

The ballet, always moving and changing within Elgar's haunting music, is helped by Julia Trevelyan Oman's indoor/outdoor set and her lovely costumes. Here is a gifted designer who can find an elegy in the misty trees which stand sentinel-like in the parkland outside Elgar's garden. Characters drift in and out under a simple garden archway and one person does nothing at all, he sits upstage and watches the action, occasionally dozing, but generally in stasis. I was reminded of Sydney Saxon Turner, a member of the Bloomsbury Group, who perhaps sat alongside Lytton Strachey or Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell or Duncan Grant, over several summers at Charleston, part of a literary powerhouse, yet never producing anything at all!

Raymonda was always an odd ballet. Created originally by the great Petipa for the Maryinsky Theatre it suited the social easily-pleased climate of the late 19th century, but had about as much substance as a meringue shell. Diaghilev and Stravinsky changed all that of course with *Firebird* and *Scheherazade* and so the complete ballet *Raymonda* was shelved for years, until Nureyev came along, liked Glazunov's delicious music, tightened up the choreography and eventually launched the third act only as the glamorous, highly sophisticated triple-bill bon-bon, shown on this disc. The Royal Ballet has set it here alongside *Enigma Variations* and *Concerto* as a glittering finale and it works perfectly with its suggestion of heel-clicking, hand behind-the-head, Hungarian officer class with their equally formal ladies.

In complete contrast, the Royal Ballet has chosen Kenneth Macmillan's abstract piece *Concerto*, where barre work set to music by Shostakovich is elevated like the Host, into the hard-edged world of abstract dance where emotion is outlawed and physical ability is what we must look for instead. And yet there is a remarkable degree of intimacy in the partnering of Yasmine Naghdi and Ryoichi Huro, which somehow leaves a moistness in your eye. 'It can happen' Macmillan said to me during an interview, 'there can be soul, you know, even in abstraction'.

Richard Edmonds

Richard Edmonds was for over 30 years the dance writer for The Birmingham Post. He was a visiting professor at University of Central Birmingham, and is a Fellow of the Birmingham Society alongside Sir Simon Rattle and Sir Peter Wright, a friend and former artistic director of Birmingham Royal Ballet.

CD REVIEWS

Elgar: *The Dream of Gerontius*, Op 38

John Vickers, tenor

Constance Shacklock, mezzo-soprano

Marian Nowakowski, bass

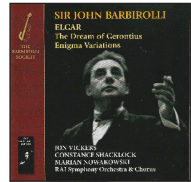
RAI Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, Rome

(RAI Auditorium, 20 November 1957)

Elgar: *Enigma Variations*, Op 36

RAI Symphony Orchestra, Turin (15 November 1960)

Sir John Barbirolli



The Barbirolli
Edition

SJB1105-06

If you are a devotee of 'early music' (whatever that really means) I suggest you skip this paragraph for I now confess a heresy: I love the Beecham/Goossens arrangement and recording of Handel's *Messiah*! One of the great moments is when the voice of John Vickers fills the room with 'Comfort ye, my people'. It is powerful, seductive, clear and - dare I say it - comforting. It is, for me, a standard by which others might be judged: a great voice for Aeneas in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Florestan, Grimes, Tristan and, as here, Gerontius. This is the one chance to savour Vickers' interpretation, in a performance which, of course, has many other attributes.

Any reader who had the stamina to read my substantial review of the Warner release of Sir John Barbirolli's 'EMI' recordings last December (*Journal* Vol.22 No 3) may recall my enthusiasm for the performance of part two of *The Dream of Gerontius* broadcast from Manchester's Town Hall in 1951. The deteriorating sound could not disguise the greatness of this performance which, in certain respects, is superior to the commercial recording Barbirolli made thirteen years later. Parry Jones and Marian Nowakowski were as good as any two male soloists I have heard and, if Dame Janet Baker remains in a league of her own, it would be an insult to Marjorie Thomas's superb performance to suggest she should take a back seat. Where I think it scored over the 1964 recording is in Barbirolli's conducting (tighter, more alert, a true performance), in the quality of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's playing and the outstanding choral singing. Barbirolli, who had played in the orchestra for *Gerontius* when Elgar conducted it at the 1920 Three Choirs Festival, knew the work as well as any conductor and this shows in the results he achieved in Rome in 1957.

This recording of this famous 'Italian' performance is one that every Elgarian should have on their shelves (or wherever such things are kept these

days) in its first reissue since 1991.¹

I should explain that the sound is, well, adequate and that the choir's pronunciation of English is not perfect (not a problem for me). The orchestra is superb, responding to Barbirolli with enthusiasm and accuracy. He also had three superb soloists. In December I said that Nowakowski was 'imperious and caring and at the same time God would have no option but to listen to his pleading'. What is more he had only been singing in English since 1944! Here he is not quite as imperious, possibly owing to the placing of the microphones, and he might have needed another attempt at intercession! However, in some ways this is a less raw performance, the way he phrases the end of his intercession '... they shall ever gaze on thee', is deeply affecting.

Constance Shacklock, then 44, was at the height of her not inconsiderable powers. It was later that she 'climbed every mountain' and then hot-footed it to the Royal Albert Hall to sing *Rule Britannia* at the last night of the Proms. She seems to take a while to warm up, but once this has happened she is all you want in an Angel: sympathetic, cajoling, imperious and, finally, sympathetic for that final journey to wait 'on the morrow'. Her ecstatic 'Alleluia! Praise to His Name' (two bars after cue 117) is thrilling and her diction exemplary.

So back to Vickers who had a voice which seems able to cower at the thought of death ('a visitant is knocking' and 'some bodily form of ill . . . flaps its hideous wings') then is able to face it down when the hour arrives; and in a deeply personal 'Novissima hora est' he sinks, with relief, into the next life. This is wonderful vocal acting, stressing the operatic side of Elgar's extraordinary composition: one that can grip believers of many faiths and those with none. In part two his wonder at meeting the angel is touching and, bearing in mind this is a journey of 'extremest speed' he allows the various emotions contained within Newman's text to be helped, just a little, seemingly irritated by the demons and so eager to face his God. His uncertainty as he sings 'I go before my judge' is also palpable. This is a great tenor placing his voice at the service of the music and, in Barbirolli, he found a perfect partner. The brief excerpt of applause at the end shows the appreciation of the audience and also their recognition of a work of art that spoke directly to all present.

Three years later Barbirolli conducted RAI's excellent Turin Orchestra in Elgar's *Variations*. Again you can feel the players responding to a conductor who knew what he wanted and how to get it. It is a tribute to the Rome

1 The Italian *Arkadia* label issued both performances, with the addition of a performance by the Turin Orchestra of Mozart's C major Symphony (K.338) with Barbirolli conducting. By jamming all this together part two of *Gerontius* was spread across both discs, the break coming at 'Thy judgement now is near'. The information provided by Arkadia is, to say the least, chaotic. It dates the *Gerontius* performance as 1967 whilst the notes date it as 1957, the same date the performance details attribute to the *Enigma* performance. The remainder of the notes are 'interesting': 'Anche le Variazioni Enigma furono un cavallo di battaglia di Barbirolli' ('Even the *Enigma Variations* were one of Barbirolli's battle horses').

Orchestra that they performed so effectively what must have been an unknown score; here the players must have known the music but, of course, many players are more exposed. There is something in Barbirolli's phrasing that almost immediately tells you who is conducting. He is true to the music but here, with these Italian players, they give him 'his' performance. This would not be your first choice for a Barbirolli *Enigma*, but it is an excellent and interesting coupling to go with his *Gerontius*. Two variations will suffice to explain why. Variation VIII (WN) moves briskly, the woodwind playing with beautiful balance before the 'attacca' into a *Nimrod* which does not linger (it is unsentimental and at 3'13" really quick, near Elgar's speed) but it works, the Turin strings digging deep to produce a luxurious sound.

The Barbirolli Society is to be congratulated on this release which should be widely known and played - often!

Andrew Neill

Eric Coates, Albert Coates, Orchestral Suites
Coward, *London Morning*
Elgar, *Variations on an Original Theme, Op.36*
Eric Coates, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Geoffrey Corbett



Decca - Australian
Eloquence
ELQ4840190

We can be confident that Alice Elgar would be enraged, or at least deeply put out, by this two-CD set, were it possible to bring it to her attention. Albert Coates (1882-1953) almost certainly had the distinction of being the last in the sequence of those who caused her offence, he having compromised the rehearsals for the premiere of the Cello Concerto to such an extent that the performance itself was a near-fiasco. Lady Elgar confided to her diary that Coates was a 'brutal, selfish, ill-mannered boulder' (the noun is eloquent of her social origins) and hoped that she would never have to speak to him again (an obligation from which her death released her, just over five months later). Her husband was less colourful in his condemnation, limiting himself to 'dreadful' and 'hopeless' in a letter written to the other Alice on the last day of 1927. At any rate, the boulder's contribution to this set is a five-movement suite for strings drawn from the dramatic music of Henry Purcell and opening with the stately D minor theme on which Britten based his *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. Performed here by Sargent and the LSO strings, the suite is a useful reminder of the existence of this beautiful and much-neglected repertoire, but the transcription itself is unremarkable. It served to fill up a recording of the Elgar work made at the Kingsway Hall in January 1953, when John Culshaw was the producer and Kenneth Wilkinson the balance engineer; and one wonders whether the unusual pairing reflected someone's belief that nothing of consequence had taken place in English music between 1695 and 1899.

Discussions about Sargent tend to be confined to his personality and to be dominated by stories about disagreements with players. The implication is that he was not much of a musician (and his detractors go on to underline

the point that he began as an organist). In this performance of the *Variations*, however, there is abundant evidence of fine musicianship. The spirit of each movement is well captured, the attention paid to Elgar's numerous directions is admirable, particularly where dynamics are concerned; and in common with so many good conductors, Sargent frequently points up the kind of small details that are easy to overlook, even when one follows the score. If disciplined performances of this calibre come at the expense of occasional clashes between the conductor and the conducted, perhaps that is a small price to pay. There is much that one could single out for praise. Near the top of any list, surely, would be the bar immediately before cue 37, where the trumpets' octave B flat and the manner in which the timpanist observes the hairpins are more than usually humbling.

The suites by Eric Coates recorded here comprise *The Three Elizabeths*, *Four Centuries*, and *The Three Men*. They are joined by *The Three Bears*, a fantasy written in 1926 for the composer's infant son, and *The Dance of the Orange Blossoms*. The first two suites were recorded in 1953 at Decca Studios, West Hampstead, the remaining works at Kingsway Hall in 1949. In all cases, the conductor is Coates himself and the orchestra the New Symphony Orchestra of London. Coates had a good grasp of the basic techniques of composition and a first-rate understanding of the orchestra, but at the end of the disc, after over an hour in his company, there comes a nagging feeling that the time could have been spent more profitably (and with more propriety). Clearly, Coates owed at least a little to what is sometimes thought of as the lighter side of Elgar, but his music lacks (amongst other things) the undertow of melancholy characteristic of the older composer; and its curiously anonymous quality can make it sound like the work of a committee of minor composers (each instructed to remove any personal touches from the others' contributions). It is right, though, that Elgarians should occasionally allow themselves exposure to this repertoire, if only because it may prompt useful reflections on the meaning of 'light music' and on the extent to which that label truly applies to anything of Elgar's.

Geoffrey Corbett is the conductor of the Coward work, which was orchestrated by Gordon Jacob. It is heard here played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra in a recording made in 1959 at Decca Studio 1, West Hampstead.

Peter Quantrill's liner notes are careful and helpful (the use of Z numbers is particularly impressive). He teases us by dodging the obvious question - Were Albert and Eric siblings? - and adopts an enigmatic stance towards the *Variations*, about which he writes nothing at all. If he took the view that quite enough has already been written about them, and that the time has come to listen rather than dissect, he was surely wise to do so. Incidentally, he is quite right to say that the 1967 episodes of *The Forsyte Saga* - whose signature theme was from *The Three Elizabeths* - were Saturday evening broadcasts; but the 1968 re-broadcasts were on Sunday evenings and are regarded by some as having had an irrevocable impact on attendance at Evensong.

Relf Clark

Sir Adrian Boult- The NBC Recordings

Butterworth: *A Shropshire Lad*

Beethoven: Symphony no. 7 in A major, Op. 92

Elgar: *Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op. 36*

Holst: *A Fugal Concerto, Op. 40 no. 2*

Walton: *Viola Concerto (original version) **

Vaughan Williams: *Symphony no. 4 in F minor*

Copland: *El Salón México*

(Bonus track as an mp3 download: Busoni: *A Comedy Overture*)

NBC Symphony Orchestra/Sir Adrian Boult

*William Primrose (viola)

1938 concerts



Pristine Audio

PASC 626

2 CDs

It was a discovery back in the 1990s of Donald Carl Meyer's absorbing student dissertation on the NBC Symphony Orchestra and its broadcasts (these days downloadable only, it seems, via the Universities of California or Pennsylvania; I have the 4cm-thick, hard copy book) that alerted me to these 1938 concert recordings from the NBC archives. Now, for the first time, here they are, sourced from the NBC's own reference discs. With Andrew Rose's subtle widening of the original mono image and some discerningly applied reverberation to the fabled dry acoustics of New York's Studio 8H, the sound, although inevitably of its time, is full and immediate with an ample bass. Not exactly opulent, to be sure, but a far cry from most of the harsh Toscanini recordings from this, the Italian maestro's favoured venue.

Toscanini's orchestra on these concert recordings was just one year old, and at this stage at least was not as refined an instrument as Boult's BBC Symphony, so warmly admired by Toscanini on his visit to London to conduct it three years earlier. Yet in the Butterworth there is refinement aplenty. Perhaps something of mystery is lost in the opening, played at a healthy *mp* instead of Butterworth's marked *pp*; the mind's ear can almost hear Toscanini's familiar exhortation, '*Cantare!!!*'. Yet, at a full minute longer than Boult's more urgent 1941 account with the wartime Hallé, this is equally compelling. Listening 'blind', I might well have guessed Barbirolli as the conductor.

In the Beethoven there's no mistaking Boult for Toscanini. Comparison with the latter's 1935 New York Philharmonic recording in the first movement Introduction reveals the British conductor's measured grandeur, quite distinct from the older conductor's lighter, more swift account. In Boult's hands the following *Vivace*, though sturdy, may not always be rhythmically on its toes, but by the development things have heated up considerably, and the first movement coda (the passage which prompted Weber's famous remark that Beethoven was ripe for the madhouse) is an object lesson in slowly building up tension. I loved the slow movement. Played at Crotchet=56, this is considerably down on Beethoven's marking of 76, but there is dignity and mystery here without a hint of heaviness. The third movement has tremendous

energy and ebullience, with all repeats observed except that of the second Trio - fair enough, I've always thought; surely Beethoven outstays his welcome here – while the Finale, with a hugely exciting, *accelerando* coda, gives us the vital exposition repeat. Curiously, Boult omits the equivalent in the first movement, a strange inconsistency given his insistence on the structural importance of such things. Broadcast time deadlines, perhaps? How heartening the cheers at the end must have been to Toscanini's respected guest.

The Elgarian idiom would have been familiar to the NBCSO before Boult arrived, Toscanini having given fine performances not only of *Enigma*, but of the *Introduction and Allegro* (the latter available in a Toscanini account from 1940 on the Somm label). The playing of Elgar's *Variations* on this Pristine CD is first class, assured and very much inside the music, while the polish of the exchanges at the start of H.D.S.P.'s variation between first and second violins puts most other pre-1950s recordings to shame. No doubt the sections were separated left and right, as was Boult's – and Toscanini's – custom. W.N.B. goes like the wind, as do Troyte and G.R.S. Tenderness is perhaps occasionally missing. *Ysobel* is surely too plain, although the full-hearted playing at her variation's only *forte* near the close is very moving. *Dorabella* is also a little straight-laced beside Boult's affectionate 1970/LSO/EMI portrait, and at this NBC concert she almost comes off the rails in the bars before Fig. 44 with an odd *ritenuto* not specified by Elgar and not in evidence in Boult's other recordings. A conductor's momentary lapse of concentration? Nevertheless, when Boult's majestic broadening 5 bars after Fig. 76 in E.D.U. moves the music homeward, the lump in my throat was as large as it always is at that point in this miraculous score. Curiously, Boult always seems always to have begun this Finale well below the metronome marking of Minim=84, building the tempo as the variation progresses. I've always wondered on what authority he did so. Certainly not Elgar's, if the composer's own 1926 account is to be credited; nor is this a feature of any other recording that I know. Might it be that Boult was concerned that we hear exactly what the theme's little semiquaver flick, usually lost, is made of? I wonder whether at this late stage anyone can shed light on the matter. Where are you, Vernon Handley, when we need you?

When, in the early 1980s I had the privilege of interviewing Boult for *Hi-Fi News & Record Review*, I asked him why it was that British conductors seemed to be especially admired for their distinction in conducting concertos. He stroked his moustache and mused that perhaps it was something to do with the British as 'fair traders', as good listeners. A typical Boult understatement. The conducting and orchestral playing in Walton's Viola Concerto are incandescent, and here, with the leaner forces of Walton's original orchestration (he revised the concerto in 1962, with the added exotica of harp and percussion), the bravura passages take off like rockets, Boult sticking limpet-like to his soloist. I daresay that the *Scherzo*, more volatile still than Primrose's HMV recording with Walton and the Philharmonia, may strike some as hasty. Yet the sense of risk, of things on the edge, makes most

modern recordings of the piece sound staid by comparison. The orchestral playing is astonishingly alert and powerfully projected.

Although not the first time that Vaughan Williams' Fourth Symphony had been heard in America (that premiere fell to Rodzinski and the Cleveland Orchestra three years earlier), this NBC performance starts with a feeling of players getting into their stride. Not that the playing isn't excellent. Rather, perhaps, it lacks that final degree of freedom from the score that would make for an unbridled attack in the angriest pages. Or so I thought until the *Scherzo* and Finale which make Boult's two commercial recordings (Decca 1953; HMV 1968) sound tame affairs indeed. Everything comes off the leash at this point, and the New York audience seems momentarily stunned before giving orchestra and guest conductor the warmest applause. As in Vaughan Williams' own recording with the BBCSO (HMV, 1937), the flute's final note of the second movement is here a question-mark F before, as RVW wrote, 'the Lord came down and told me that it should be an E' - as it is in all subsequent recordings except for Dmitri Mitropoulos' 1956 taping with the New York Philharmonic.

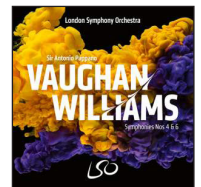
The Copland doesn't tease as it should, Boult not perhaps being the most obvious casting for this, the work's American premiere. It's all a bit four-square. Nonetheless, the importance of this two-CD document cannot be overestimated, either as an evocative piece of *zeitgeist* or as a compelling example of a great English conductor before his admirer's recently-formed orchestra.

Andrew Keener

Vaughan Williams: Symphonies 4 & 6

London Symphony Orchestra/Sir Antonio Pappano

This CD couples RVW's two so-called war symphonies, the Fourth and the Sixth, first performed in 1935 and 1948 respectively. At the time the Fourth Symphony was premiered there was no suggestion by any critic or commentator of any linkage to 'the state of the world' and this was only attributed to the music in subsequent years. There is no basis for regarding either symphony as directly linked to the times in which it was written, although those times will naturally have had some impact on a sensitive artist such as RVW. Indeed, it has also been suggested that No. 4 was a reaction to the building of the Dorking By-pass, or frustration over the continuing illness of his wife, Adeline! RVW emphatically denied any connection to outside events and said 'I wrote it not as a definite picture of anything external, but simply because it occurred to me like this'. As always he was self-deprecating ('If that's modern music, I don't like it' – at a rehearsal for No. 4). However, there had been examples of increasing dissonance in his music, notably in *Sancta Civitas*; *Job, A Masque for Dancing* and the Piano Concerto, and the Fourth Symphony did not appear from nowhere. To demonstrate the futility of trying to attribute meanings to his music; between the two symphonies



LSO Live

LSO0867

featured here appeared the radiant Fifth Symphony – initially conceived in 1938 and first performed in 1943, thus written at a time when World War II was at its worst and the outcome looked very uncertain.

RVW was apparently not a great conductor in the technical sense. He was aware of his shortcomings (shouting at the chorus in a Three Choirs rehearsal of *Hodie* – ‘I’ve told you a 100 times not to watch me!’) but, as evidenced by his sole studio recording, that of the Fourth Symphony, he was able by his personality (and no doubt the musicians’ love and respect for him) to inspire a great performance. And that recording¹ (with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, set down at Abbey Road in 1937) is *sans pareil* – breath-taking in its violence but also bringing out the humour in the piece. After playing this a lie-down in a darkened room is advisable. What a tragedy that no record company took the opportunity to record him conducting others of his works², despite his living into the LP era and indeed leaving us just as stereo records first became available.

So, what of these performances, recorded live in the City of London’s Barbican Hall in 2019 and 2020 – the former on the night of a General Election and the latter on the very eve of a widely anticipated Covid lockdown announcement? Well, they are magnificent. We take the virtuosity of U.K. orchestras (and not only those based in London) almost for granted, but here the LSO can certainly re-stake its claim as our finest ensemble – and one of the best in the world. Pappano is best-known for his long tenure at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden but here shows his mettle with non-operatic repertoire – and does it magnificently. From the opening grinding discords of No. 4, he keeps up the tension through all four movements, culminating in the great shaken fist of the abrupt final chord. Where the music becomes less hectic, he allows it to breathe but maintains momentum and an overall view of the piece – he can see the end from the beginning.

In No. 6, Pappano again understands the music so well and for once the ‘big tune’ towards the close of the first movement (used many years ago as the main titles music for ITV’s *A Family at War*) seems an integrated part of the music rather than slightly at odds with it. The epilogue, famously to be played *pianissimo* throughout, is beautifully judged and played: after the turmoil of the previous movements this quietude almost comes as relief – again it has been (mis)interpreted as describing the aftermath of nuclear war but for once RVW did give a clue, writing to Michael Kennedy that the nearest approach

-
- 1 Currently available on Naxos 8111048 (transcribed from HMV original 78s) coupled with Holst conducting *The Planets* etc. The BBCSO had given the first performance in 1935, under Boult, and one imagines AB had meticulously prepared the players for this recording.
 - 2 I am aware that there is a CD of RVW conducting his fifth symphony coupled with *Dona Nobis Pacem* (SOMMCD 071) but these are transcriptions of radio broadcasts, the symphony from a 1952 Prom and *Dona Nobis Pacem* from a BBC studio in 1936, the latter being the first radio broadcast of the work.

might be found in Prospero’s speech.³

The playing of the LSO is generally superb throughout – every solo played with the greatest virtuosity and musicality. That said, I am constrained to point out that in No. 4 the timpanist misses out half a bar shortly after rehearsal cue 10 – however, these are live performances and an occasional minor imperfection is almost inevitable. The recording itself is stupendous – exceptionally vivid and succeeding in capturing both the dynamics and detail of the performances, not an easy task with these symphonies given their very wide range of dynamics. There are those who dislike the acoustic of the Barbican Hall: for my part (having sung there many times in both small and large choirs) I can only say that I have not found it a problem, and certainly prefer it to that of the Royal Festival Hall. Whatever one’s view may be, it does not detract in way from this superbly engineered recording. My only very small complaint is that I would have liked a longer silence between the two symphonies.

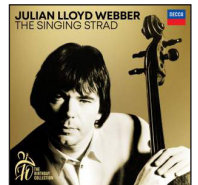
So, very highly recommended – do try to hear this astonishing CD, even if you think you don’t like these works – you will be greatly impressed.

Pappano has recently been announced as the LSO’s Chief Conductor from the 2023/24 season, succeeding Rattle. On the strength of this CD this partnership will bring us great music-making in the future. Pappano was born in London with Italian parentage; not too dissimilar to Barbirolli’s background. Although they are clearly very different musicians, let us dare hope for a partnership as successful as JB enjoyed with ‘his’ Hallé.

David Morris

Julian Lloyd Webber *The Singing Strad*

JLW and various artists
CD1 British Music
CD2 French Music
CD3 Russian Music



Decca 485 1567
(3 CDs)

Celebrating Julian Lloyd Webber’s 70th birthday, this three-disc compilation is his selection from past recordings spanning 20 years and all featuring his ‘Barjansky’ Stradivarius (Serge Alexandre Barjansky was a Russian virtuoso who lived from 1883 to 1946 and his cello hails from about 1690).

Readers of the Journal will doubtless want to know about CD1, which contains the Elgar Cello Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin conducting the RPO, Elgar’s *Idylle* (with John Birch, organ), *Chanson de Matin* and *Salut d’Amour* (RPO, Wordsworth). There are also Holst’s *Invocation* (ASMF & Marriner), arrangements of Ireland’s *The Holy Boy*, the folk song *Brigg Fair* and the *Romanza* from RVW’s Tuba Concerto, along with Andrew Lloyd

-
- 3 RVW specifically mentioned ‘We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded by a sleep’ - Act 4, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

Webber's *Pie Jesu* and, a rarity indeed, Julian's own *Jackie's Song* (BBC CO & Wordsworth), a moving tribute to Jacqueline du Pré. Julian's significant enrichment of the cello repertoire is illustrated in the choice of 'fillers' although your ever-greedy reviewer would have wished for even more fruits from his researches into music college libraries and archives. Nevertheless, it was good to be reminded of Holst's *Invocation* which I recall he made previously with the Philharmonia and Vernon Handley and it is a shame it doesn't ever appear on the concert platform (mind you, what does in these pandemic times?) I was also particularly charmed by the use of the organ as accompaniment to Elgar's 'Esquisse facile' *Idylle*.

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 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.

Throughout the compilation, he produces a wonderful tone from his Stradivarius and I am churlish to complain that the ravishing sounds seem to me to have dictated the selection of compositions and lent a sameness to these discs. True, each one has at least one major masterpiece from the repertoire: the aforementioned first concerto by Saint-Saëns, Shostakovich's Sonata op.40 and Tchaikovsky's rarely heard original version of his *Variations on a Rocooco Theme*, and they are all fine but, with one insignificant exception, the shorter works are all slow, broad and expansive, and there are no fireworks to lend excitement and variety. I was reminded of the comment of the reviewer H.C. Colles who wrote in *The Times* four days after the premiere performances of the three Brinkwells chamber works: 'An immediate effect of listening to Sir Edward Elgar's opp. 82, 83, and 84 in succession is to give one a new sympathy with the modern revolt against beauty of line and colour. A stab of crude ugliness would be a relief from that overwhelming sense of beauty'. I cannot believe Julian and the Barjansky Strad could even produce a 'stab of crude ugliness' but some dazzling showpieces to show off the virtuosic abilities of our former President would have taken my approval rating of these recordings even higher than my present 90%.

Steven Halls

George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra: The Forgotten Recordings

Music by: J S Bach, Smetana, Strauss, Mozart, Brahms, Schumann and Stravinsky.



SOMM: Ariadne
S011-2

This is another review of a release containing no music by Elgar. However, I have taken the liberty of penning a few words because the set has been engineered by the Society's good friend and honorary member, Lani Spahr.

George Szell, like Fritz Reiner, is one of those European émigré conductors who went to the USA and produced an orchestra of the highest playing standards, in his case the Cleveland. I can recall what may have been Szell's last concert in London when he conducted the LSO. The renowned horn player, Barry Tuckwell said of Szell 'he was quite the most unpleasant conductor I ever played under, but we invited him to the LSO because we wanted to become a better orchestra, and we knew he would make us better'.¹ What Szell achieved in Cleveland is on display in this set of recordings made for LP release in 1954 and 1955 (the Bach, Smetana and Strauss being mono).

These recordings show why Szell was special and, because of the limitations of space, I highlight one work. Richard Strauss's masterpiece *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* is given an electrifying performance, with tension and humour when it matters and a poignant end with a smiling last laugh! The playing is immaculate, but Szell allows the music to breathe whilst never letting the sense of forward movement falter. The mono sound is no distraction, the original engineers managing great clarity in the generous acoustic of Cleveland's Masonic Auditorium. Other reasons to buy the set are a glorious Mozart 39th Symphony (the playing in the trio of the menuetto is superb) and a powerful, memorable, *Firebird* Suite. The enterprising SOMM label has alighted on something rather special and Lani Spahr, yet again, has produced a remarkable result, largely made from the LP originals, no tapes of these performances being available.

Andrew Neill

¹ Morrison, Richard, *Orchestra: The LSO: A century of Triumph and Turbulence*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2004), 145.

100 YEARS AGO ...

On 1 April Elgar bought a Winspear binocular microscope. He visited Mrs Vicat Cole on 5 April to ascertain if the lease of Brinkwells was for sale, but the Vicat Coles wished to keep it for themselves so a purchase was not possible. On 6 April, the day before the first anniversary of Alice's death, Carice noted it was a 'very sad day thinking of last year'. As he was unable to go to Malvern himself, Elgar had asked Troyte Griffith to place flowers on Alice's grave, but he was able to spend part of the day arranging *With Proud Thanksgiving* for orchestral accompaniment - the original had been written for military band. He wrote to Lady Stuart of Wortley (the Windflower) on 14 April: 'I have been very very sad during this anniversary time & we are planning - as well as we can - for the future. Brinkwells alas! is definitely not to be ours ... it seems rather hard after we were led to believe we could have it'. Microscopes remained a fascination as he bought another on 8 April. Elgar worked on parts of *The Fringes of the Fleet* on 9 April for an imminent performance and two days later Carice took them to Enoch's, and the newly orchestrated *With Proud Thanksgiving* to Novello. On 16 April there was a rehearsal and performance of *The Fringes of the Fleet*: 'Father enjoyed it all - good attendance'. They saw Shaw's *Major Barbara* at the Everyman Theatre Hampstead on 18 April: Carice recorded 'very good - much enjoyed it'. Carice wrote on 17 April: 'Father playing Bach fugues' and two days later she noted he was orchestrating Bach's Fugue in C minor - this was the 'fuga' from BWV 537; on 21 April the Windflower came for tea and Elgar played her Bach and *Caractacus*. Carice had recently acquired an Aberdeen terrier - Meg - and Beatrice Harrison brought another Aberdeen to Severn House, but it had to be returned on 22 April as 'Father feeling giddy - found 2 dogs too much'. Elgar dated the full score of the Bach orchestration 'Ap. 24: 1921', but he made further pencil additions thereafter. On 25 April Billy Reed came to dinner, and two days later Elgar travelled to Bournemouth to conduct the Second Symphony on 28 April; he stayed for several days after the performance.

Carice noted on 4 May that Elgar was busy working again on the parts for *With Proud Thanksgiving*, and on 5 May Frederick Holding, a student at the Royal College of Music, and Adrian Boult came to play through the Violin Concerto in preparation for a concert at the College.¹ That day Carice took the remainder of the parts of *With Proud Thanksgiving* to Novello and on 7 May in the Royal Albert Hall Elgar conducted the premiere of the orchestral version. The King and Queen attended, and Elgar was presented to them. In the evening Elgar, Carice and the Windflower heard *The Apostles* at the Northern Polytechnic. Carice noted: 'Good chorus - soloists fair'. On 9 May Elgar and Carice went to the Aeolian Hall for the London premiere of Fritz Kreisler's String Quartet. Elgar later wrote to the Windflower: 'I wonder what you thought of 'The Apostles'! That & Kreisler gave a glimpse of the grand old artistic past life of me: gone!' Also on 9 May Henry Clayton of Novello came to discuss re-engraving the score of *The Apostles* and raised the possibility of Elgar finishing the trilogy with the final oratorio. Elgar was moved to write to Troyte seeking his help to find 'a remote small house' near Malvern as he found he had 'a certain vitality & must work' and he wanted 'to complete the great work ... [and] to be near my dearest one's grave - & that I want you not too far off'. However, nothing was found, and the impetus was not sustained.

On 10 May Elgar travelled to The Hut and the following day he went from there to Hayes to

complete the recording of the *Variations* which had commenced in 1920. Finding at The Hut that he 'was very dull & sad', with the place 'so different & so odd', he decided to return to Severn House on 14 May, and on the following day he went through the Cello Concerto with Felix Salmond who played it that evening at a dinner party given by Landon Ronald. He and Carice went to the Salmond's home on 19 May for an evening of chamber music by Fauré, Brahms and Beethoven, which Carice found 'delightful'. On 20 May Elgar was busy re-copying the orchestration of the Bach Fugue, which he continued to work on during the succeeding two days. On 22 May Elgar dined with Landon Ronald and went on to a party given by Herbert Hughes, a music journalist for the *Daily Telegraph*, where Reed and Anthony Bernard played Elgar's Violin Sonata, followed by his Quintet.

The next day Elgar and Carice went to Brinkwells, which Elgar found 'divine but sad beyond words & empty'. On the following day he was busy still working on the Bach Fugue so that on 25 May Carice was able to post the score to Novello, which reluctantly paid him a hundred guineas for the copyright: Elgar thought it was 'brilliant - a word I wanted in connection with Bach, who in arrangements, is made 'pretty' etc etc'. Later Elgar wrote to Ivor Atkins that he 'wanted to show how gorgeous & brilliant he would have made himself sound if he had had our means'. Elgar considered it a 'wild work'. Writing to Sir Sidney Colvin Elgar confessed he found Sussex 'full of memories of a happy past - a past gone, shattered' and he considered he 'was no longer "in" the world, or rather that the old artistic "striving" world exists for me no more:'. Yet at Brinkwells he found some solace in the chaffinches and other birds, writing: 'Inscrutable nature goes on just the same - young larks six, in a nest on the lawn & many other birds, nightingales sing; but I miss the little, gentlest presence & I cannot go on'. Carice noted on 27 May: 'Wonderful nightingales singing quite late'. In preparation for a visit by Billy Reed, Elgar prepared a map of the route from the station to Brinkwells, and on 28 May Carice noted: 'Father down early to meet Mr. Reed ... sent him a lovely map by Mr. Alwin who met him at Pulboro' Mr. Hull arrived too - nice day ... Mr. Hull left but lost his way & returned'.² Elgar and Carice returned to Severn House on 8 June. On 9 June Felix Salmond brought his new cello dating from 1700 and played some of Elgar's concerto which Carice found 'beautiful'. That evening they saw *Man and Superman* at The Everyman Theatre. On 10 June Elgar and Carice went to The Gramophone Company's premises in Regent Street to hear the *Variations* discs recorded in May and 'Father selected best' - Elgar then had lunch with Lady Beresford and tea with the Colvins. On 14 June Elgar and the Windflower went to an exhibition of Max Beerbohm cartoons, followed by a visit to the Ambassadors Theatre to see Henry Ainley in a play by Lord Dunsany, which they did not enjoy.

Elgar gave a lunch at the Café Royal on 17 June for Bernard Shaw and his wife Charlotte, and the company of the Everyman Theatre: 'Father made amusing & brilliant speech - Mr Shaw replied & Mr MacDermott.³ They all seemed to enjoy it'. On 18 June Elgar went to The Hut and then spent some time at Stoke Prior with his sister Pollie, returning to London on 28 June. The Windflower came to Severn House on 30 June and Carice noted that an R33-class airship flew right over their house on the way to the Hendon Air Pageant.

Kevin Mitchell

1 Sir Adrian Boult refers to this in his radio portrait *As I Knew Him: Sir Edward Elgar*, recorded on 17 April 1951 and broadcast on the BBC General Overseas Service on 15 May 1951. The recording can be found on the LP *Elgar Choral Songs* conducted by Boult, number ELGS 002 issued by The Elgar Society in 1982.

2 The map Elgar drew on 27 May is reproduced in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar: A Life in Photographs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 80. The incident involving Percy Hull, organist of Hereford Cathedral, is recorded in W.H. Reed, *Elgar as I knew him* (London: Gollancz, 1973), 69-70.

3 Norman MacDermott (1890-1977), Director of the Everyman Theatre.



ISSN 0143-1269

*Printed by
John Price Printers
Brook Street, Bilston
West Midlands, WV14 0NW*