# The Elgar Society JOURNAL

1857-1934

April 2024 Vol.24, No. 1

The Elgar Society

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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

*Front Cover:* Elgar in Severn House, Hampstead 1913 (from a private collection)

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*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://www.elgarsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Notes-for-Contributors_longer-version_February-2017.pdf



# The Importance of Elgar

One hundred and twenty-five years ago on 19 June 1899 one of the most significant events in the development of British music took place in the St James's Hall, Piccadilly when Hans Richter conducted Elgar's *Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma')*. The brilliance of the *Variations*, their orchestration, construction, subtle and at times less than subtle, musical portrait-painting and their originality make the composition, according to Michael Kennedy, 'almost flawless'.[1] The 'flaw', Kennedy suggests, is contained within Elgar's revised ending where 'Nimrod' is inflated from 'an expressive adagio' into a *grandioso* version. Although perhaps regrettable, that 'Nimrod' is now music of mourning or reflection rather than a celebration of friendship may not have surprised Elgar and its performing isolation from this orchestral masterpiece is now almost complete and is, as it happens, nothing new. Nearly 35 years later, on 23 February 1934, Elgar died at his home in Worcester. Dr Adrian Boult, in Hastings that afternoon, acknowledged Elgar's death by conducting the Municipal Orchestra in 'Nimrod', and again that evening when he conducted Section D of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in its rehearsal studios at Big Tree Wharf situated off the Waterloo Road near the station. Six days later, on 1 March, Boult conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO) in London's Queen's Hall in a concert devoted to the composer's memory. Albert Sammons played the Violin Concerto, and the concert began with the Prelude to *The Dream of Gerontius*. The evening concluded with the E Flat Symphony.

Sir Adrian's principal activity at that period was with his BBC Symphony Orchestra and only two days before Elgar's death he had conducted the British premiere of the extraordinary piano concerto by Ferruccio Busoni. He was also engaged in preparing Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* for its first complete performance in Britain on 14 March. Nothing daunted, towards the end of the month, on 24 March an Elgar Memorial Concert in the Royal Albert Hall was again conducted by Boult. For *The Dream of Gerontius* Astra Desmond, Steuart Wilson and Roy Henderson sang, with the Royal Choral Society and the combined forces of the BBC Symphony and London Philharmonic Orchestras. Fifty years later, this Society commemorated the half-century following Elgar's death with a memorable concert in London's Royal Festival Hall on 23 February 1984. Dame Janet Baker sang, Vernon Handley conducted, and the LPO played once more.[2]

Readers may well ask why we are going out of our way to commemorate Elgar's

1 Kennedy, Michael, *Elgar Orchestral Music* (London: BBC Music Guides, 1970), 26.

2 The concert consisted of The Incidental music and Funeral March from *Grania and Diarmid*, *Wand of Youth* Suite No 2, *Sea Pictures* and the A Flat Symphony.

death another forty rather than fifty years on. Our explanation is given in the preface to the three essays published in this *Journal* under the heading 'The Importance of Elgar'.

For the United Kingdom generally, 1934 was not a particularly remarkable year. James Ramsay-Macdonald, the country's first Labour Premier, was Prime Minister of a 'National Government' and when he first assumed the role in 1924, he automatically became a member of The Athenæum in London, which led to Elgar pettily resigning his membership. Other Elgarian connections in 1934 were few, but the Gothenburg Prize for Poetry was awarded jointly to two of the poets whose words Elgar had set years before, Rudyard Kipling and William Butler Yeats.

For the LPO, only formed in 1932, the 1934 concert was the first time that Sir Adrian (he was knighted in 1937) conducted the orchestra with which he would become closely linked and which somehow, for a time, took over the mantle of 'Elgar's Orchestra', demonstrating how important the principal conductor of an orchestra was in deciding its programme. That Boult, who became Principal Conductor of the LPO after leaving the BBC, had much to say in this area, helped ensure that Elgar's music was performed and recorded during the 1950s and beyond. Later Principal Conductors, revered as they might have been, such as Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur, showed little or no interest in the music of Britain. It is some comfort that many of our orchestras have conductors in place (for the moment) who have an interest in the music of Elgar and his British contemporaries.

1934 was, of course, an *annus horribilis* for British music with the deaths of three of its finest composers, Frederick Delius, Edward Elgar and Gustav Holst. With Sir Adrian as an inspiration, and his commitment to Elgar's music as background, the editors of this Journal considered how best to commemorate this anniversary year. Paul Guinery has generously written the piece contained within on Delius. His exploration of the relationship, both personally and musically, between Delius and Elgar is fascinating. (The distinguished historian and journalist, Simon Heffer, has agreed to write on Holst for publication in the August edition.) Our former Chairman, the late Michael Pope, often reminded us of the death of Norman O'Neill, the least-known of the four British composers who also died in 1934. O'Neill (b.1875), whose foremost work was composing for the theatre, died from the consequences of a motoring accident. We hope to include a consideration of O'Neill in our December issue.

One important figure who, has until now, appeared as little more than a footnote in Elgar's story was August Manns, the great Anglo-German conductor, who played a significant role in the music of this country for much of the last half of the nineteenth century. Elgar's association with Manns increased from Elgar first attending his concerts in the Crystal Palace in South London, to hearing first performances of his music conducted by Manns, and finally to Manns congratulating Elgar on his knighthood shortly before he (Manns) died. It is a fascinating tale, disclosing how important Manns was to Elgar and the music of many of his contemporaries. The indefatigable Arthur Reynolds has delved into this relationship and produced a startling essay of original research (beautifully illustrated) to begin the 24th Volume of our Journal. To this, with Arthur's agreement, Andrew Dalton has added a short post-script.

Sir Walter Parratt, Elgar's predecessor as Master of the King's Music and a generous supporter of Elgar, has been, to some extent, a shadowy figure, his music and role in our musical life all but forgotten. Once again Relf Clark has pulled aside the metaphorical curtains and shone light on a life that turns out to be of considerable importance to our musical history as well as to the life of Elgar, who owed Parratt much.

For Dora Penny (later Powell), the 'time of her life' was spent in the company of Alice and Edward Elgar. Her memories of that late Victorian time and Elgar's part in it are, like Rosa Burley's, imperfect but invaluable. Like most young ladies of her class, she was a competent musician and the article by Maddy Tongue throws a light on the relationship that developed between the young girl and Elgar. Because of her book, *Memories of a Variation*, 'Dorabella' remains one of the most important commentators on Elgar, his creative process and his world; as Mrs Tongue makes clear.

In addition to the above, we include a review of an *Albion* release of recordings celebrating the singers (many of whom were important interpreters of Elgar's music) who participated in the premiere of Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*. It is also a celebration of the collecting enthusiasm of David Michell who died in 2022. His collection of early recordings yielded countless riches, many of which contributed to this anthology. Finally, Kevin Mitchell provides his notes on Elgar's recording activity (his largest acoustic recording) and what the great man was up to a century ago.

As we assemble this edition of *The Journal*, Donald Macleod, one of the finest broadcasters left working for BBC Radio Three, embarked on another 'Composer of the Week' series, this being a new survey of Elgar's music and character. It was not long ago that Macleod embarked on a similar survey. Both series concentrated on an aspect of Elgar's character which somehow succeeded in showing him as a misanthropic curmudgeonly outsider. The *Enigma Variations* remind us of another side of Elgar's personality: the man who lit up a room on entering, the devotion of a wide range of friends, his ease in the company of orchestral musicians, his japes, his witty writing, puns and his unique joy in music making. Most of us have complex characters and Elgar was no exception. Through his music I hear a man who revelled in portraying his friends in music and this is how I will think of him as we commemorate and I hope celebrate his life in 2024.

Andrew Neill
with the Editorial Team of Andrew Dalton, Kevin Mitchell and David Morris

# Edward Elgar and August Manns

**Arthur Reynolds**

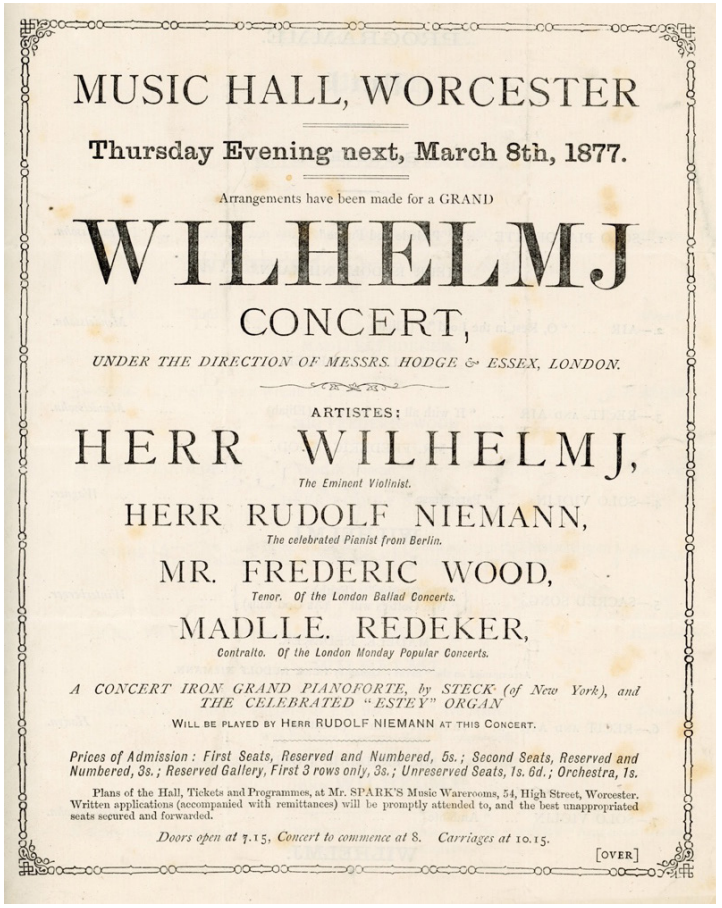
'What was the composer's first work to be publicly performed in London?' asked the *Mastermind* host of the contestant whose special subject was the life and music of Sir Edward Elgar. The answer: *Sevilliana (Scene Espagnole*) *Opus 7,* heard in the Crystal Palace on 12 May 1884, as an item on the programme of an orchestral concert conducted by the Palace's Music Director, August Manns.

**Illustration I**
**View of the Crystal Palace as it appeared in Elgar's time.**
***Source: Author's archive***



The occasion amounted to a milestone on a journey that began seven years earlier, when 19-year-old Ted Elgar attended a pivotal recital in Worcester on 8 March 1877. W H Reed tells us that at the time, 'his ambition was to become a famous violinist; and for this he worked unceasingly'.[1] The concert offered the young man his first chance to hear an internationally acclaimed practitioner of his instrument. At the time the soloist, August Wilhelmj (1845-1908), known as the 'German Paganini' was arguably the greatest living violinist in terms of tone quality.

**Illustration II**
**Elgar's copy of the programme announcing Wilhelmj's Worcester recital**
***Source: Author's archive***



MUSIC HALL, WORCESTER

**Thursday Evening next, March 8th, 1877.**

Arrangements have been made for a GRAND

WILHELMJ

CONCERT,

*UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MESSRS. HODGE & ESSEX, LONDON.*

ARTISTES:

HERR WILHELMJ,

*The Eminent Violinist.*

HERR RUDOLF NIEMANN,

*The celebrated Pianist from Berlin.*

MR. FREDERIC WOOD,

*Tenor. Of the London Ballad Concerts.*

MADLLE. REDEKER,

*Contralto. Of the London Monday Popular Concerts.*

*A CONCERT IRON GRAND PIANOFORTE, by STECK (of New York), and THE CELEBRATED "ESTEY" ORGAN*

WILL BE PLAYED BY HERR RUDOLF NIEMANN AT THIS CONCERT.

*Prices of Admission: First Seats, Reserved and Numbered, 5s.; Second Seats, Reserved and Numbered, 3s.; Reserved Gallery, First 3 rows only, 3s.; Unreserved Seats, 1s. 6d.; Orchestra, 1s.*

Plans of the Hall, Tickets and Programmes, at Mr. SPARK'S Music Warerooms, 54, High Street, Worcester. Written applications (accompanied with remittances) will be promptly attended to, and the best unappropriated seats secured and forwarded.

*Doors open at 7.15, Concert to commence at 8. Carriages at 10.15.*

[OVER]

1 William H. Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1936), 46.

**Illustration III**
**Studio portrait of August Wilhelmj taken around the time of the Worcester recital**
***Source: Author's archive***

Decades later, Elgar recalled his exhilaration in a conversation with Reed:

> …he imitated Wilhelmj, whom he had heard play the Airs Hongroises by Ernst. From his account of this affair Wilhelmj must have had a colossal tone; and his attack on the opening tenth on the G string must have been hair raising. It excited Elgar to such an extent that he never forgot it…[2]

Wilhelmj's tone-quality mastery persuaded Elgar that he needed the tutorial of a well-known, highly regarded teacher to improve his playing. Five months after the Wilhelmj recital, he had scraped together the funds ('…I lived on two bags of nuts per day')[3] for five lessons in August 1877 with Adolphe Pollitzer (1832-1900), the Hungarian violinist now

2 ibid., 73-74.

3 Basil Maine, *Elgar, His Life and Work*, Volume 1 (London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd., 1933), 33



Principal of the London Academy of Music and pre-eminent stringed-instrument teacher. In Elgar's telling, Professor Pollitzer was duly impressed by his pupil's comprehensive preparation but he also appears to have registered a glimpse into Elgar's budding prowess as a composer. Late in life Elgar shared the memory with a journalist:

> Students were led to invent passages for their special needs. Pollitzer …was much amused by my invention— I say invention, for the effort involved in 'making' these things could scarcely be called composition. Five of the studies…. mainly for the 'poise' of the bow, although the left hand is not neglected, were published long after their inception…[4]

Five years later Elgar would publish those studies as *Études Caractéristiques, Opus 24,* dedicating them to Adolphe Pollitzer.

Meanwhile, by July 1878 he was back in London for more lessons. This time Pollitzer's perception that his pupil's true talents might lie in the direction of composition prompted a crucial connection. Elgar recalled:

> I was working the first part of [a] Haydn quartet. There was a rest, and I suddenly began to play the 'cello part.
>
> Pollitzer looked up, 'You know the whole thing?' he said.
>
> 'Of course' I replied.
>
> He looked up curiously. 'Do you compose yourself?' he asked.
>
> 'I try' I replied again
>
> 'Show me something of yours,' he said.
>
> I did so with the result that he gave me an introduction to Mr. August Manns'.[5]

The encounter proved to be momentous in terms of Elgar's self-teaching. Manns must have shared Pollitzer's perception because he issued a pass, enabling the young man to attend rehearsals so he could twice hear performances of the classical repertoire as well as 'novelties' by composers both established and as-yet unknown.

By the time Edward was born in 1857, August Manns had taken his place among the rising figures of the Victorian meritocracy. He was born on 12 March 1825, the fifth of ten children, in the Pomeranian village of Stolzenburg, near Stettin in

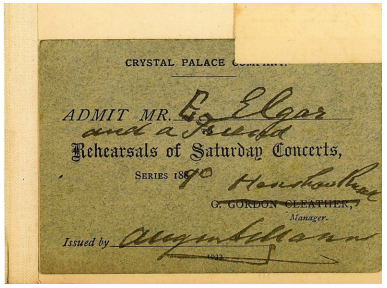



**Illustration IV**
**Elgar's Crystal Palace rehearsal pass**
**Source: The Elgar Foundation archive**

4 Elgar's letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 December 1920.

5 *The Strand Magazine*, May 1904, 538.

North East Germany[6], where his father worked as the foreman of a glass factory. When the boy August displayed ineptitude as a glassblower but capability as a player of the violin, the flute and the clarinet, the owners of the glass factory, who lived in nearby Elbing, came to the rescue with a three-year apprenticeship to Elbing's Stadt-Musikus (Town Musical Director).

In the years that followed, Manns made his way through a series of martial bandsman posts, chiefly as an E-flat clarinetist. In 1848 he left military music-making for a brief career as a solo violinist and conductor at Joseph Kroll's National People's Garden in Berlin, reluctantly returning to regimental life as a bandmaster when Kroll's burned down in 1851. Manns resigned himself to the pursuit of a conventional career leading military bands, until 1854 brought an invitation from a fellow bandmaster, Heinrich Schallehn, to move to Sydenham, southeast London, where Schallehn had been tasked with forming a band at the Crystal Palace.

**Illustration V**
**Camille Pissarro's 1871 painting of Sydenham showing the Crystal Palace in the background.** ***Source: Kind permission of The Art Institute of Chicago.***

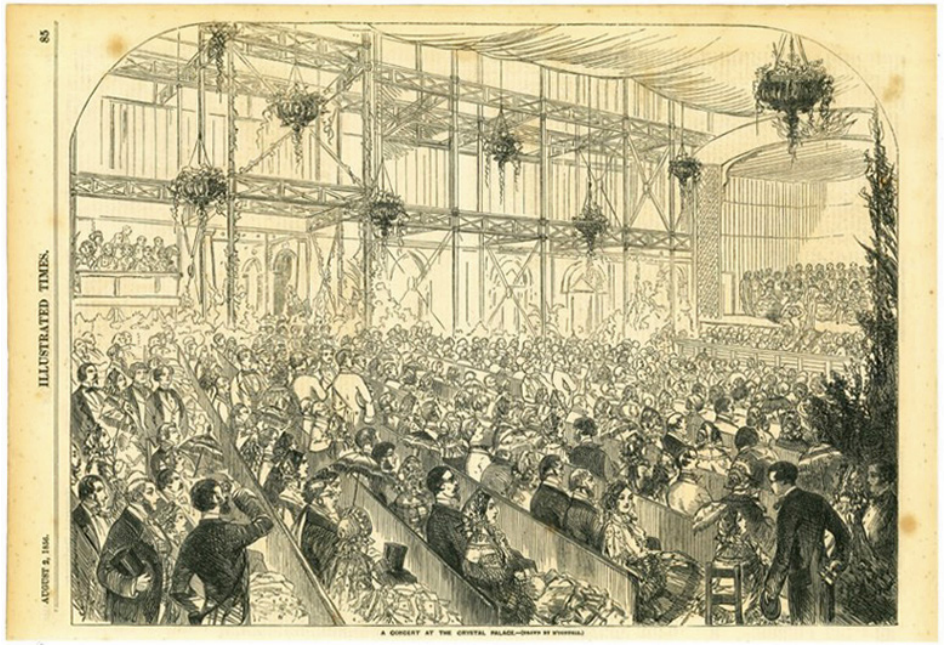
6 Now Stolec, Poland



Manns happily embarked on his new engagement as a clarinettist and sub-conductor until a row with Schallehn resulted in his dismissal. A few months after his arrival, Schallehn asked Manns to compile a set of quadrilles and compose connecting material, the result to be published under the title *The Alliance Quadrille.* When the printed score appeared under Schallehn's name, the publisher's fee having gone to the ersatz composer, Manns protested and found himself discharged.

Rescue was at hand, however. In his short time playing in Schallehn's band, Manns had made a powerful friend: George Grove, secretary of the Crystal Palace Company. Grove took up the cause of Manns's wrongful-dismissal, enlisting the support of J.W. Davison, the omnipotent editor of the *Musical World.* Now it was Schallehn's turn to face dismissal. On 21 July 1855, the Directors of the Crystal Palace Company formally offered August Manns the post of conductor of the Crystal Palace band, a position Manns was to hold for more than half a century.

**Illustration VI**
**Wood engraving showing a concert taking place at the Crystal Palace in 1856**
***Source: Author's archive***



The Manns-Grove partnership faced a daunting prospect. Hitherto, the band had been obliged to perform large works with small forces in the cavernous rotunda known as the Centre Transept. The capacity of the venue is evident in contemporary photographs showing the multitude that assembled for the Triennial Handel Festival. The future Alice Elgar noted the immense size of the 1888 Festival choir and audience: 'E in London for ninth Triennial Handel Festival at Crystal Palace. Manns conducted, choir of 4,000, total audience 86,337 over three days'.

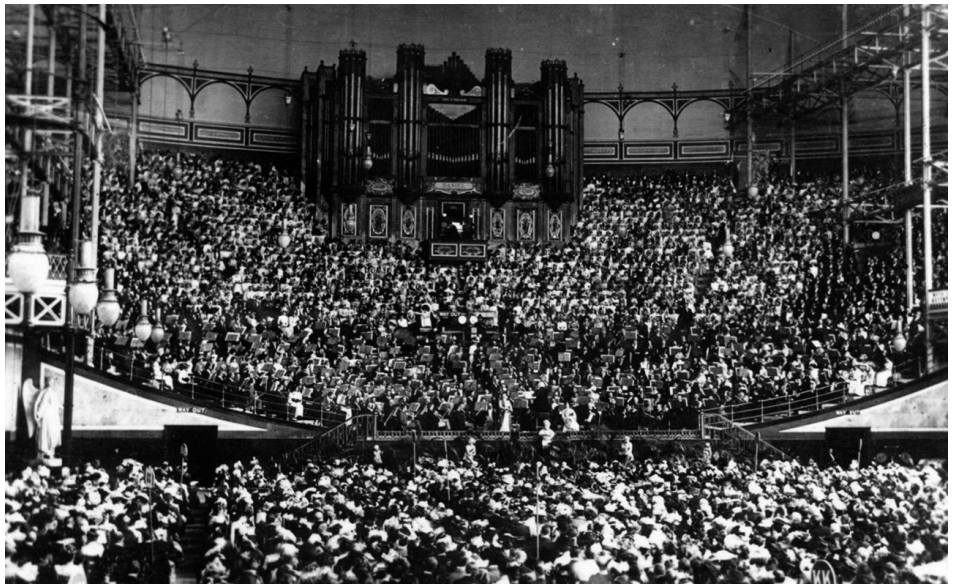


**Illustration VII**
**Photograph depicting audience and players at a performance in the July 1897 Handel Festival**
***Source: Author's archive***

Not long after his appointment, Manns sprang into action. Grove puts us in the picture:

> The music there was at that time in a very inchoate condition, the band was still a wind band and the open Centre Transept was the only place for its performances. Under the efforts of the new conductor things soon began to mend. He conducted a 'Saturday Concert' in the Bohemian Glass Court the week after his arrival; through the enlightened liberality of the directors the band was changed to a full orchestra, a better spot was found for the music, …the concert room was enclosed and roofed in, and the famous Saturday Concerts began….[7]

7 George Grove, *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (*London: MacMillan and Co. 1929), 308-309



The Saturday Concerts proved immensely popular. According to Grove:

> The concerts, which began with the first Saturday in October, lasted, with an interval at Christmas, till the end of April. The orchestra consisted of 16 first and 14 second violins, 11 violas, 10 violoncellos and 10 double basses, with single wind, etc. The programmes usually contained two overtures, a symphony, a concerto, or some minor piece of orchestral music, and four songs. The distinguishing feature of the concerts was their choice and performance of orchestral music…A very great influence was exercised in the renaissance of English music by the frequent performance of new works of importance by Mackenzie, Parry, Stanford, Cowen…The fact that owing to the wind and a portion of the strings of the orchestra being the permanent band of the Crystal Palace, Manns had opportunities for rehearsal which were at that time enjoyed by no other conductor in London.[8]

August Manns had been in situ for 29 years by the time he met Edward Elgar, who hastened to make copious use of his rehearsal pass:

> I rose at six—walked a mile to the railway station---the train left at seven—arrived at Paddington about eleven—-underground to Victoria;—on to the Palace, arriving in time for the last three quarters of an hour of the rehearsal; if fortune smiled, this piece of rehearsal included the work desired to be heard; but fortune rarely smiled and more often than not the principal item was over. Lunch—Concert at three; at five a rush for the train to Victoria; then to Paddington; on to Worcester arriving at ten-thirty. A strenuous day indeed, but the new work had been heard and another treasure added to a life's experience.[9]

Grove's biographer Charles Graves summed up the status of the band and its conductor at the time of the *Sevillana* performance:

> Manns was already sixty when the present writer first saw him conduct, but the Saturday Concerts in the mid "eighties" showed little, if any, signs of decadence. The band - the usual permanent orchestra of the Crystal Palace - enlarged for the Saturday Concerts to more than twice its numbers, was slightly smaller than Hallé's band in Manchester, and …. the acoustic properties of the concert-room were far inferior to those of the Free-Trade Hall. The quality of the orchestra, however. was excellent, and the very best London instrumental players were always well represented at its leading desks.[10]

That *Sevillana* was well received is suggested by this line from Elgar's letter to Dr Buck dated 28 September 1884: 'Did I tell you Manns has been playing one of my pieces through the summer? Joke, isn't it'.[11]

8 ibid., 309.

9 Ms. text of Elgar's speech given at a *His Master's Voice* reception in London, 16 November 1927.

10 Charles L. Graves, *The Spectator,* 30 January 1907 issue.

11 Elgar's letter to Dr. Charles Buck dated 28 September 1884. MB transcription letter 10478.

Joking aside, Elgar wrote to Manns asking if the printed score might advertise the fact that the piece had been performed at the Crystal Palace. Manns replied.

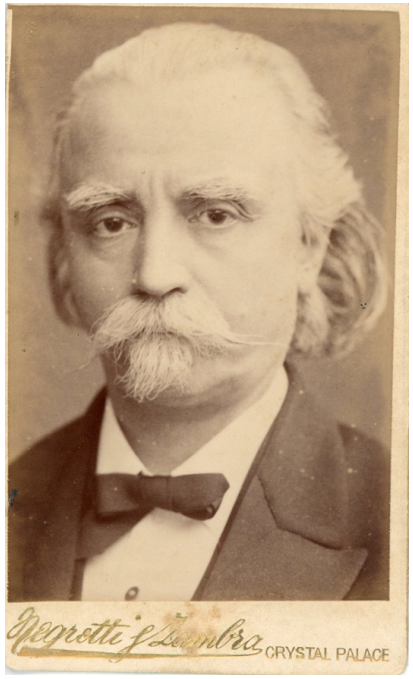
> Bath Hotel Bush Street Glasgow
> January 10 – 1885
>
> My dear Sir!
> You are quite welcome to stating (sic) on [the] Title page of your Sevillana that it has been performed at the Crystal Palace.
>
> Yours faithfully
> August Manns[12]

The next Elgar work to have its London première was his *Intermezzo: Serenade Mauresque,* Opus 10, No. 2. In August 1885, Elgar wrote to Buck: '…I had a letter from Manns the other day & he says my *Intermezzo* will be included in an early programme – that's good news'.[13]

Fortune smiled and a few months after Edward's May 1889 marriage to Alice, one of Alice's cousins lent the newlyweds a house in Upper Norwood, a short distance from Sydenham. Jerrold Northrop Moore sets the scene:

> Nearly every day found Edward at the Crystal Palace, often with Alice by his side. A rich repertoire spread before them: selections from *Die Meistersinger* (including the Overture) and from other Wagner operas, two performances of Brahms's Second Symphony, and…Mendelssohn's Overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* which Manns conducted on 26 October.[14]

**Illustration VIII**
**Portrait of August Manns circa 1885**
***Source: Author's archive***




12 Manns letter to Elgar dated 10 January 1885. MB transcript Scrapbook.

13 Elgar's letter to Dr. Buck dated 8 March 1885. MB transcript 10479.

14 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 140.



The idyll of Upper Norwood and Sydenham was frequently interrupted by Elgar's need to earn a living as a violinist playing in orchestras located in Birmingham and Hereford. Alice records Edward's return to her on 11 November, so they could be present at the Palace for a performance of Edward's engagement gift:

> A met E's train at Euston and went with friend Edith Lander to Crystal Palace to hear Manns play Salut d'amour (originally called Liebesgruss, this was the first performance of the orchestral version) afternoon concert.[15]

W.H. Reed added this entertaining commentary:

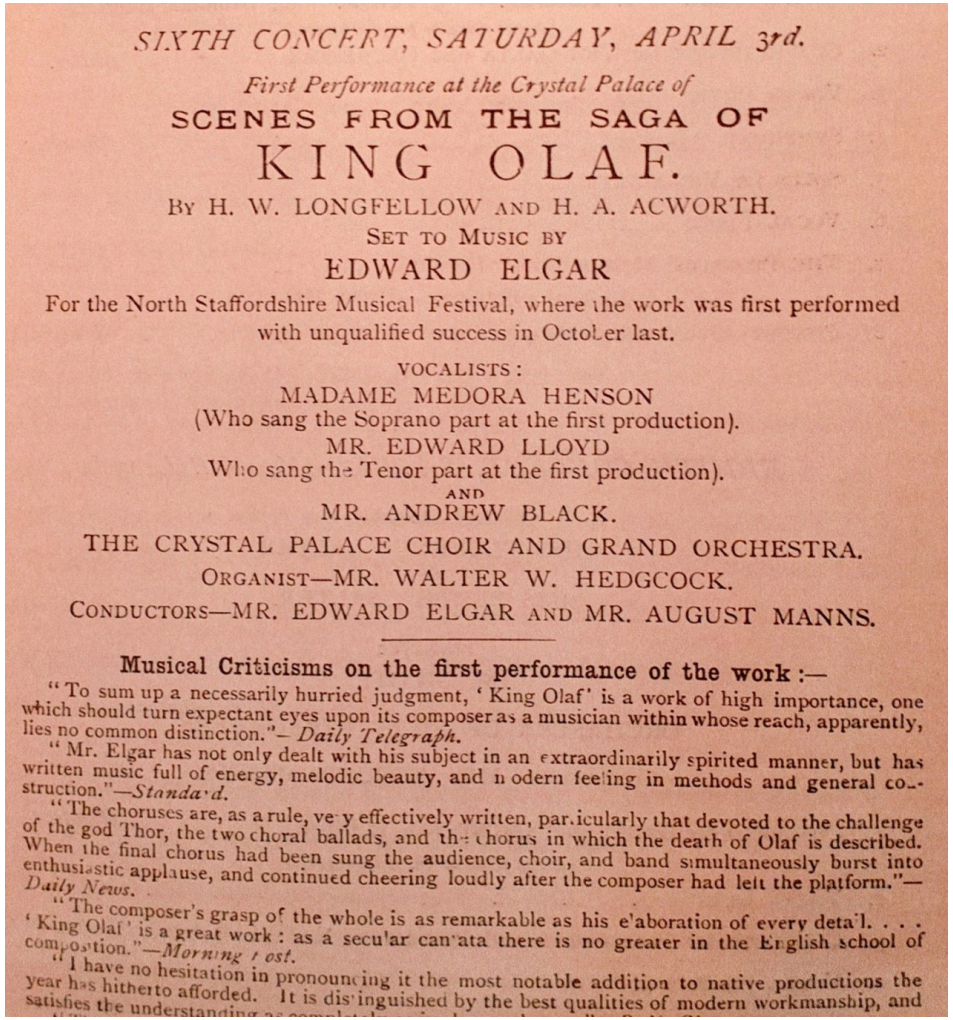
> Liebesgruss was rehearsed at the Crystal Palace on 23 October, and Elgar went up to London, staying over for the next concert, which took place on 28 October. He kept the programme of this concert owing to a curious circumstance, and this throws some light upon the difficulties connected with concert-giving in those days. He had the habit, too, of jotting down things that tickled his sense of humour, and in this particular programme, … appears the following: "Crystal Palace Concert, Instrumental Concert by the Company's Orchestral Band". Then, after several items, appears this: "Nocturne for Strings, Dvořák", and in Elgar's handwriting, "omitted" with a footnote: "owing to the howling of Dogs arrived for the Show tomorrow".[16]

Another instance of howling adversely affected Elgar's performance of his cantata, *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* programmed for the Saturday Concert on 3 April 1897. On the same day and at the same time the Palace hosted 35,000 cheering fans come to see an England versus Scotland football match. The throng of football supporters overflowed the trains from Victoria to Sydenham. Winifred Norbury noted in her diary that she was late arriving as a result.

Whether it was the football fervour, or the fact that 3 April was the day of the Boat Race, or for an unknown reason, the hall was far from full for *King Olaf.* Novello and Elgar had agreed to support the performance with financial guarantees. The loss amounted to £57.19s. Since Novello's portion was fixed at £21.00, the balance was for Elgar's account.

15 Alice Elgar's diary, 11 November 1889. MB transcript.

16 William H. Reed, *Elgar* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1946), 24.



SIXTH CONCERT, SATURDAY, APRIL 3rd.

*First Performance at the Crystal Palace of*

SCENES FROM THE SAGA OF

KING OLAF.

BY H. W. LONGFELLOW AND H. A. ACWORTH.

SET TO MUSIC BY

EDWARD ELGAR

For the North Staffordshire Musical Festival, where the work was first performed with unqualified success in October last.

VOCALISTS:

MADAME MEDORA HENSON

(Who sang the Soprano part at the first production).

MR. EDWARD LLOYD

Who sang the Tenor part at the first production).

AND

MR. ANDREW BLACK.

THE CRYSTAL PALACE CHOIR AND GRAND ORCHESTRA.

ORGANIST—MR. WALTER W. HEDGCOCK.

CONDUCTORS—MR. EDWARD ELGAR AND MR. AUGUST MANNS.

**Musical Criticisms on the first performance of the work :—**

"To sum up a necessarily hurried judgment, 'King Olaf' is a work of high importance, one which should turn expectant eyes upon its composer as a musician within whose reach, apparently, lies no common distinction."—*Daily Telegraph.*

"Mr. Elgar has not only dealt with his subject in an extraordinarily spirited manner, but has written music full of energy, melodic beauty, and modern feeling in methods and general construction."—*Standard.*

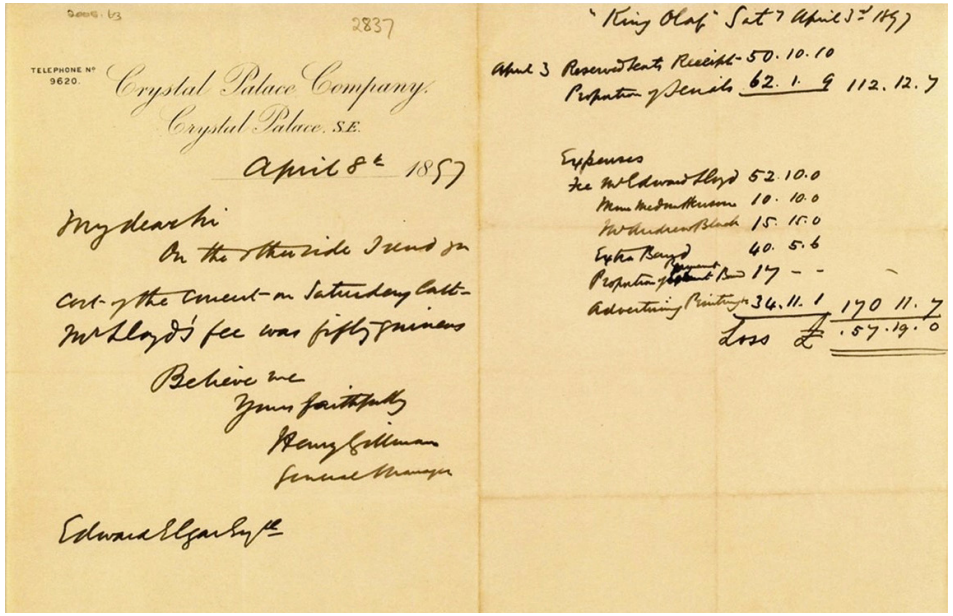
"The choruses are, as a rule, very effectively written, particularly that devoted to the challenge of the god Thor, the two choral ballads, and the chorus in which the death of Olaf is described. When the final chorus had been sung the audience, choir, and band simultaneously burst into enthusiastic applause, and continued cheering loudly after the composer had left the platform."—*Daily News.*

"The composer's grasp of the whole is as remarkable as his elaboration of every detail. . . . 'King Olaf' is a great work: as a secular cantata there is no greater in the English school of composition."—*Morning Post.*

"I have no hesitation in pronouncing it the most notable addition to native productions the year has hitherto afforded. It is distinguished by the best qualities of modern workmanship, and satisfies the understanding as complete

**Illustration IX (a) & (b)**
**The program of the April 1897 King Olaf Performance**
***Source: The Elgar Foundation archive***





2837

'King Olaf' Sat.y April 3rd 1897

TELEPHONE No 9620.

Crystal Palace Company.
Crystal Palace. S.E.

April 8th 1897

Abnl 3 Reserved Seats Receipts 50. 10. 10
Proportion of Receipts 62. 1. 9 112. 12. 7

Expenses
Mr Edward Lloyd 52. 10. 0
Mme Medora Henson 10. 10. 0
Mr Andrew Black 15. 15. 0
Extra Band 40. 5. 6
Preparation of Band Parts 17 - -
Advertising Printing &c 34. 11. 1 170 11. 7
Loss £ 57. 19. 0

My dear Sir
On the other side I send an account of the Concert on Saturday last—Mr Lloyd's fee was fifty guineas

Believe me
Yours faithfully
Henry Gillman
General Manager

Edward Elgar Esqre

**Illustration X**
**The Crystal Palace invoice for the KO performance financial shortfall**
***Source: The Elgar Foundation archive***

The obligation induced a rare occurrence of uxorious dissembling on Edward's part. A week after the fateful event he wrote to Novello's chairman:

> April 11.97
> Private
> Dear Mr. Littleton
> As you spoke to me in the first instance as to the contributing to the expense of the C.P. concert, I send the enclosed account—rec' d last night—to you.
>
> I am sorry it has turned out so very badly; if you will kindly let me have the amt. of your contribution, I will send it on with my share to the Manager.
>
> I write to you as I may say that I do not wish to worry my wife with seeing these details of expense—*just now*—& I shd. be much obliged if you wd. send anything in connection with this matter to me at 'The Club' Malvern. This I could scarcely put in a business letter.
>
> Believe me
> Vy sincerely yours Edward Elgar[17]

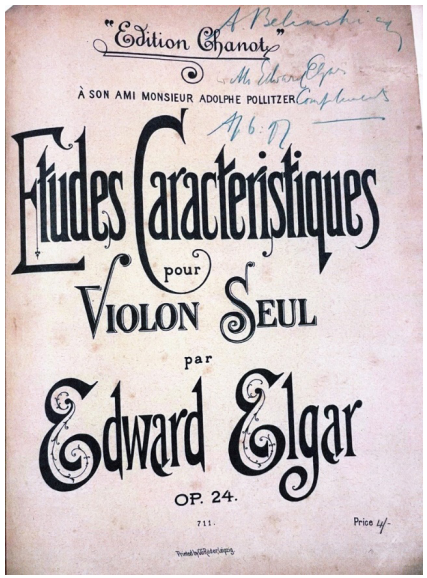
17 Elgar's letter to Littleton dated 11 April 1897. Published in Moore, Op. Cit., 222.

Those who did manage to be present, together with the performers, responded with a ringing ovation echoed by the press reviews, exemplified by this notice appearing in the 4 April issue of *The Standard:*

> The music is remarkable for the vividness with which it illustrates and reflects the wild spirit of the text. In some places it is most stirring and impressive, and "The Challenge to Thor" is one of the finest choral numbers of recent times. The setting of the ballad "The Wrath of Odin" also shows the rare power of suggesting the weird and uncanny in musical tones, and many other portions of the work testify to Mr. Elgar's lively fancy and great command of expression. Melodies of an attractive character abound, and the orchestra is written for in a most picturesque and musician-like manner. It was not surprising, therefore, that the work should receive a hearty reception, and that Mr. Elgar, who conducted, should have to acknowledge repeatedly the applause of his audience.[18]

By 1897 Edward Elgar had become well known to the Palace orchestra members. Three days after the *King Olaf* performance, Edward inscribed this copy of *Études Caractéristiques,* Opus 24 to the Austro-Hungarian violinist Aurel Vaiz Belinski, leader of the Palace Band.

**Illustration XI**
**Inscribed Études Charactéristics score**
***Source: Author's archive***




18 *The Standard,* 5 April 1897 edition.



Two weeks later a massive audience packed the mighty concourse of the Centre Transept for Manns's annual Easter Monday concert. For the 1897 event, Manns assembled four massed bands to thrill his spectators with a Diamond Jubilee program that included the first performance of the *Imperial March* composed by 'Richard Elgar', according to the printed program. Audience affection for their maestro is suggested by his caricature appearance in a contemporary edition of *Spy magazine.*

**Illustration XII**
**Spy cartoon portrait of Manns**
**Source:** ***Author's archive***


Manns's presentation of the next Elgar première took place amid signs that unwelcome changes were afoot. Competing venues, conductors and orchestras were appearing on the horizon, setting off alarm bells.

September 26th, 1897
Dear Mr. Elgar
I have inserted your 3 Bavarian Dances for Saturday 23rd of October…I must ask you to let the Publishers know that I have announced the Dances as "First time of performance" and that therefore they must let Mr. Henry Wood and Mr. Robert Newman of the Queens Hall Concerts know that permission for performance at the Queens Hall must be withheld until after my performance of the 23 of October has taken place. I make this request because these two Gentlemen have shown themselves so unscrupulous in their treatment of my work, or as I should say: unscrupulous in their endeavours to weaken the impact of my research announcing novelties and new artists for my C. P. Saturday Concerts that I cannot help being distrustful about their future doings….Yours very faithfully

August Manns [19]

Press reviews of the performance were uniformly laudatory, for example this review that appeared in the *Observer*:

> An interesting feature of the concert was the first performance of three dances by Mr. Edward Elgar. These are orchestral arrangements of the first, third, and sixth numbers of a choral suite entitled "From the Bavarian Highlands". However attractive they may be in their original form they are most fascinating orchestral pieces, instinct with grace, light-hearted gaiety, and the incomparable exuberance of youth. The melodious themes are developed with great skill and all the artful art of a master of instrumentation, the latter remark being specially applicable to the final number. The composer conducted and should have been satisfied with the manifest appreciation his music received.[20]

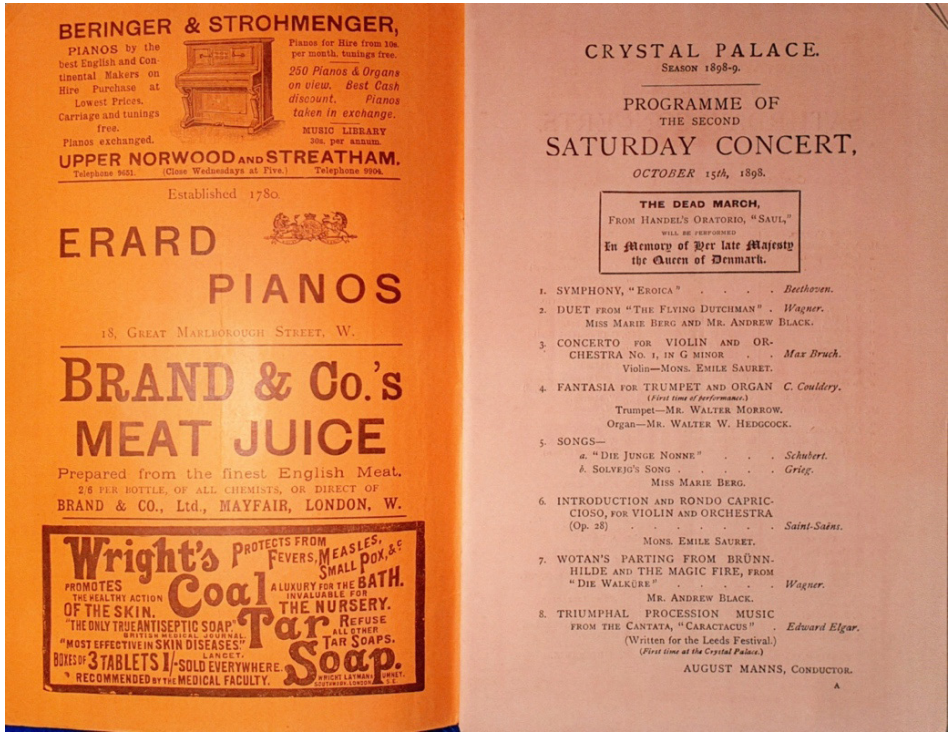
To counter rival efforts '…to weaken the impact of my research announcing novelties and new artists', Manns developed a wily strategy of rehearsing and performing new works during the week under alias titles, then announcing them in the Saturday Concerts as 'first performances' under their actual appellations. In a letter to Elgar dated 20 October 1897, Manns announced that he was going to play an Elgar piece on Friday, 'in disguise as *Characteristic Dances'* and on Saturday as *Three Bavarian Dances*. A work spuriously entitled *Grand Festival March in C* performed on Friday 14 October 1898 became the 'Triumphal March' from *Caractacus* on Saturday the 15th.

By 1900 works by Edward Elgar had become staple features of Saturday Concert programmes. The *Morning Post* published this review of Manns's 24 February concert:

> The Spring Season of Crystal Palace Concerts opened on Saturday, when a programme which, as usual under Mr. Manns, included a due proportion of the old works and the new, attracted an audience that filled every part of the concert room. The novelty was Berlioz's "Rob Roy" overture. Miss Clara Butt was to have produced a new scena from the pen of Miss Frances Allitson,[21] but, exercising the ladies' privilege, she changed her mind and preferred instead to sing once more the cycle of "Sea Pictures" written for her by Mr. Elgar for the Norwich Festival last autumn.[22]

As soon as he learned that Elgar was at work on an oratorio (*The Dream of* Gerontius) for the 1900 Birmingham Triennial Festival, Manns wrote to snap up the second performance.

**Illustration XIII**
**Elgar's copy of the Crystal Palace program featuring the Triumphal March**
***Courtesy of The Elgar Foundation***




19 Manns letter to Elgar dated 26 September 1897. MB transcript letter 1772.

20 *Observer,* 24 October 1897 edition.

21 Frances Allitson 1848-1912.

22 *Morning Post*, 26 February 1900 edition.

Aug 28, 1900
Dear Mr. Elgar!
What is your position with your New Oratorio. Would it be possible to have it performed here on Saturday the 10 of November? The Orchestra will be organized chiefly by engaging the bulk – if not the entire – of the London Richter Orchestra, who, as Vert told me, are to a man in the Birmingham Festival Orchestra.

1. What Principals does your new work require?
2. Is the work for the Chorus very difficult?
3. Who publishes your Oratorio?
4. How much time will it require for performance?

I would prepare the Choir but would much prefer you to conduct your own Work.

Kindly send a full reply by an early post and oblige thereby.

Yours sincerely, August Manns[23]

Manns lost no time scheduling a Palace performance of the complete work until his attendance at a Birmingham rehearsal wrought a change of plan.

Sept. 26, 1900
Crystal Palace Company
My dear Mr. Elgar!
Although the absence of the Chorus from the Rehearsal on Monday deprived me of the full effect which your remarkable new work will produce at Birmingham and at other places where it can be reproduced in a high artistic manner, I left the Hall with the impression that you have produced a truly great Choral work and that your pure musical Soul and matured mastery over polyphonic and orchestral technic are inviting the highest admiration of all true musicians.

This being my opinion, it distresses me all the more that I am not able to perform your work here as intended on the 27 of October, because my Crystal Palace Choir could not do even the smallest amount of justice to the all-important Choruses: You have had a Festival Choir in view, and a Festival Choir only can overcome the many sided difficulties by dint of proper organization and numberless Rehearsals. I must wait for future development of musical affairs here before I can say or promise anything for future Seasons.

But I shall feel thankful if you will allow me to insert the wonderful Prelude to the 1st Part on the 27th of October. Of that I can safely promise you a refined and impressive performance.

With my and my wife's best wishes for a Grand Success.

I am most sincerely, August Manns [24]

23 Manns letter to Elgar dated 28 August 1900. MB transcript letter 1780.

24 Manns letter to Elgar dated 26 September 1900. MB transcript letter 9240.



The 'wonderful Prelude' was down for the 27 October 1900 concert, but Manns delayed the performance until 11 November to give him time to augment the orchestra. In a sense, the piece functioned as a swan song, owing to the imminent retirement of both the Saturday Concerts and its 75-year-old founder.

Nov. 11th, 1900
Crystal Palace Company
My dear Mr. Elgar!
Your "Glückkamf" had evidently been taken to heart by the Gods: The C. P. Orchestra enlarged considerably played your Prelude "lovingly" and the performance was listened to reverently by a fairly large audience and made evidently a deep impression upon all, including the members of the Orchestra and their old Timekeeper.

I wish you and Mrs. Elgar could have been present; for I feel sure that you would have enjoyed the performance and felt happy.

Clara Butt, being ill, your Songs could not be sung, which, no doubt, caused disappointment.

I am still uncertain about the musical Future of the C. P. – All I know is that my Old Engagement will come to an end with the last day of this year, and as far as I can judge from the general results of the Queens Hall Orchestras appearances at these Concerts, they have proved a serious loss to Mr. Newman, and the experiment will therefore scarcely be repeated, and the world-famed Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts, which I founded in October 1888 and directed ever since, will probably come to an end with the Richter Concert of next Saturday. The Wagner-Tschaikowski craze has killed the best musical nursery Great Britain ever possessed. Whether I shall establish Orchestral Concerts in London after New Year or shall retire for good after nearly 51 years of timebeating is still uncertain.

With affectionate greetings "von Haus zu Haus" as ever,

Yours sincerely,

August Manns [25]

With the closing of the year came the announcement that the 44th annual series (1899-1900) of the Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts would be the last, apart from a short season of five concerts in March and April 1901. Manns's success had been his undoing. Henry Wood tells us that when Elgar and Manns met 22 years previously, '… there had been only two permanent orchestras in England: that under Sir Charles Hallé in Manchester, and the Crystal Palace orchestra under August Manns'.[26]

25 Manns letter to Elgar dated 11 November 1900. MB transcript letter 1781.

26 Henry J, Wood, *My Life of Music* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1938), 140.

The new century brought a new generation of maestros to take charge of new orchestras and new choirs, dispersing to venues conveniently located in central London and the home counties the audiences Manns cultivated and the instrumentalists he nurtured. By now a hostage to advancing years and declining health, Manns could do nothing but take impotent umbrage at the unstoppable trends.


**Illustration XIV**
**Manns's retirement portrait taken in 1900.**
**Source: Author's archive**

He gave vent to his exasperation in a letter thanking Elgar for the gift of the score of *Cockaigne:*

> Gleadale,
> 4, Harold Road, Norwood S.E. London
> Aug 15
> 1901
> Dear Mr. Elgar!
> It gave me great pleasure to hear from you. Thanks!
> I must – although somewhat late – congratulate you on your great Cockaigne Success. Needless to assure you that I fully appreciate your kindness of presenting me with a copy of the Score, and that I am looking forward with more than ordinary interest to reading your new work.
>
> Whether I shall ever have the pleasure of conducting performances of the Overture is at present quite an open question; because I shall probably retire for good from my life work as a Conductor, partly, because the patronage of music art here has been driven away by the culture of Caffée Chantant and all sorts of vulgar Music-Hall-Entertainments, and partly, because I have conducted now for 52 years…and the time has arrived at which I ought to make room for younger musicians….
>
> With our united affectionate greetings, I remain.
>
> Believe me,
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> August Manns [27]

Progressive rheumatoid arthritis threw its shadow over the years that remained to August Manns. When Edward and Alice wrote to convey their concern, Manns replied as follows:

> Gleadale,
> 4, Harold Road, Norwood, S.E.
> October 28, 1902
> My dear Mr. Elgar!
> I appreciated your kind letter to my wife in order to answer it myself, a fact which will account for and excuse her not answering by return as intended. Let me say before all, that we appreciate your and Mrs. Elgars kindness very sincerely and thank you both heartily for it.
>
> In giving you a little account of myself, I will begin by stating that I entered upon my 78th year last March with rheumatic troubles in my right hip and leg, but continued to keep myself going up to Good Friday, on which day I was able to conduct the usual Sacred Concert without trouble very successfully. What may have happened to my old body between the end of that Concert and the following Saturday morning, God only knows! I awoke on Saturday morning stiff all over and not able to move a single limb without excruciating pain. Doctors and Nurses were called, but in spite of all their efforts I had to be lifted out of Bed and fed like a Baby for fully 2 months before I could put a foot to the ground and venture to scramble over the Bedroom- floor. It was not before the end of June that I was able to take an hour's drive, but I am happy to say that since then I went on improving so far that I was able to try the Dowsing-Electric-Radiant-Rays-Treatment at Woodhall Spa near Lincoln, and that Treatment has benefited me so far that I am now able to walk a little (a couple of miles or so) and to take my meals without help. Unhappily! my

27 Manns letter to Elgar dated 15 August 1901. MB transcript letter 1782.

shoulders and hands are still disabled by rheumatic stiffness (pain) from doing their duty, so that my dear wife has still to wash and comb and dress me, a troublesome duty which she discharges with angelic patience and loveable tenderness, God bless her!

I remain with kindest regards to Mrs. Elgar and yourself,

Hearty greetings in which Mrs. Manns heartily joins.

Sincerely yours

August Manns [28]

In 1903, Manns attempted to reassert his prowess by preparing to conduct one last Handel Festival. Alas, it was not meant to be. A letter to Elgar dated 27 April 1903 included this paragraph:

My Handel Festival arrangements are now nearly completed, but my health has been so unsatisfactory of late that I have been compelled to ask the C. P. Board of Directors to release me from the arduous duties connected with the many Rehearsals and the 4 Performances. I have suggested that Dr. Cowen, and Henry Wood should be invited to take my place and divide the honours connected therewith… . [29]

Though he found himself obliged to relinquish the Festival 'honours connected therewith', two substantial tokens of esteem came his way in 1903. On 12 May Oxford University conferred on Manns the honorary degree of Doctor of Music. When Elgar wrote to congratulate him, Manns responded as follows:

Gleadale
4, Harold Road Norwood, S.E. London
October 12, 1903
My dear Dr. Elgar!
Let me thank you most heartily for your generous sympathy with my Oxford-University-Honours, which, honestly confessed, soothed considerably my severe disappointment at not being able to conduct the Handel Festival; which I had prepared with special care….

Needless to say, I, like the rest of musicians, am longing to know something of your new work, and a quiet reading of your Score will be more than ordinary interest. Thanking you heartily for the present.

I remain, with very best wishes for a Grand Success

Yours sincerely

August Manns [30]

28 Manns letter to Elgar dated 28 October 1902. MB transcript letter 1784.

29 Manns letter to Elgar dated 27 April 1903. MB transcript letter 1786.

30 Manns letter to Elgar dated 12 October 1903. MB transcript letter 1787.



Later in the year, on the King's Birthday, Manns received a Knighthood, to the general rejoicing of the professional musicians, the concert-going public and the musical press. It was a topic on which Elgar and Stanford would have heartily agreed; Stanford's witty letter of congratulations could have been written by Elgar.

50 Holland Street
Kensington, W.,
November 9th, 1903
My Dear Old Friend
I am more than delighted at the announcement of the papers this morning. We all would have knighted you or made you a peer years ago; but then you did not produce so many of the compositions of Cabinet Ministers as you did of the young Englishmen. Anyhow, we have never ceased to be grateful to you and some of us in these latter days (who had happy experiences of your unbiased catholicity of taste) to long for you and your influence again.

So long life to you, and every good wish from one of the musicians who has especial cause to be grateful to you.

Yours very sincerely,

Sir C. Villiers Stanford [31]

When Edward become Sir Edward a year later, Manns wrote to congratulate him.

June 24, 1904
Dear Elgar! I hereby thank His Majesty, King Edward VII of England most sincerely for having once more done the right thing.

May God's Blessing enhance the value of your fairly won Honours, & by granting you and Lady Elgar the best of good health. In this wish my dear wife joins very heartily.

Believe me, with our kindest regards.

Sincerely yours

August Manns [32]

By the time of his next letter, Manns had become a virtual invalid.

31 H. Saxe Wyndham, *August Manns and the Saturday Concerts (*London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co. Ltd. 1909), 208-209 - quoting a letter to Manns from C. Villiers Stanford dated 9 November 1903.

32 Manns letter to Elgar dated 16 March 1904. MB transcript letter 3880.

Gleadale
Harold Road Norwood London
January 18, 1905
Dear Elgar!
Many thanks for your New Year greetings which are fully appreciated by both my wife and self. Let me reciprocate by wishing Lady Elgar and yourself during 1905 all the good things which make up a happy life.

It gives me always great pleasure to read of your success at home and abroad. Knowing that your prosperity is – like my own – chiefly the result of self-culture of Heaven's gifts, I admire your great artistic achievements all the more.

As to myself – I can, unhappily, not report improvements since last we met: The serious rheumatic sufferings in the summer of 1902 have left me greatly invalided; indeed, so much so that I have thought it best to retire from all public music-making for good:

My nerves will not stand responsible work any longer. I am, since the 1 of this month, free from all association with the C.P. Co., and able to enjoy for the rest of my days a quiet, happy, home-life with my dear wife, who is adorning the winter of my "Erdenleben" with the sweetest flowers of Spring. I am happy! My wife joins me in hearty greetings and good wishes for Lady Elgar and yourself.

Ever yours sincerely

August Manns [33]

Thus incapacitated, Manns struggled on for another two years until his death on 3 January 1907.

August Manns's 52-year-old reign over the music at 'the world's wonder-house' produced more than 12,000 concerts, the consistent quality of which drew this eulogy from the *Yorkshire Post* critic Herbert Thompson:

> Nowhere else could one hear the great classics of orchestral music so sympathetically interpreted and there can be no doubt that these concerts, which on Saturday afternoons used to draw all the most earnest lovers of music in London, did more to train audiences than any other institution.[34]

One admirer summed up his influence on music-making thus: 'There is scarcely one musician prominent before the public today who does not owe his first hearing to August Manns'.[35] Havergal Brian put Manns's contribution to British musical life this way: 'Nowhere else could one hear the great classics of orchestral music so sympathetically interpreted and there can be no doubt that these concerts, which on Saturday afternoons used to draw all the most earnest lovers of music in London, did more to train audiences than any other institution'.[36]

The last word on the self-teaching significance of what Edward Elgar absorbed from August Manns's productions belongs to Billy Reed:

> I think it was the attendance at these concerts—when he heard that orchestra play the great classics and saw the romantic figure of the young conductor with his plume of raven hair (to me known only as a white-haired and most dignified Prussian gentleman), interpreting the works of Beethoven and Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann, with occasional ventures into Liszt and even Wagner—-that fired his ambition and turned the scales on the side of serious composition. He realized that he must be first and foremost a creative musician.[37]

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

33 Manns letter to Elgar dated 18 January 1905. MB transcript letter 1789.

34 Herbert Thompson, *Yorkshire Post*, 8 March 1907 edition.

35 Graves, *The Spectator, 30 January 1907 issue.*

36 Havergal Brian, *Musical Opinion,* 1 October 1935 edition

37 Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him,* 46-47.

Andrew Dalton adds the following note: Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, violinist W.H. Reed gave a series of talks for the BBC entitled 'Looking Back'. The following extract on his experiences at the Crystal Palace is taken from the typescript of a talk given on 10 August 1939. It is reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Music London.

In the days when I was still very young I was engaged to play in the orchestra at the Crystal Palace for the Triennial Handel Festival. It was a custom to have a solo orchestra – the actual Crystal Palace Orchestra in fact – of about sixty or seventy performers and then reinforce this body with two or three hundred amateurs, these amateurs having one professional to every five or six distributed among them.

This arrangement was to help them, I suppose, or it was to keep them in order. That they need this was obvious when I tell you that I sat amongst them at this my first Handel Festival. Seated next to me was a middle-aged parson from some country vicarage. His violin I should imagine only came out of its case on these occasions. At any rate, as soon as August Manns got up to commence the Saturday massed rehearsal with all his forces – mammoth choir and enormous orchestra (in number, at any rate), up went my companion's violin at the ready, and when he had disentangled the chin rest from his long beard, which had got somewhat involved in the process of assuming a stylish posture, he place his bow on the strings and produced the strangest sound imaginable. I ventured to remark 'Excuse me, sir, but isn't your violin very flat?'. 'Flat?', said my friend. 'Yes, flat', said I. Again disentangling his beard from his fiddle, he lowered it, and feeling the tension of the strings between finger and thumb most thoughtfully, he said 'I never have them any tighter than that'. His violin was a very good one as a matter of fact, and he showed it to me with much pride, and asked me if I would like to try it. I took it from him with alacrity as I saw that it was a Nicholas Gagliano, while the violin I had taken for the Festival was nothing much to boast about. While discoursing upon the various fine points of this fine Italian fiddle, I surreptitiously tuned it correctly and handed him mine, which was at any rate in tune, and we played the next chorus or orchestral excerpt in this manner. I say WE, but only I played, as he gave up about the second bar and listened intently to the sounds coming from HIS VIOLIN when I played it.

I offered to hand it back at the end, but he insisted on my playing on this beautiful violin for the whole of the Festival, while he held up mine. Mine I could leave there for the whole of the time without breaking my heart if I should return to find it had disappeared, but his was taken about never out of his sight during every interval and the intervening days. The Festival took place on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, with the grand massed rehearsal on the previous Saturday.



# Elgar and Parratt

**Relf Clark**

## *I Introduction*

Sir Walter Parratt died at 12 The Cloisters, Windsor Castle on 27 March 1924.[1] The following reflections mark the centenary of that event.

The death must have come to Elgar's notice very quickly, for the next day he wrote as follows to Lord Stamfordham, the Private Secretary to George V:

> I see, with the greatest regret, the announcement of the death of my old friend Sir Walter Parratt, Master of the King's Musick.
>
> If there is to be a new appointment may I suggest, without presumption, that I should feel it to be the greatest honour if I might be allowed to hold the position?[2]

The rather unseemly timing of the letter suggests anxiety. Elgar could surely have waited until after the funeral, which took place on 1 April.[3] Why did he not do so? In

1 Information taken from the death certificate. It describes Parratt as 'Master of the King's Musick, / Organist, / Knight' and gives his age as 83. Stanford died two days later. The house occupied by the Organist and Master of the Choristers at St George's is nowadays 23 The Cloisters, which is not 12 The Cloisters renumbered: 12 The Cloisters is the flat beneath Vicars' Hall and today the home of the College archive. I am indebted to Roger Judd, MVO for this information.

2 Moore, J.N., *Edward Elgar* [:] *letters of a lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 381.

3 Tovey, D. and Parratt, G., *Walter Parratt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 137. For a concise account of Parratt's career, with particular reference to his time at Windsor, see Fellowes, E.H., *Organists and Masters of the Choristers of St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle* (Windsor: Oxley and Son (Windsor) Ltd, *c*.1939), 79-86. See also West, J.E., *Cathedral Organists past and present* (London: Novello & Co., 1921), 153 and 167 and Shaw, Watkins, *The Succession of Organists of the Chapel Royal and the Cathedrals of England and Wales from* c.*1538* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 350-1 and 384. For an account of the role played by Parratt in the history of the organs of St George's Chapel, see Judd, R.L., *The Organs in Windsor Castle* [:] *their history and development* (Oxford: Positif Press, 2015), 67-85.

December 1909 he had had from Gilbert Parker a letter describing him as 'the Master of English Music'.[4] Did that phrase, slightly adjusted, plant a seed in Elgar's mind? Had he toyed with the idea of filling a vacancy that Parratt's death would create? If he had, perhaps he was now fretting over the possibility that someone else would be approached. Elgar was much concerned with status and recognition (with 'the importance of Elgar', in other words). We see that concern at its most unattractive in the episode at the Royal Academy on 3 May 1913,[5] and at its most embarrassing in his attempt to procure a peerage. By 1924, Elgar's admission to the Order of Merit was an event in the foreign country of the pre-war past. Since then, various honours had come his way, but none of them was from the King,[6] and it seems reasonable to assume that succeeding Parratt as Master of the King's Music[7] would provide (for the time being) the reassurance he may well have craved.

It is difficult to know whether the 'if' at the beginning of Elgar's second sentence indicates doubt as to the future of the office or merely a desire not to be thought presumptuous. It has been suggested that fear of abolition was all that motivated him, but from what follows it appears that the possibility had not crossed his mind.[8] Dated 1 April, the reply to his letter came from Sir Frederick Ponsonby, the Keeper of the Privy Purse, and it contained the following sentence:

> It has, however, been contemplated in former years to abolish the post of 'Master of the Music'[9] and I cannot therefore say whether the King will retain this post in the [Royal] Household.

At this point, Elgar seems to have realised that the matter was not entirely straightforward. Not wishing his initial letter to be construed as financially motivated, in a letter dated 2 April he hastened to assure Sir Frederick that he would not have written 'in the first instance' had he not been advised that the post was 'purely honorary'. Turning then to the possibility of abolition, he continued as follows:

4 Moore, J.N., *Elgar and his publishers* [:] *letters of a creative life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 726.

5 See Moore, J.N., *Edward Elgar* [:] *the Windflower letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 117.

6 See McVeagh, D.M., *Edward Elgar* [:] *his life and music* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Limited, 1955), 248-9.

7 Geoffrey Parratt pointed out that in all three of his father's warrants of appointment the spelling was 'Music' rather than 'Musick' or 'Musicke', which he regarded as journalistic inventions: Tovey and Parratt, op. cit., 90.

8 Moore, J.N., *Elgar and his publishers,* 838. See also Moore, J.N., *Letters of a lifetime*, 496.

9 Note the spelling 'Music' and see note 7.



> With respect and without wishing to presume in the slightest degree, I desire to urge very strongly that His Majesty the King be advised to retain it, at least for the present … [because to] … abolish it at this moment would have a very deterrent effect on the prestige and progress of British music especially abroad.[10]

Elgar's 'prestige and progress' point seems far-fetched. Parratt was no exception to the general rule that in those days the Master of the King's Music tended not to have a particularly high profile. From the year of his initial appointment, 1893, until his death,[11] Parratt divided the majority of his professional time between playing the organ and taking practices at St George's, teaching at the Royal College of Music, and travelling on the Great Western Railway between Paddington and Windsor & Eton Central. For a decade (1908-1918) his routines were varied by his duties as Professor of Music at Oxford, but the post did not require residence and could not have interfered very much with the tasks he undertook at Windsor and the RCM. He did not occupy an international stage, and whether musicians abroad knew much about him seems a little doubtful. But Elgar's approach paid off, and on 28 April he was able to tell the Windflower that a letter offering him the post had arrived (at Perryfield) that morning.[12] Parratt's death therefore assisted Elgar in his career. In life, his intentional assistance had been rendered on a number of occasions, and to these we must now turn, but not before giving an outline of Parratt's own career.

## *II Huddersfield to Windsor and South Kensington*

Parratt was born in Huddersfield on 10 February 1841, the son of Thomas Parratt, a professional organist.[13] In 1852, aged only eleven, he became the organist at the church in Armitage Bridge, a nearby village; and later in the same year he went to the choir school of St Peter's Chapel, Palace Street, London, where George Cooper gave him organ lessons. In 1854 he returned to Huddersfield and took up the post of Organist of St Paul's Church. The connection with the Elgar family began in 1861, when he was appointed Organist of the church of St Michael and All Angels, Great Witley, Worcestershire, a

10 Moore, J.N., *Letters of a lifetime*, 382. In this letter, Elgar wrote 'Master of the Music', having evidently noted the spelling preferred by Sir Frederick.

11 The appointment was renewed after the accession of Edward VII and again after that of George V.

12 Moore, J.N., *The Windflower letters*, 291. In an earlier letter to the Windflower (16 April) he misrepresented the sequence of events: ibid., 289-290.

13 The date of birth is as given by Tovey and Parratt, op. cit. A certificate appears to be unobtainable, and it may be that Parratt's parents failed through ignorance of the law to register the birth (which occurred only a few years after registration had become a legal obligation).

post that involved acting as the private organist of the Earl of Dudley; and it was in that capacity that Parratt became acquainted with Elgar's father, William Henry Elgar, who tuned the pianos at Witley Court, the Earl's residence.[14]

Parratt left Great Witley in 1868, and in 1872, after a few years as Organist of Wigan Parish Church, he was appointed Organist - or *Informator Choristarum* - of Magdalen College, Oxford, following John Stainer's translation from there to St Paul's Cathedral, London. In 1882, he succeeded George Elvey as Organist of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, and in 1883 he became the first Professor of Organ at the recently opened Royal College of Music. He was knighted in 1892, in 1893 he succeeded William Cusins as Master of the Queen's Music, and he was Professor of Music at Oxford from 1908 (when he succeeded Parry) to 1918 (when he was succeeded by Hugh Allen). He received a number of honorary degrees and was awarded the KCVO.

## *III 1896-1910*

Parratt and Elgar may have become acquainted in the Great Witley years, but Dr Moore felt unable to go further than saying that Elgar 'almost certainly' accompanied his father on his tuning rounds.[15] After leaving Great Witley, Parratt had no obvious reason to be in contact with Elgar, and it seems likely that it was not until the 1890s that they met (or met again, as the case may be). He was certainly present at the Queen's Hall on 3 September 1896, when Elgar rehearsed the Leeds Choral Union in *The Light of Life*, Op.29,[16] and Kennedy states that a meeting took place on that occasion.[17] Some four months later, in a letter to Novello & Co. dated 9 January 1897, Elgar was able to claim acquaintance with Parratt,[18] and we have seen that by 1924 he could refer to him as his 'old friend'. Why was Parratt present at that September rehearsal? Was it out of a combination of sentimental regard for the Great Witley days and curiosity about the progress of William Elgar's boy? Was he connected with the Leeds chorus? Whatever the reason, that letter in January 1897 related to the *Imperial March*, Op.32, which Elgar hoped to dedicate to Queen Victoria. That the work bears no dedication indicates that nothing came of Elgar's approaching Parratt for permission; but some two years later he applied to him

14 Moore, J.N., *Edward Elgar* [:] *a creative life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 215, 240.

15 Moore, J.N., *Letters of a lifetime*, 496.

16 Moore, J.N., *A creative life*, 215. The Leeds Choral Union was one of the ingredients of the choir at the Worcester Festival performance on 8 September 1896.

17 Kennedy, M., *Portrait of Elgar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 37.

18 Moore, J.N., *Letters of a creative life*, 43.



for assistance of a similar kind in connection with *Caractacus*, Op.35, and in a letter to Elgar dated 20 July 1899 Parratt agreed to consult Her Majesty.[19] He went on to say not only that he used Elgar's music 'constantly' but also that the Queen herself liked it;[20] and in the same letter Parratt commissioned a work for inclusion in a collection of choral items marking (and to be performed on) Victoria's eightieth birthday, which fell on 24 May 1899. Elgar was summoned to Windsor Castle for this occasion and saw and heard 'Her Most Gracious Majesty'.[21] Later in the same year, Parratt organized a concert at the Royal Albert Institute, Windsor at which Elgar in the presence of Princess Christian conducted eleven of his own works.[22] For the purpose of this event, Elgar was provided with accommodation in Windsor Castle, a fact he proudly communicated both to his father and to his sister Helen ('Dot').[23] In December 1900, there was correspondence between Elgar and Parratt about the possibility of a setting of Kipling's *Recessional*,[24] but although the latter was enthusiastic ('Please do it, and soon') nothing ensued. However, Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901, and on 12 March Parratt passed on to Elgar a coronation ode written by A.C. Benson, a master at Eton College, and urged him to set it:[25] as amended, it became the text of Elgar's *Coronation Ode*, Op.44,[26] which included *Land of Hope and Glory*. The coronation having taken place on 9 August 1902, the work was given its first performance on 2 October, as part of the Sheffield Festival;[27] and in the following month Elgar completed a set of five TTBB part-songs, *From the*

19 Permission was duly given, and the dedication is as follows: TO / HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY / QUEEN VICTORIA / THIS CANTATA / CARACTACUS / IS BY SPECIAL PERMISSION / DEDICATED / BY HER MAJESTY'S LOYAL AND DEVOTED SERVANT / EDWARD ELGAR.

20 Moore, J.N., *Letters of a lifetime*, 65.

21 Moore, J.N., *A creative life*, 269. The work was *To her, beneath whose steadfast star*, a setting of words by F.W.H. Myers. It formed part of a volume entitled *Choral songs in honour of Her Majesty Queen Victoria* (London: Macmillan, 1899).

22 ibid., 292. What were they? Dr Moore's 'eleven' is contradicted by Elgar in his letter to his sister Helen ('Dot') dated 20 October 1899, in which he writes 'ten' and underlines the word: see Moore, J.N., *Letters of a lifetime*, 80.

23 Moore, J.N., *Letters of a lifetime*, 80-1.

24 Moore, J.N., *A creative life*, 338.

25 Kennedy, M., *The life of Elgar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 84.

26 Moore, J.N., *A creative life*, 347.

27 Kent, C.J., *Edward Elgar* [:] *a guide to research* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 192. See also Bury, D., 'Elgar, the Eton housemaster and the *Coronation Ode*' in Mitchell, K.D., ed., *Cockaigne* [:] *essays on Elgar 'in London town'* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2004), 94-137.

*Greek Anthology*, Op.45,[28] and dedicated it to Parratt, presumably as a gesture of thanks. Perhaps it was in acknowledgement of the dedication that in December 1902 Parratt increased Elgar's exposure to the royal family by taking him to Kensington Palace in order to meet Princess Henry of Battenburg.[29] There then seems to be something of a gap, caused possibly by an absence of royal events requiring music, and perhaps by Elgar's relationship with Edward VII being such that a proxy at Court was no longer required. But on 8 May 1908 Elgar wrote to Parratt from Parker's Hotel, Naples and congratulated him on his appointment as Heather Professor at Oxford.[30] It therefore seems that the friendship was maintained; and a further commission from Parratt came in 1909, for an anthem to be sung at Frogmore on the anniversary of Queen Victoria's death.[31] The result was *They are at rest*, a setting of a text by J.H. Newman; its first performance was given at Windsor on 22 January 1910.[32]

## *IV Retrospect*

Parratt's rise in the world of music is comparable in some ways with that of Elgar. He was born and brought up in the provinces. His father was a musician. His family occupied a relatively low stratum of the middle class. He attended neither a famous school nor a university (but in later years he became a magnet for honorary degrees). However, the combination of outstanding skill as an organist and his affiliation to the Church of England ensured Parratt's apparently smooth transition from the provinces (Huddersfield, Great Witley, Wigan) to a famous university (Oxford) and from there not only to the Royal Household (Windsor) but also to the musical establishment created by the RCM (South Kensington). By 1883, when he was still in his early forties, he seems to have acquired an impregnable position both musically and socially, and he went on to occupy it for the next 40 years. The well-trodden (and not unremunerative) career paths available to Parratt, and to Anglican organists generally, had no immediately obvious equivalents for a Roman Catholic violinist who aspired to be a composer: Elgar remained an obscure figure until the appearance of the various choral works he wrote in the 1890s, and he was 42 when the *Variations on an original theme*, Op.36 launched his international career. Parratt was an insider, Elgar an outsider. But without the patronage of Frederick Ouseley,

28 Although the work was completed on 11 November that year, its first performance took place at the Royal Albert Hall on 25 April 1904: Kennedy, M., *Portrait,* 286. There was much to-ing and fro-ing between Elgar and Jaeger over the proofs, largely it seems because the texts were to appear in both English and German.

29 Moore, J.N., *A creative life*, 378.

30 Tovey and Parratt, op. cit., 112.

31 Moore, J.N., *A creative life*, 557.

32 Kent, C.J., op. cit., 252.



whose Wardenship of St Michael's College, Tenbury made him accessible in the Great Witley years, Parratt might have remained an obscure figure.[33] He was aware of, and had himself surmounted, the difficulties that stood in the way of those who lacked a patrician education and well-off parents, and perhaps he regarded Elgar as being in some ways a kindred spirit. It is surely significant that he passed Benson's coronation ode not to his RCM colleague Parry, who might well have made a successful setting of it, but to Elgar.[34] He grasped the importance of Elgar, the fact that he was the rising star; and at this distance his advocacy of the younger man looks like his striking a blow for the class from which they had both emerged, and an equivalent (and perhaps an acknowledgement) of Ouseley's crucial help.

## *V Coda*

Nothing turns on it, but both Elgar and Parratt had a connection with the Pre-Raphaelites. In the Lady Lever Gallery in Port Sunlight, and in the City Museum and Art Gallery in Birmingham, Parratt appears with John Stainer, Varley Roberts, a few dons, and the Magdalen trebles in Holman Hunt's *May morning on Magdalen Tower*.[35] Elgar's well-known connection is that Alice Stuart Wortley was a daughter of John Everett Millais, who like Holman Hunt was a member of the Brotherhood. Those who seek out memorials to, as well as images of, Elgar's dedicatees may like to know that Parratt's may be found in the floor of the north aisle of the Quire of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, near the entrance to the organ-loft (and on the other side of the aisle from the King George VI Memorial Chapel). It reads as follows:

33 The important role that Ouseley played in Parratt's career is gone into in Lawford, Timothy, 'Walter Parratt', *Journal of the British Institute of Organ Studies* 29 (2005), 135-161. As far as Parratt was concerned, Great Witley and Tenbury Wells were within walking distance of each other (he was a man of great energy).

34 Parry's ability to write grand occasional music is more than confirmed by *I was glad*, which nowadays receives many more performances than the *Coronation Ode*, the latter having become, in Robert Anderson's words, 'an opulent curiosity': Anderson, R., *Elgar* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 193.

35 RC observation. The painting dates from the period 1888-1890 (Stainer succeeded Ouseley as Heather Professor in 1889: why Parratt was in Oxford on that occasion does not appear to be known). The Birmingham painting is a smaller version of the very striking one at Port Sunlight. A 1914 portrait of Parratt by J.S. Sargent can be found in the Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY; it is reproduced in Tovey and Parratt, op. cit. A portrait by William Rothenstein is reproduced by Lawford, op. cit.

BENEATH THIS STONE / REST THE ASHES OF / WALTER PARRATT KT. / K.C.V.O. M.A. MVS. DOC., / FOR FORTY TWO YEARS / ORGANIST OF THIS CHAPEL / AND / EMMA / HIS WIFE / 1842-1931[36]

Parratt comes to mind on the quarterly Obit days at St George's, when as a rule one hears his short but moving anthem *The Whirlwind*. Tovey and Parratt give a two-page list of his compositions,[37] but outside Windsor his contribution tends to be limited to a few Anglican chants, the hymn-tune *Obiit,* and *Give rest, O Christ*, a setting of a melody from the Kiev tradition.[38]


**Sir Walter Parratt**
**Arthur Reynolds collection**

*A solicitor, Dr Relf Clark practised with a City law firm and retired in 2017. He studied at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle with Dr Sidney Campbell (one of Parratt's successors) and as an exhibitioner at Worcester College, Oxford with Robert Sherlaw Johnson and F.W. Sternfeld. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and an honorary life member of the Elgar Society and the Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain.*

36 RC observation. There is another Parratt memorial further along the north aisle: In loving memory of / AMY TEMPLE PARRATT / who died within these precincts 18 Sept. 1917. / Dear daughter of / Sir Walter Parratt / organist of this chapel / and Emma his wife. / "Waiting for the morning" (RC observation).

37 Tovey and Parratt, op. cit., 168-9.

38 See 301 and 351 in the 'refreshing' edition of *Hymns Ancient & Modern*.



# Elgar and Delius: Some Common Ground

**Paul Guinery**

Elgar and Delius are scarcely reckoned to be kindred spirits. Musical chalk and cheese, they created very different soundscapes. Yet I believe there were more points of contact than either they, or we, might have expected. For a start, both were self-taught, with little or no formal training. True, Delius did at length manage to enrol at Leipzig Conservatoire, parental support grudgingly bestowed only through the persuasive advocacy of Edvard Grieg. Elgar's father, on the other hand, simply couldn't afford the fees. But ironically Delius turned out to be an ungrateful student with a poor attendance record. He soon dropped out; all those academic exercises in writing fugues were not for him. He turned his back and fled to Paris, resigned to bide his time – just as Elgar was having to do, in his case in less exotic Worcester. With hindsight this probably happened for the best, enabling both young men to break away from the long shadow cast by Brahms over his contemporaries and successors, with its short-sighted resistance to Wagnerian chromaticism. Parry and Stanford never avoided speaking with a Brahmsian accent whereas Elgar and Delius certainly did and forged their own styles, instantly recognisable within a bar or so. Leonard Bernstein, when he conducted *Enigma* marvelled at how inimitable Elgar's voice was, whilst still drawing on the basic vocabulary of a late nineteenth-century language.

Neither Elgar nor Delius had significant imitators or disciples; it's hard to think of any who started out writing 'in the style of Elgar' (let alone Delius). Nor did the two composers make any impression in most European countries. Elgar hardly became a household name in, say, Spain or Italy whilst Delius, despite spending most of his life in France, was totally ignored there. He still is, despite a heartfelt musical tribute to the city of his mis-spent youth in his tone-poem *Paris – Song of a Great City.*

Where both composers did find encouragement and – most importantly – performances, was in pre-war Germany, so much so that 1914 had a traumatic effect on them, both professionally and personally, not to mention practically, in terms of income. Previously their large-scale works, including in Delius's case a couple of operas, were taken up in Germany by sympathetic conductors. Neither man ever hit his stride again after 1919, Delius becoming a chronic invalid, Elgar crushed by personal grief and disillusionment. However, after the compositionally barren 1920s, there came for both a certain late-flowering in the 1930s with Delius able to complete half-a-dozen or so

abandoned works, thanks to Eric Fenby's devoted services, and Elgar embarking on a third symphony. (Interesting to equate this with Rachmaninoff who, after many unproductive years touring as a pianist and conductor, returned to composition and produced three masterpieces, including a third symphony, in half a dozen years before his death in 1943.)

Another point of similarity, it seems to me, is how Delius and Elgar shared a comparably iconoclastic view of musical form. Whenever I accompany Elgar's *Violin Sonata* I'm struck by how irreverently it deviates from the text-book definition of a sonata, notably in terms of keys and subjects. It is hard to pin it down formally, since it so frequently heads off in totally unexpected directions. Likewise Delius, in his three mature violin sonatas, pays only scant attention to traditional form. He often unveils tantalising scraps and fragments of ideas and then begins to develop and evolve them immediately, too unwilling (or impatient) to wait for the so-called 'development section'. This can be confusing, but as a listener or performer one must simply go with the flow and leave one's expectations behind. But, as with Elgar, it is not a question of mere caprice or formlessness, a charge often levelled by detractors. I am convinced that there is a firm controller in charge, directing from the wings, building a convincing construction. Not haphazard at all but a case of two composers knowing exactly what they are about.

Here's another point of similarity, a regrettable one (I speak as a keyboard player) in that neither composer was drawn to the piano as a solo instrument (joining other reluctant compatriots such as Vaughan Williams, Walton and Britten). Elgar's piano writing, in the Violin Sonata and Piano Quintet, can be quirky, sometimes lying unnaturally under the hand, though it is undeniably very effective. Delius's penchant for writing page after page of thickly spaced, chromatic chords with little change of texture has undoubtedly put pianists off his Cello Sonata, beautiful as it is (just as cellists are deterred by its lack of bars' rest and its severe challenges to intonation). Delius even bizarrely allowed the virtuoso Theodor Szántó to completely rewrite the soloist's part of his Piano Concerto.

**Delius at the age of 30; from a pastel portrait dated February 1893 by Daniel de Monfreid.**
This black and white copy was reproduced in the 1945 biography of Norman O'Neill, the original then being in the possession of Mrs. Norman O'Neill. (We have attempted to locate the current owners of the portrait to obtain permission to reproduce it, without success. Eds.)



It has also struck me how the two composers shared a love of both town and country: Elgar celebrating the bustle and pageantry of London in scores such as *Cockaigne* and *Falstaff* while still relishing his Malvern Hills; Delius, a poet of nature, at his best 'in a summer garden' or listening to spring cuckoos, but also revelling in memories of wild oats sown on the town, as evoked in *Paris* or in the *Idyll.*

I suspect that Delius and Elgar would have been wary of each other as young men, Delius possessing a self-assurance, not to say arrogance, that Elgar would not have found congenial. In any case, they hardly ever met, just occasionally in London and once at the Birmingham Festival of 1912 when Elgar conducted his *Music Makers* which Delius, to put it mildly, didn't care for: 'rowdy and commonplace' was how he dismissed it. Though it's not on record what Elgar thought of Delius's *Sea Drift,* performed on the same occasion, I suspect its yearning poignancy would have greatly appealed to him. But in their final years, they were drawn together when they met at Delius's home in Grez-sur-Loing on the afternoon of 30 May 1933, unaware that it would be for the last time. It was Elgar who'd made the first move, writing to Delius out of concern for his appalling physical incapacity, fascinated that Delius had been enabled to continue composing when all seemed hopeless, through the skill of his amanuensis, Eric Fenby.

They talked music and Elgar brought a gift of new recordings of Sibelius and Hugo Wolf. Delius was on his best behaviour, telling his visitor that he thought there was some 'fine stuff' in the *Introduction and Allegro* and that he admired *Falstaff;* indeed, elsewhere he described it as a magnificent work, rating it as the best of its composer and the product of a 'rich nature', rare praise indeed from Delius who normally disliked any music apart from his own. In turn, Elgar asked to be sent some Delius scores to conduct. They also chatted about books, gardening and Elgar's first trip by aeroplane, from Croydon to Paris, which had induced school-boyish excitement. Delius could grow suddenly tired of visitors and peremptorily dismiss them, but not on this occasion. Indeed, he was disappointed that Elgar had to leave, albeit after several hours (he was over in France to conduct his *Violin Concerto* with young Yehudi Menuhin). They congenially shared a bottle of champagne before parting. Elgar subsequently wrote an effusive account of the meeting for *The Daily Telegraph* whilst Delius later told Fenby that he'd found Elgar genial, unaffected and altogether quite unlike what he'd expected; in short, he liked him very much. Delius's wife Jelka was also won over, especially after Elgar praised her ham sandwiches.

A generous host and an appreciative visitor at a one-off meeting. But what's significant is how this acquaintance was then pursued for several months via their correspondence (Delius though by this stage paralysed, dictated all his letters to Jelka). A month later Elgar had the temerity to request a short work for small orchestra for performance in Worcester. Delius promised to send the score of his *Song Before Sunrise.* By now both composers were signing their letters 'yours affectionately' and 'your true friend'. The Deliuses listened to a broadcast of Elgar's Cello Concerto and thought it beautiful. One can imagine how the sheer poetry of the slow movement would have moved them deeply.

On Christmas Day 1933, Elgar wrote a long letter to Delius from a nursing home in

Worcester where he was being treated for sciatica but was also by then terminally ill with inoperable cancer. Unrealistically, Delius was planning a visit to London in the following spring and a further meeting was spoken of. Elgar touchingly referred to his visit to Grez as a vivid memory and one of highlights of his year. The final piece of correspondence is a letter from Delius in early January 1934 in which he mentions playing gramophone records of the *Nursery Suite,* a new discovery for him and one which he found charming, singling out for praise the first movement 'Aubade' as 'a gem'.

The late flowering friendship between two of England's greatest composers is as remarkable and touching as it is unexpected, especially given the potentially prickly nature of both men. I'm sure that Elgar's admiration for Delius's music – especially what he referred to as the poetic nature of it – was more widespread and heartfelt than any reciprocal appreciation from his new-found friend could ever be. But Delius was never insincere in saying what he thought, and he obviously genuinely admired the *Introduction and Allegro* and *Falstaff,* probably other Elgar masterpieces if he'd come to know them better. True, he was scathing about *Gerontius* but that's hardly surprising given his lifelong, aggressive, atheism.

Both composers had a hard start in their profession, both having to make their own way by unorthodox directions, outside the bounds of the musical establishment. Perhaps it was that above all that finally led them to an instinctive realisation of at least some common ground and to reach out, despite their very different backgrounds and achievements, in such a poignant way.

*Paul Guinery studied piano at the Royal College of Music, gaining an ARCM and winning the accompanist's Prize (adjudicated by Gerald Moore); he was also a répétiteur for the RCM Opera School. He subsequently took a degree in modern languages at Oxford. Paul performs regularly, either as a piano soloist or in chamber music. He has just recorded his third CD of light-music piano solos, to be released in May on EM Records.*

*A former vice-chairman of the Delius Society, Paul was commissioned to record the CD* Delius and his Circle*. He's the co-author, with Lyndon Jenkins, of a photographic study of visitors to Delius's home in France; and, with Martin Lee-Browne, Delius and his Music in which he broke new ground in offering detailed analyses of the composer's complete works. He is currently Chairman of the Delius Trust.*

*For many years Paul was a staff announcer and presenter for the BBC, working latterly for Radio 3. He is still on the air as a newsreader.*



# Elgar's Dorabella: An Enigma of Musical Biography

**Maddy Tongue**

> Dear Miss Penny: (That's not right)
> Dear Miss Dorabella, (That's feeble)
> My dear Dorabella (pish! very ordinary)
> Now for it - My dear & adorable Dorabellissima, (That will do)
> Once more, My very or most dear & most or very adorable
> Dorabellissima!
>
> (Letter from Edward Elgar to Dora Penny, October 1902, original emphasis)

On 6 December 1895 Edward Elgar met Dora Penny on Wolverhampton Station. It was their first meeting. Elgar and his wife were coming to lunch with the Pennys and Dora was there with her stepmother, a close friend of Elgar's wife, Alice. The two ladies had much to talk about so Dora was left to entertain Elgar and she found him informal, easy going and full of fun. He tried out the piano in the drawing room, was excited that their house was close to the football ground and together they tried to mend a broken chair. Out of the informality of that day arose a friendship of some significance that lasted for nearly twenty years. Dora was 21, Elgar was 38.

**The Elgars, 1892**

Elgar had married Caroline Alice Roberts in 1889. She was nine years older than her husband and described as 'short, dumpy and pleasant looking rather than attractive'.[1] Alice was the daughter of a distinguished Major-General: her outlook, manners and expectations were fashioned by her place in

1 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32.

society. She had published two novels before her marriage and written poetry, some of which Elgar later set to music.

In her novel *Marchcroft Manor* Alice may have set out what she considered to be the essential characteristics of a wife, which she allegedly displayed in her own marriage: an 'unwavering reliance on the wisdom and purity of his [her husband's] intentions, ever re-established in times of trial or depression...'.[2] By marrying Elgar, she gave up her own ambitions to be a writer and devoted herself to promoting his musical ambitions. There had been opposition to the marriage: her aunt, appalled that Alice was marrying someone of a lower social class and a Catholic, disinherited her. But Alice was determined. Both her parents were dead and she, in spite of marrying a struggling music teacher with a background in trade, never doubted that he would be successful, and her unwavering devotion to him and his music was paramount.

By 1895, Alice was approaching 50. She perhaps recognised that there were many aspects of her husband's life that she could not provide. Elgar was still full of youthful vigour and enthusiasms. He loved walking in the Malvern Hills, going on long bicycle rides, flying kites and attending football matches. All these outdoor energetic activities he so enjoyed were not something in which she participated, so Alice actively encouraged friendships with younger women, knowing that, as the Elgar scholar Jerrold Northrop Moore writes, 'whatever parts the other women might play or seek to play, when it came to the music only Alice was of final importance'.[3] Nevertheless, close friendships with other women were always going to be problematical.

The Dora Penny diaries in existence cover the years 1896 to 1913. She records the engagements of the day, the prevailing weather, and virtually nothing of her personal feelings. They reflect the life she led as the daughter of a Church of England cleric, attending to the various parish duties of Mission Meetings, the Mothers' Union, Sunday School, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, plus all the visiting and entertaining involved in such a life; not always something she relished. A typical diary entry reads: '11 March 1896. Went to deadly dull At Home in the afternoon and a still more d.d. one in the evening. A few spots of rain'.[4] She was 22.

Little wonder that when Elgar entered her life with his charm, his jokes, his music and his love of the outdoors he must have filled it with a vigorous masculinity lacking in the decorous rounds of parish duties. Her familiarity with, and love of, music gave her an immediate rapport with Elgar. She could read scores easily and so was able to turn pages of manuscript for him as he played the piano. Singing was important to her: she had regular singing lessons, would perform at various local functions, and she sang with the Wolverhampton Choral Society every season for eighteen years. Dora also displayed enough initiative and ability to found and conduct the Wolverhampton Amateur String Band in 1903.

**Dora**

Dora enjoyed Elgar's company. He made her laugh, and at meals with the Elgars she was often in danger of choking from the hilarity and laughter that they enjoyed, which Alice seems to have regarded as somewhat unseemly.[5] In time Alice asked Dora to help compile the scrapbooks, and so with a feeling of importance she became 'Keeper of the Archives', a task that kept her in close contact with both Elgars, and continued for nearly fifteen years.[6]

Elgar burst into Dora's life quite unexpectedly and she soon found herself caught up in the Elgars' lives. It was inevitable they might meet occasionally as Dora's stepmother and Alice maintained their friendship. But it was soon plain that Elgar began to value Dora's company, and her visits to his home became more frequent, and often at his request. He would write... and she would come. She brought youth and a carefree outlook, unconcerned with the stifling formalities of the time. If Elgar suddenly decided to go for a bicycle ride she was willing, and together they walked, rode, and enjoyed the fun of what he called 'japes'. She admired him and was in awe of his musical abilities, and she would sit with him at the piano turning pages and listening to his new compositions, and there would be more laughter.

Elgar was an attractive man, at ease in the company of women, and expressed himself in a fulsome, emotive way that could well be misconstrued. He was soon calling her Dorabella. 'Oh! So it has got to that, has it?' said her stepmother.[7] Elgar explained 'That's a quotation from Mozart's *Cosi fan Tutte*, don't you know it?' Dora had the idea of calling him 'Your Excellency'. Alice approved of Dora's name for Elgar and in her letters to Dora he became H[is] E[excellency]. Dora meanwhile always referred to Alice Elgar as 'The Lady'. It was a title that officially came her way in 1904 when Elgar was knighted and Alice might well have felt restored to her own class in society.

Dora's account of their relationship in *Edward Elgar: Memories of a Variation* (first published in 1937 under her married name of Powell) has been an important source for

2 C. A. Roberts, *Marchcroft Manor* (Remington, 1882) Vol. II, 280.

3 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 241.

4 Dora Powell, *Unpublished Diary* 1896, Royal College of Music.

5 Mrs Richard Powell, (formerly Dora Penny), *Edward Elgar: Memories of a Variation* (Oxford University Press, 1947), 26

6 Ibid, 43

7 Ibid, 11.

all biographers of Elgar, as she writes of concerts, compositions and the frustrations of struggling for recognition, as well as the more intimate aspects of life in the Elgar household. Elgar's susceptibility to attractive women throughout his life was well known. How far these relationships went has been an aspect of his life somewhat sidelined in biographies and subsequent accounts from his friends, although there is no evidence that any were more than Platonic. But these relationships sustained and nourished Elgar and were of great importance to him.

He offered Dora male friendship, a rare commodity for her at the time, and he seemed genuinely interested in her and her life. The fact that he was married and that his wife condoned, in fact at times encouraged, the relationship gave each of them a freedom to conduct their meetings without guilt or concern for gossip and innuendo. His letters to Dora and his reported conversations with her become increasingly more personal. Dora recalls long walks and rambles together with endless talk, sometimes serious but often amusing, and one special evening when, after dinner at the suggestion of Alice, they went out to the woods behind the house and sat as the sky darkened, and he described to her the sounds and habits of the creatures around.[8] Later in life she told her son that their behaviour together was apt to be more demonstrative than she cared to admit in her book.[9] How she interpreted his interest in her is open to considerable speculation. Her feelings, however turbulent and aroused, are not recorded in her memoir, but she gives a glimpse of what she felt. 'How terribly difficult to return to normal life and occupations after one of those visits. Of course I had to tell my people something of what I had heard and done but one had to be very careful'.[10] None of her letters to him have survived.

On 21 October 1898 Elgar started to improvise on the piano. His wife commented on the tune he was playing and asked what it was. 'Nothing', he replied, 'but something might be made of it'.[11] He began to play around with the tune whilst thinking of some of his musical friends, how one of them ran his fingers over the piano to warm up before starting to play, how another played the cello. He wondered if the personality of someone could be 'evoked so clearly that he would be recognised directly from the music'.[12] So out of the original tune he had been playing to Alice came the theme Elgar used for the set of variations for orchestra which became known as the *Enigma Variations*. By making modifications to the tune, time and harmony of the theme so that in each variation it appears in a new but recognisable form, Elgar represented his friends in a musical form.

8 Ibid, 30.

9 Powell, *Memories of a Variation,* Revised and edited by Claud Powell (London: Scolar Press, 1994), 6.

10 Powell, 1947, op. cit., 31.

11 Cited in Moore, op. cit., 249. Many sources provide this episode. Most likely to originate from Elgar himself in conversation with Basil Maine in 1931-2. Basil Maine, *Elgar: His Life and Works,* 2 Volumes, Vol. II, (London, G. Bell & Sons Ltd, 1933), 101.

12 Moore, op. cit., 250.



Dora became Variation No. X, 'Dorabella: Intermezzo'.[13]

On 1 November 1898 he played Dora the *Variations* on the piano for the first time. Her diary on that day merely relates: '… concert Worcester 8. back 11.15. Bed'.[14] Whereas her recollections tell of an excitement and an air of urgency in Elgar, how all day he was in high spirits and when they returned home he 'fled upstairs to the study, two steps at a time - I after him, The Lady following at a more sedate pace'. Dora found the first piece dedicated to his wife 'serene and lovely - and in some curious way *like* her'.[15] She got a surprise when she turned the page and saw 'No. X, Dorabella'. She was overwhelmed and sat in silence finding it difficult to comment afterwards, her mind in a 'whirl of pleasure, pride, and almost shame that he should have written anything so lovely about *me*'.[16] It is possible she felt ill at ease that his pet name for her and her friendship with him would henceforth be in the public arena. The public would be avid to know the identity of Dorabella, who she was, why she had been included, whether she was pretty or plain, whether she was a relation, and furthermore the piece would be played in London, Germany and subsequently all over the world. After all the emotional excitement of hearing her own variation her diary for the following day drily states: '2 November 1898. Beastly, windy and wet. Did nothing particular before lunch. Mr Elgar came as far as Worcester with me. Home 6.45'.[17]

Did Dora fail to recognise on that first occasion that Elgar had incorporated into the music her slight stammer? Her variation opens with a woodwind phrase of four notes to which one can say her nickname Dorabella, and in performance the slight elongation of the first note alerts the listener to her speech impediment. Elgar was gently teasing her, not obviously, but in a subtle way that mostly seems to emphasize how well he knew her ways.

Whether the theme arose spontaneously that evening when he played to Alice or whether, as Julian Rushton suggests more likely, it was a tune that had been in his head for some time, it gave Elgar the inspiration for the set of variations, each of which is named after a friend.[18] Moreover, writes Rushton, without the musical sensitivity of Alice the piece might have faded away. 'Elgar may have turned to other females for entertainment, even for love, but his love for Alice was coupled with respect for her artistic sensibility'.[19] Rushton also recounts how at the time of the first performance Elgar muddied the

13 *Intermezzo*: By the 19th century the word had come to be applied in the same sense as interlude; piece of music played between other parts. Michael Kennedy, *Oxford Dictionary of Music,* Revised Edition (Oxford University Press, 1999).

14 Powell, Diary 1898.

15 Powell, 1947, op. cit., 12.

16 Ibid. 13.

17 Powell, Diary 1898.

18 Julian Rushton, *Elgar: 'Enigma' Variations* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

19 Ibid: 12.

interpretative waters by including the word 'Enigma' in his public programme...[which] spoke for the first time of the enigma as such, ...[and makes reference] to another and larger theme.[20]

When Elgar composed the portraits of his friends he wrote on the score, 'Dedicated to my friends pictured within'. In a letter to his friend A. J. Jaeger, he wrote:

> I've written the variations each one to represent the mood of the 'party' – I've liked to imagine the 'party' writing the var[iation] him (him or her) self and have written what I think they wd. have written – it's a quaint idea & the result is amusing to those behind the scenes & won't affect the hearer who 'nose nuffin'.[21]

Knowing his intentions adds a dimension to the music, and much has been written about the unknown people he chose to include. He was challenging the concept of displaying personality in music, possibly somewhat easier in the case of those friends included who were musicians. 'In many cases, however, the portraiture was astonishingly accurate and the translation of physical or mental characteristics into musical terms wonderfully ingenious'.[22]

Critics reviewing the 'Dorabella *Intermezzo*' have variously described it as 'a recognisable female subject... a dainty, sinuous melody of the most winsome charm',[23] whilst Donald Tovey called it 'the most romantic thing in the [whole] work'. Basil Maine declared it 'lighthearted and irresponsible'.[24] Diana McVeagh, writing in 1955, picks out one or two variations including 'Dorabella' which 'leave one in no doubt as to how Elgar felt about the characters'.[25] Yet some of those who knew Dora as a rather obstinate young women did not hear her in Variation X.[26] What is important is that the variation is how Elgar saw her, not how her friends saw her. She is seen through his perceptions of her, coloured, as they no doubt were, by the nature of their relationship. It is a possibility that the variation depicts their intertwined relationship rather than Dora alone. The experience of hearing the music he wrote for her reveals such possibilities.

Into the silence left at the end of the noble and grand No IX 'Nimrod' variation[27] comes the wistful fluttering sound of the violins followed immediately by Dorabella's name called tentatively with a childlike innocence, high on the woodwind. A poignant contrasting tune begins lower down, played by a solo viola, which builds up somewhat hopefully but does not come to anything. This is repeated more urgently and again seems incomplete. An agitated swirling middle section interposes and the music becomes busy and unsure before falling back and returning to the fluttering violins and the hesitancy of the 'Dorabella' phrase which, by now, seems to have developed a yearning edge to it, a mild melancholy of what might have been. There is an echo once more of the romantic theme, more muted but still present, until both fade away. The evidence may be slight yet significant. 'The Variations', wrote Elgar, 'are not all "portraits"; some represent only a mood, while others recall an incident known only to two persons'.[28] The 'Dorabella Variation' is Elgar's sole description of Dora expressed in the only way he knew how, and with it he breathes life into a character known only on the written page.

The *Variations* were first performed on 19 June 1899 in London, conducted by Hans Richter, and were a great success. It represented a defining moment in the composer's life and put Elgar on the European musical map. Increasingly his music was performed and his time taken up with rehearsals and concerts plus demands for further works. Yet still Dora featured in his life. On 16 June 1902 she was summoned by 'The Lady', who was ill, to come to Malvern to keep Elgar 'cheerful'.[29] Once more they went for bicycle rides, sat by the Severn and listened to music, until Alice was well again. In such ways Dora's twenties and thirties were taken up with Elgar during the years that he became a more public figure.

One of her most interesting visits occurred In November 1905 when Dora went down to the Elgars in Hereford for a few days. Alice met her in the hall and stated that Elgar was very busy so her visit would be dull. Dora got the impression Alice would have been relieved if she had then left, a rare reference to the feelings aroused in Alice as she watched the younger woman bring pleasure into her husband's life. But Dora stayed. Elgar was working and preoccupied. Even at dinner when he finally appeared he was dour and uncommunicative. For some reason at dessert he suddenly hit Dora's hand 'quite sharply', got up, left the room and went to his study. So began what Dora called 'One of the most remarkable evenings I have ever spent'. She and Alice sat by the fire talking, reading and listening to the sounds from the study indicating that Elgar was composing. Neither lady went to bed. By 2.30 Elgar had already joined them and played through that evening's work, when Alice suggested they all retire to bed. As Dora got up Elgar said 'Oh, do stop and talk to me, Dorabella…'. The ensuing conversation (as remembered and related by Dora) might have left her even more concerned and unsettled:

20 Ibid, 16.

21 Moore, op. cit., 253.

22 Rosa Burley and Frank C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar: the record of a friendship* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 117.

23 Ernest Newman cited in Rushton, op. cit., 48.

24 Maine, op. cit., 111.

25 Diana McVeagh, *Elgar the Music Maker* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1955), 46.

26 Francis Sparshott, *Portraits in Music—A Case-Study: Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 243.

27 Variation No IX *Nimrod* depicts A. J. Jaegar, Publishing Manager at Novello, close friend and supporter of Elgar and his music. This piece has since been played regularly at solemn ceremonial occasions.

28 Edward Elgar, Descriptive notes written by the composer for production with the pianola rolls, (no date) reproduced in *My Friends Pictured Within* (London: Novello & Co., 1949).

29 Powell, 1947, op. cit., 50.

> Don't you [Dora] dare to bring any dingy, smoky frocks when you come to stay with me, because I won't stand it - and you only looked at me twice during dinner!
>
> Twice, was it? Well, I was terrified! I simply daren't look at you for fear of putting you off your stroke or something'
>
> At first I hoped you wouldn't and then as dinner went on, I hoped you would. Finally I went away; you'd won, and that is why I hit your hand so hard. Did it hurt? I meant it to
>
> He picked up my hand and inspected it.[30]

The next day Alice took Dora out of the house on a constant round of social calls and the following day Dora left.[31]

Dora makes no reference in her own book to any sudden break in their friendship, but by 1912 she was seeing the Elgars less often and mostly at concerts of his work, which she continued to attend. It has been intimated by some that in 1912 Elgar became so 'irritated by the suggestion from Dora that the "hidden theme" in the *Variation*s might be "Auld Lang Syne" that he ended their friendship'.[32] Moore relates a similar story which was conveyed to him by Dora in a conversation of July 1960.[33] The mystery of the 'hidden theme' has never been answered conclusively though many have attempted a solution. Rushton bluntly states that the Elgars eventually 'dropped' Dora from their circle of friends.[34] More likely other factors played their part. The pressures fame had brought Elgar took up his time and his energies. He was often depressed and irritable and he had a new muse in his life, Lady Stuart Wortley. She was the third daughter of the Pre-Raphaelite artist John Millais and the wife of the conservative MP for Sheffield. Born in 1862, just five years younger than Elgar, she was described as a 'brilliant and sympathetic woman with a fine understanding of artists'.[35] As her first name was also Alice, Elgar chose to call her 'Windflower' and she became a significant friend, companion and possibly more although there is again no evidence for this. More sophisticated and worldly than Dora, Windflower received the same demands from Elgar for attention, support and love, which she returned. Little wonder that Dora faded from his life.

Dora's life was also changing: she must have been seeing Robert Powell by then, so she had her own preoccupations to keep her away. Her engagement to Robert Powell was announced in the *Morning Post* on 28 October 1913 and they married in January 1914 when Dora was forty. For Dora the relationship with Elgar had filled her life for nearly twenty years. By her inclusion in the *Variations* her name and the enigma of her

30 Ibid, 73.

31 Moore, op. cit., 477.

32 Kennedy, op. cit., 134.

33 Moore, op. cit., 637.

34 Rushton, op. cit., 48.

35 Moore, op. cit, 375.



personality has intrigued audiences around the world ever since. Elgar died in 1934. In 1937 Dora published an account of her friendship with Elgar and was subsequently in demand to give lectures and readings. She died in 1964.

For Elgar, Dora provided youth, energy, gaiety and uncritical support. She was the first of his romances since his marriage. From 'Miss Penny' she became for him 'my adorable Dorabelissima'. Words and music leave clues but also much unsaid. Possibly it was a love affair that went further than intimate letters and a desire to be in the company of the other. Or perhaps just an innocent '*intermezzo*' at a time when Elgar was insecure about his music, his acceptance by society and his inability to earn an adequate income for his wife, and Dora was of an age when his presence flattered and beguiled her and provided all that her provincial rectory life lacked. Whatever it was it supplied an element their lives lacked: fun, charm, yearning and something else that was never properly articulated by either of them, but possibly only expressed in the music Elgar wrote in Variation X – 'Dorabella: Intermezzo'.

*Maddy Tongue has had a lifelong involvement in dance. Following early ballet classes she trained in modern dance with the Czech dancer Helen Lewis and performed in dance, drama and opera productions with Cambridge Modern Ballet and The Belfast Modern Dance Group. From 2005 she worked for many years as Movement Director of Yeats dramas for the Yeats International Summer School in Sligo. Maddy writes about dance and is currently living and teaching dance in Cambridge. She is the author of 'Helen Lewis, Shadows Behind the Dance'.*

# The Importance of Elgar

**Andrew Neill**

This and a number of future issues of the *Journal* will publish a series of essays submitted under the heading *The Importance of Elgar*, thereby commemorating the 90th anniversary of his death. Readers may well ask why this commemoration now in 2024 rather than awaiting the centenary in 2034. There are several reasons for this, one of which is that your editorial team is hardly likely to be in place in 2034 and, furthermore, we wanted to invite the thoughts of many current practitioners, observers, writers and commentators on Elgar and his music whom we invited to contribute. Happily we have been thrilled and somewhat daunted by the number of essays we have received - so far!

The first of these essays appear in this edition and, in view of the response to this request, their publication is likely to continue well into 2025 and even beyond. The essays we have received so far are of great variety, from writers overseas as well as nearer home. They range from those who express their deep love for Elgar's music to those who analyse it in a way that throws a new light on something that may be very familiar. Depending on the cost of such an enterprise we hope that a number of these essays may be published in a book as part of the celebrations for the 75th anniversary of the founding of our Society in 1951.

Not everyone we approached felt able to say anything more about a subject they had written or spoken about over many years and this we respect. Christopher Bishop, EMI's great recording producer wrote saying that 'I really feel I have said it all. I have loved Elgar ever since I was able to wind my grandfather's gramophone (in about 1935) and enjoy his large collection of the Master's recordings'. Christopher's valuable and enchanting interview with Peter Newble can be seen through the Society's website and is more than a sufficient alternative to anything he might have written. We can only express our gratitude to Christopher for his outstanding work in the recording studio, with the Philharmonia Orchestra and, for a time, even considering writing an essay for us.

We begin with Scott Dickinson's expression of love and understanding of the music in question and his wonderful picture of youthful music-making, whilst demonstrating the importance and benefits of musical education. In contrast, our politicians (of all political colours) seem to have come to the bizarre conclusion that 'classical music' is *elitist*. That a substantial number of the great composers were born into penury or at least into modest circumstances which meant they had to struggle to be heard let alone survive seems to be ignored or rather misunderstood. Classifying Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Janáček, Mahler, Wagner and Elgar (for example) as composing elitist music is, of course, ridiculous: they had, by their own genius, to rise sufficiently high even to recognise a silver spoon! Adrian Partington's essay combines a thought-provoking critique of musical education in Britain today with an expression of love for Elgar's music and an explanation as to why Elgar may not have been important musically. I would not argue with this for Elgar was a 'one off' but, on the other hand, I would argue that historically he is one of Britain's most important musicians for what he achieved, how he achieved it and in his lasting reputation. Frank Schuster, Elgar's friend, supporter and benefactor, summed up Elgar's music by stating that he 'was worthy to rank with the great masters'.

Eleanor Roberts writes in her essay about Elgar's relationship with Manchester's Hallé orchestra. The London Symphony Orchestra and the Hallé were the most important orchestras to Elgar, and it is regrettable that he made no recordings with the latter great band. Miss Roberts mentions that *King Olaf* was performed by the Hallé once only, in 1898. Now there is a challenge: perhaps a second performance could be organised by the time we commemorate the 95th anniversary of Elgar's death!

Few composers, let alone British ones, have had more written about them than Elgar. Much of his life has been studied in detail as has, of course, his music. What it means and meant to many can be observed in the final moments of the famous BBC Monitor portrait of Sir John Barbirolli. It was his choice to end the film with the conclusion of Elgar's E Flat Symphony and it is overwhelmingly evident what the music meant to one of Elgar's greatest interpreters.

The fast-changing world in which we try to survive may well have made journals like this obsolete by 2034. As the members of your editorial team still prefer reading printed material, we feel that the written word should have, if not 'the last word', at least an attempt at its preservation and its acknowledgement of this anniversary. Happily, others share this commitment, as this *Journal* demonstrates.

We hope and trust our members and readers of what follows over the next year or so find this series of essays stimulating and interesting. This particular journey begins here.

## *Thoughts on 'The Importance of Elgar'*

**Scott Dickinson**

'Let's start with the Elgar, please', and with a particularly youthful flourish of E flat major, off we all head into the tumultuously sun-soaked pleasure that is the *In the South* Overture. The venue is the sports hall of Strathallan School, Perthshire, the conductor Martyn Brabbins and the date 8 July 2023; the much anticipated first day of the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland's summer course.

I am lucky enough to witness this encounter, this challenging yet joyous rite of passage, up close. As Elgar's love of the Mediterranean spread its infectious smile over the assembled company, we tutors caught each other's eyes with irrepressible grins of pleasure: what greater privilege could there be than to be present at the very moment when the next generation experiences the wonder of being right in the living, beating heart of this expression? So refreshingly far away from any complicating connection with imperialism or grandeur this is, quite simply, music of the most potent ardour, the most explosive description imaginable of living life to the full, the vivacity of Italy as seen through the eyes of an Edwardian English tourist - with nostalgia, poignancy, expectation and fulfilment coupled with that masterful paradox where simplicity and complexity collide: perhaps only a composer as self-taught as Elgar could muster this so tellingly.

Looking around the room, it is so obvious that these lucky young people are finding deep channels of connection with each other, with the past, with the inspiring presence of Martyn Brabbins, with the notion of travel, and certainly with their own futures, through the heart, mind and formidable technical challenges of Sir Edward Elgar. It isn't long before the cries of incredulity - cellists reaching for top E flats, 'let's try figure 26 slowly and calmly' - are replaced by an understanding and idealism that these demands are driven by a bigger picture: the huge sweep of passion that propels the overture's narrative. Almost all is forgiven when the flow is this strong, the journey this vibrant.

It is ever thus, playing Elgar: crazily demanding yet immensely fulfilling. Besides the regular joy we at the BBCSSO have of performing and recording Elgar under the consummate understanding of Martyn Brabbins, I was lucky enough to be part of several extremely meaningful (not that Elgar 2 ever couldn't be!) encounters with the Second Symphony last Spring from two other enormously passionate Elgarians: Ryan Wigglesworth and the BBCSSO in the claustrophobic intensity of City Halls Glasgow, the majestic Music Hall Aberdeen and on BBC Radio 3, and John Wilson and his Sinfonia of London in Snape Maltings (could there be a more perfect acoustic for this piece?) and on Marquee TV. The overridingly generous spirit of the first movement, the heart-breaking pathos with which the second unfolds, the way the wild energy of the *scherzo* transitions (figure 118) to a melody of questioning beauty which then turns on itself so terrifyingly (figure 120), and the resolution and final calm of the *Finale* add up, of course, to one of the greatest and most complete journeys of the orchestral canon. In this age of instant gratification, what could be more important than one hour's travel through hopes and fears, with every emotion from paranoia to heart stopping beauty: the very essence of what it is to be human, surely?

Later in July 2023, Martyn's instinctive, thoughtful and hugely emotional sweep couples with the passion of youth to make Elgar's masterpiece the centrepiece and highlight of the NYOS concerts: an orchestra member reports afterwards that they are now listening to *In the South* regularly 'to restore happiness'. What better rallying cry could there be for every one of us to do everything we possibly can to ensure that no generation misses out on the sense of communal wonder that this Importance of Elgar can bring?

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*He has appeared with Karen Cargill, Ivry Gitlis, Steven Isserlis, the Brodsky, Chilingirian, Elias, Maxwell, Navarra and Royal Quartets, regularly with the Hebrides, Nash, Wigmore Soloists and Red Note Ensembles and as guest principal viola with numerous orchestras including the Australian Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, London Philharmonic, London Symphony, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Sinfonia of London, Swedish Radio Symphony, the John Wilson Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and the World Orchestra for Peace.*

*For five years he was a member of the Leopold String Trio, performing worldwide ( including Carnegie Hall, New York, Musikverein, Vienna , on CD and frequently at the Wigmore Hall, London ) and since 2002 he has been principal viola of the BBCSSO, with whom he has also regularly appeared as soloist, including performances of Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante to celebrate Donald Runnicles's 60th birthday and Jubilus by Jonathan Harvey on CD which was nominated for a Gramophone award. Recent projects include an acclaimed solo video for Hebrides Ensemble's 'Inner Hebrides' series and a number of commissions of duos - for two violas with his BBCSSO desk partner Andrew Berridge and for flute and viola with his wife Susan Frank. Scott loves people, words and wildernesses and is passionate about the benefits of music in all areas of society. He teaches at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and is an Artistic Advisor to the Tunnell Trust for Young Musicians.*

## *The Importance of Elgar*

**Adrian Partington**

There are several ways in which this title could be interpreted . I am not an academic, but after over 50 years of performing Elgar's music, and for almost as many years reading about the man and his music, I can offer a few thoughts. (These may of course be disputed by people better qualified than I.)

Elgar was a famous national figure in the first few decades of the twentieth century: he received every honour which the nation was able to bestow on him; his music was played everywhere from the Royal Albert Hall to the humblest dwelling where there was a piano; the 'man in the street' knew Elgar's name and could whistle one or two of his tunes. He was also a part of that subjectively entitled phenomenon known as the 'English Musical Renaissance', which was much discussed in the twentieth century, when musical historians believed that nothing had happened in British musical life since the seventeenth century. This interpretation is now viewed as too glib; there were of many developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Parry and Stanford, for example, were significant national composers well before Elgar's name was known.

Apart from Elgar's public achievements in the years before the First World War, and apart from the large body of music that he left, much of which is still enjoyed today, Elgar was not a figure of great *historical* importance. He did not start a musical movement, nor did he develop one. His brief but spectacular career was brought to a sudden halt by the Great War. Public taste moved away from Elgar and other 'late Romantic' composers as a result of this conflict, and its many social and economic consequences. (Elgar's music was perceived after 1918 as being part of the 'old order', which had caused so much suffering; people wanted something new, e.g. jazz.) Elgar was arguably the best of a group of British composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries whose art owed much to German 'Romantic' music; in Elgar's case, his debt was to Wagner, Brahms and Schumann. The music of his contemporaries, for example Parry and Stanford (the latter Irish by birth, but British by education and career), has fared less well than Elgar's because their musical personalities were not as strong.

Thus, Elgar's music is a final flowering of a nineteenth-century aesthetic; he had no significant musical successors; and, unlike Stanford and Parry, Elgar did not teach composition, or even involve himself in the world of musical education to any great extent, apart from an unsuccessful period as nominal Professor of Music at Birmingham University. It is thus arguable that *historically speaking*, Elgar is less important than both Stanford and Parry, whose pupils and 'grand-pupils' dominated British musical life for the rest of the twentieth century: Vaughan Williams, Holst and their many pupils.

Elgar was a wonderfully gifted composer whose music has brought pleasure to thousands of people over the past hundred years or more; but he finished an epoch and did not contribute to the flow of musical history. I contend therefore that Elgar is not a figure of historical importance compared to his younger contemporary Vaughan Williams or his near contemporaries in Europe, Debussy or Bartók, for example. The question is, does Elgar's music continue to give pleasure now?

There is no doubt that the UK has radically changed in the past decade or so, demographically, geopolitically, and culturally. Classical music has not fared well through these changes: national and private funding for most musical institutions has plummeted, audiences continue to decline in size, choirs are smaller, fewer children are learning to play musical instruments and so on. The decline in interest in 'Classical' music of course began in the 1960s with changes in education policy, which meant that fewer and fewer children were taught anything at all about such music. The prioritising of 'core' subjects and a change in emphasis towards popular music in the music curriculum have together accelerated to the point where there is now a national ignorance about Classical music which did not exist fifty years ago. Moreover, Classical music, because it is now appreciated by so few people has gained a reputation for being 'elitist', and it has become politically unimportant, so few people in authority are interested in speaking up for it. (I should add that private schools have continued to invest in Classical music, which has meant that although there are still plenty of young musicians seeking to enter the profession, they come from a smaller and smaller section of society. This has added to the atmosphere of 'elitism' which is one of Classical music's most obvious problems; and is ironic considering Elgar's own humble beginnings.)

As a result of the new ignorance, interest in Elgar has declined nationally to the point where he is not perceived as an important national figure; in fact, where people have actually heard of him, they may see him in the same way as, for example, Winston Churchill, i.e. a representative of an old white, Anglo-Saxon, male, imperialist culture. It is hard to deny that Elgar was such a representative, with his social climbing, his collecting of national honours, and his reactionary political views and snobbery. It is hard to defend Elgar in our current cultural climate on these grounds, a climate which has caused Elgar's most famous tune, the Trio of the first *Pomp and Circumstance March*, to be seen as a symbol of everything which the UK should not now be. (Possibly the tune in its choral version will be banned from the Last Night of the BBC Proms.)

I would thus argue that Elgar is no longer a person of any importance in the UK. Sadly, he has never been an important musical figure elsewhere. However, his music is still loved by many of that small proportion of our population who still have an interest in Classical music. It is up to us to continue to defend and promote the work of Elgar, otherwise in the future it may be forgotten.

I cannot see an end to the decline in the public funding of Classical music; the Arts Council of England has other priorities now. Similarly, I cannot see an end to falling attendances at concerts; and I cannot see a change in attitude of those who decide the nation's education policy. I cannot see a recovery in the fortunes of the traditional churches, the Anglican church in particular. (This matter may seem tangential to an essay

about Elgar, but I believe that the disappearance of church choirs and congregations has impacted greatly on British life: fewer and fewer people are involved in public music-making, that is to say hymn singing, now. And for many people in former times, singing in a church choir as a child was their introduction to becoming practical musicians, and their initiation into Classical music).

I cannot see an end to the view among the general public that Classical music is not for them (that is, if they even give the subject any thought). Appreciating Classical music requires a certain level of patience and knowledge. In recent years, the proliferation of electronic devices has provided too many easy alternatives to listening to any music which lasts longer than a few minutes; and to be blunt, most people's ability to concentrate has been seriously impaired. Thinking these depressing thoughts made me consider why I became interested in Elgar as a child, and why he has been a central figure in my life for over 50 years. I have come to the inescapable conclusion that it was because I had a privileged upbringing, not financially speaking, but culturally. My parents cared about the arts and considered them as important. Neither of them went to private schools and both were brought up in council houses. But Classical music was definitely part of their upbringing in the 1930s because of the prevailing cultural climate, not because their parents were musical.

It was thus my privilege to be born into an Elgar-loving household: my parents had met and courted in Malvern so, as young professional musicians, they could not escape the influence of Elgar who had died only a few years before their arrival. My father was a pianist and organist, and my mother was a violinist; as a duo, much of their repertoire was by Elgar. By the time I was born, they had settled in Nottingham, and my first clear musical memory was of being taken to hear the *Enigma Variations* in the Nottingham Albert Hall, played by, I think, the CBSO. I would have been five or six at the time (*c.*1964). I remember being overawed by the experience. My parents subsequently sent me to be a Chorister at Worcester Cathedral, partly because they were extremely impressed by the wonderful musicianship of the Cathedral's then Director of Music, Christopher Robinson, and partly because they were in love with 'Elgar Country', having enjoyed the best times of their lives there. As a Chorister, I had a full diet of Elgar experiences, from singing *The Spirit of the Lord* on a televised 'Songs of Praise' broadcast in 1968 to singing on an LP recording of Elgar's Church Music in 1969, which may have been the first of its kind, and is certainly still available, 50 years later. I heard my first *Gerontius* at the 1969 Three Choirs Festival, which fascinated me, partly because the solo tenor lost his voice about halfway through the performance.

With a solid Elgarian background from early childhood, my understanding of, and love for, Elgar's music has developed and intensified over the succeeding decades to a point where I feel very comfortable performing any of his music. Since returning to the world of the Three Choirs Festival as Director of Music at Gloucester Cathedral in 2008, I have enjoyed the enormous privilege of directing most of Elgar's large-scale works with world-class orchestras: the concertos, the overtures, and of course the oratorios: I



conducted my third *Apostles* in 2023 and will conduct my fourth *Kingdom* on the last night of the 2024 Three Choirs Festival at Worcester. I have ten performances of *The Dream of Gerontius* under my belt now, too. Elgar's music is important to me because, as I have demonstrated, I grew up with it; it is like a member of my family, and I love it as such. The most pervading characteristic in his music is its nostalgia. I think he *knew* he was at the end of a musical era and regretted the fact, hence the deliberate nostalgia in the music.

It is more difficult to define precisely what I enjoy about Elgar's music, aside from its overwhelming sense of nostalgia. The only way I can briefly explain my love for the music is that there are aspects of Elgar's personality in it: his world view, his self-doubt, his humour, his generosity, his anxiety, his narcissism, and his S*ehnsucht* (yearning), all of which I feel accord strongly with my own personality. (I think all musicians are narcissistic to a greater or lesser extent!) In addition, I have become increasingly aware of the sheer professionalism of the music, the skill in its compilation; the consistent idiomatic writing for all instruments; the wonderful and inventive harmonic sense; and the most wonderful tunes, tunes which would 'knock 'em flat' to quote his promise about the tune of the Trio of *Pomp and Circumstance March* No.1.

Elgar was a thoroughly practical musician and composer; a man of the people despite his pretensions; and an obviously flawed human being struggling to make sense of the world. These are the reasons which make his music important to me.

*Adrian Partington has been Director of Music at Gloucester Cathedral since January 2008. During his years there, he has introduced Girl Choristers to the Cathedral Choir, has taken the choir to sing overseas several times and has made several CDs, most recently a disc of music by the international clarinettist Emma Johnson. In May 2019, he took the Choristers to sing with the Berlin Philharmonic at the Philharmonie in Berlin.*

*He has also been Conductor of the BBC National Chorus of Wales since 1999. Since then he has conducted or prepared that chorus for well over a hundred broadcast concerts,( including over forty BBC Proms). The chorus has made about twenty CDs, two of which have been nominated for Grammy awards. Adrian has recently conducted the BBCNOW and NCW in three CDs, including Grace Williams's masterpiece, the Missa Cambrensis, in January 2024. He has directed five Gloucester Three Choirs Festivals, in which he has conducted the Philharmonia, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and BBCNOW in many of the great choral-orchestral classics by Beethoven, Berlioz, Elgar and Mahler, as well as symphonies and concertos and much contemporary music.*

*Adrian was educated at the Royal College of Music and King's College Cambridge, where he was the Organ Scholar. He is still active as an organist, having recently played in Hungary, Japan and Russia (before the war). He has made a dozen solo CDs, and been the soloist at the BBC Proms, in 2018.*

## *The Hallé and Elgar*

**Eleanor Roberts**

There are few composers as closely associated with the Hallé as Sir Edward Elgar. Not only was he was President of the Hallé Concerts Society from 1930 until his death, he conducted the orchestra a number of times, notably stepping into the breach for the Hallé's opening concert in the 1914-15 season in the wake of Michael Balling's absence.[1] In the year of his 70th Birthday, Elgar chose to conduct the Hallé on 20 January 1926, in a concert of his own music: *In the South, Froissart, Sea Pictures, Enigma Variations* and the Violin Concerto, for which Adolph Brodsky came out of retirement as soloist. In the Manchester Guardian Samuel Langford wrote: 'Sir Edward Elgar himself seemed more inclined to indulge the orchestra than to rule it, as though he himself was savouring the delight of hearing the most lovely touches of the music given leisurely on beautiful instruments by first-rate players'.

Sir Charles Halle's before the Orchestra in 1895. Hallé's second wife, the violinist Wima Norman-Neruda stands, as soloist, in front of the first violins.

1 Michael Balling (1866-1925) was the Hallé's conductor from October 1912 until the outbreak of war in September 1914. A German by birth he was in Bavaria at the time but, because he was a British citizen, he was interned and stayed in Germany until his death, eventually resuming conducting there.



The first work by Elgar to feature in Hallé concert programmes was *King Olaf*, on 1 December 1898[2]. (Not a work that the orchestra has performed since!). That concert was conducted by Sir Frederick Cowen, but it is with Dr Hans Richter that Elgar is most closely associated. Richter was an enthusiastic promoter of Elgar's works in all his concerts. The development of their resulting friendship is documented in a series of letters 1899-1913 that form part of the Richter-Loeb Archive.[3] They had come into contact initially through the Birmingham Triennial Music Festivals but it is unlikely they met until the London rehearsals of the *Enigma Variations* in June 1899.[4] Within his first season as Principal Conductor, Richter brought two works to Hallé audiences for the first time: *Sea Pictures* (18 January 1900) and *Enigma Variations* (8 February 1900). *Sea Pictures* was part of a concert conducted by Charles Villiers Stanford, but it was Elgar who conducted his own work. I am confident that was the first time he conducted the Hallé Orchestra, it certainly was the first time he did so in Manchester. Richter conducted the *Variations* and it was his championship that Elgar credited with making that work a success. The correspondence provides some fascinating insights into Elgar's music, the following are a few examples. In the first letter, dated 5 October 1899, the composer refers to his revised ending for his *Variations*:

> I am so very delighted to see that you are playing my Variations again: thank you many times for taking an interest in my work. Since you introduced the work in the spring, following the advice of my friends, and I think your own view, I have added to the Finale making a more symphonic movement of it* in place of the original abrupt ending. This will not entail any long rehearsal as many of your orchestra played the new ending at the Worcester Festival so that the orchestral parts are quite correct. I hope you may approve of the additional music which I feel is an improvement in form.
>
> *It only adds between 2 & 3 minutes to the length – not more.

In April 1901 Elgar refers to a new Overture:

> If you have not completed your programmes for next season would you keep a little 12 minutes for my overture: I have written it for the London Philharmonic[5] where it will be produced on June 20th – I shall conduct. The score is not yet ready or I wd [sic] send it to you, but I trust it not be long delayed. The work is not tragic at all – but extremely cheerful like a miserable unsuccessful man ought to write.

2 *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*, Op.30 (1896).

3 Also part of the Richter-Loeb Archive are the scores that Elgar gave to Richter, all of which contain affectionate personal dedications and signatures.

4 Fifield, Christopher, *True Artist and True Friend A Biography of Hans Richter* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993) 309.

5 Royal Philharmonic Society. The London Philharmonic Orchestra was not formed until 1932, 74 years after the Hallé.

In a later letter he added to his description 'here is nothing deep or melancholy – it is intended to be honest, healthy, humorous & strong but not vulgar: I hope I have not quite missed my aim & trust I may one day hear the overture under your conductorship – I need not tell you what a joy that would be'.

The work was the *Cockaigne Overture* and Richter duly included it in his Manchester Concerts during the 1901-02 season, receiving its Manchester premiere on 24 October 1901. A letter dated from Liverpool on 25 October reveals that Elgar had his wish, he had attended the concert in Manchester:

> The performances last night were truly magnificent – the Coriolan was sublime. My own overture was most exhilarating & I was glad indeed to hear it under your sympathetic & most masterly direction – but it has taught me that I am not satisfied with my music & must do or rather try to do something better and nobler. I hope the symphony I am trying to write will answer these higher ideals & if I find I am more satisfied with it than my present composition I shall hope to be allowed to dedicate it to my honoured friend Hans Richter: but I have much to do to it yet.

This is of course an early reference to the Symphony in A flat that was indeed dedicated to Richter 'True Artist and True Friend' and received its world premiere in Manchester on 3 December 1908 when Richter conducted the Hallé. In a letter dated 14 December 1908 Elgar thanked Richter for his 'splendid reading' before going on to say:

> I have been through the parts & have put the very few minor points right only one note have I altered & that is in the Timpani 5th bar after 136 – this bar should be a rest and so the note B is gone. Please insist that from four bars after 29 to 31 and from 53 to the end of the movement must be played in a veiled, mysterious way – a sort of echo: there is only one *f* (in the strings) for a moment throughout these two sections.

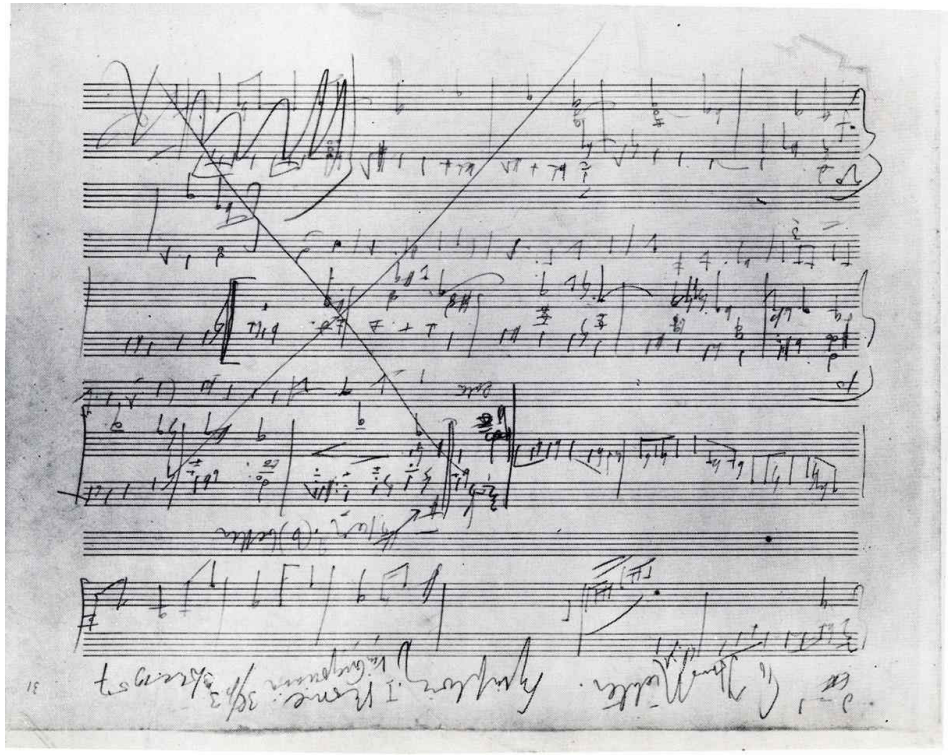
The early decision to dedicate the symphony to Richter – given that their friendship at this date was comparatively new - shows how sincere the regard on Elgar's side was. A letter dated 4 February 1902 addressed 'My dear Friend' begs Richter to dispense with formalities:

> 'One thing – please do not call me Dr Elgar – I would like you to call me Elgar, or even Edward:- the Dr is too formal…Please another time no prefixes'.

In March 1903 Richter was preparing for the first Hallé performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*, but the illness of soloist John Coates meant the performance was postponed for a week, until 13 March. Elgar was unable to be there, but sent a congratulatory note 'I hear the performance was the best'.

It feels significant that during Richter's time in Manchester, Elgar only conducted the Hallé on that one occasion in 1900, for it seems that, having heard Richter's performance of the *Variations*, he was happy to leave the interpretation of his own works in Richter's hands. The archive correspondence has other more light-hearted references to the first symphony in a letter dated 11 October 1903:





**Elgar's dedication of his Symphony to Hans Richter, December 1907.**

> My dear friend:
> You will be glad to hear that we are quite safe after our Motor journey.
>
> Will you please tell Mr Beale[6] that the bill for the following small things will be sent in to the committee.
>
> Six (6) babies, run over at one pound (£1) per baby.
>
> Two men knocked down; - I have guaranteed them wooden legs, to be provided by the Committee – Seven (7) dogs killed at two pounds (£2) per dog. You will see that infants are cheaper than dogs around here.
>
> There are several miles of fencing carried away & two lots of masonry knocked off the canal bridges – about 3 cwt: - an estimate for replacing this will be sent in.
>
> You will see we had a peaceful & happy journey & all the incidents are being worked into the symphony in E flat dedicated to Hans Richter
>
> By his friend

6 A member of the The Choirs Festival Committee.

In late 1903 and early 1904 there are references to the fact that Elgar had not been able to complete the symphony and, instead, he provided *In the South* as his newest work. It was premiered by the Hallé at Covent Garden as part of the Festival of Elgar's works. Elgar conducted as the score & parts had not been produced in time for Richter to study them. On 26 February 1904 Elgar wrote:'Would it be possible (perhaps next week) to devote 15 minutes with your orchestra to read through the new overture? I will get all parts as correct as possible but it's rather nervous work to leave late. I think the parts will be ready soon. I will bring them to you'.

When the Festival was over both the Elgars wrote to Richter:

> When I was listening to my husband's works last week, & hearing the wonderful way in which you penetrate the very inward meaning of his thoughts & give to the world such a revelation of what was in his heart in writing, I suddenly thought, now, what have I, good & precious enough, to send Dr Richter, as a remembrance of the beautiful moments I am living through? Then my mind turned to a portrait of my husband which I like so much - & then Mrs Richter assured me you would like a picture of him, so I have sent it to be packed & sent off to you, & trust you will like it. It is a very serious picture but looks as if he were seeing visions! If you do not like it as a picture of Edward you must please frankly say so, & send it back & I will get another one to replace it.
>
> We are just home but I still seem to live in that wonderful week – I do hope you were not very tired. I can never hope to hear anything so beautiful (till I have the great pleasure I hope, of hearing it again) as your marvellous Orchestra ....

A few days later Elgar wrote:

> I have been waiting to find a really quiet time to write a proper letter to you to thank you from my heart for your conducting my music at Covent Garden: now this is Sunday & I should have found time, but – people come to take up my time & now, at ten o'clock the hour at which all good boys should go to bed, I find myself trying to write a sensible letter.
>
> …
>
> Now, dear friend, I am not going all through the programmes but I must say the variations were marvellously played, I have never heard them sound better & Cockaigne also. …
>
> Now, once more, thanks, heartfelt & sincere for doing all you did; without you the thing could not have been done at all, & with you it was a great artistic success & your presence gave it a dignity which would otherwise would [sic] have been wanting.

The dedication of the symphony, which by now was the first rather than the one in E flat that later followed, is mentioned in 1908 shortly before the premiere in Manchester on 3 December.

> Many thanks for your letter about the analysis & for the kind interest you take in my work.
>
> I understand that Mr Ernest Newman is the official analyst for your concerts & he has been furnished long ago with rough copies & has been working with them.
>
> For the dedication which between us must be simple & true: I have put
>
> To Hans Richter, Mus. Doc.
> True artist & true friend.
>
> I hope you will like this which means everything without long wordy sentences.

There are even references to one of Richter's other legacies to the Hallé – the Pension Fund. In March 1904 Elgar congratulated Richter on having secured the support of Queen Alexandra as patroness: '[I] trust it will lead many others to see the good possible to be done in this way'. There are several references to Elgar's wish to conduct at a Pension Fund concert, in particular at the 1911 concert, which was Richter's final appearance as Hallé Principal Conductor. In a letter dated 2 January that year, Elgar refers to 'my dear friends the members of the Hallé Orchestra'. The following month Richter announced his retirement and Elgar sent him a short letter that remains moving in spite of its simplicity:

> I see in the Telegraph an announcement that gives me a great pain – more than half my musical life goes when you cease to conduct.

The next letter in the sequence is dated 16 March and has the following postscript:

> The proof of the Score of my second Symphony in E flat has come today. I hope you may hear it some day – it was meant for you to like.

It was Elgar himself who conducted the Hallé's first performance of the Second Symphony on 23 Nov 1911 as part of an evening of his own works. It demonstrated that the relationship between the Hallé and the composer went beyond the personal friendship and shows that, whatever discomfort Richter may have felt over his departure, was not communicated to his friend. Richter's successor Michael Balling brought much more new music to the Hallé, including *Falstaff* in 1913. The Hallé musicians worked with Elgar outside Manchester with Richter's involvement with the Birmingham Triennial Festival taking them there regularly. The first item in the archive that I found relating to Elgar was a photograph showing the Hallé at Middlesbrough Town Hall in 1903. It is captioned 'with Elgar' but he is not on the rostrum! Some years later a call from Middlesbrough Public Library brought to light a programme for this concert.

One of the orchestra's real personalities at this time, Principal Viola Simon Speelman, was also on good terms with Elgar. Speelman took on directing the Hallé's first venture into more popular 'Promenade' concerts in 1905, and also conducted Blackpool's Northern Pier Orchestra. The relationship with the Hallé Orchestra – and by extension the men who ran it – was close enough that when the First World War broke out and the orchestra was without its permanent conductor (Balling), it was Elgar who stepped in.

He conducted the first concert of the 1914-15 season and returned a number of times over the next few years. They were financially straitened times and he accepted expenses only rather than a fee. Unsurprisingly given its associations with the English landscape and patriotism, Elgar's music featured prominently in programming in the war years, as the morale-boosting qualities of music were recognised and utilised. Over the war period Elgar conducted the Hallé in Manchester on 3 occasions. It was a while before he did again, in that year of his 70th Birthday, referenced at the start of this essay. In 1930 the Hallé, at Hamilton Harty's suggestion, invited Elgar to become the Society's second President, a position he held until he died.[7] He conducted *The Dream of Gerontius* for what was to be his final concert with the Hallé on 26 January 1933. The soloists on this occasion were Muriel Brunskill, John Coates and Roy Henderson.

The week before Elgar died on 23 February 1934, John Barbirolli conducted the Hallé for the third time – in a concert that was entirely devoted to Elgar: *Froissart, The Enigma Variations*, Violin Concerto and the *Cockaigne Overture*. Neville Cardus in his review thought:

> The *Variation*s was "one of the best pieces of conducting of the season. Not a point was missed; the composer's original mingling of masculine and feminine qualities, of the more reflective and the picturesque, sounded more than ever like the greatest music he has ever written…Mr Barbirolli made even the finale dignified and strong; he unfurled the flag of the music masterfully, and for once in a way we were spared a noisy outburst of Jingoism – or perhaps nowadays we should say of Hitlerism. Mr Barbirolli has gifts….last night's performance of the *Enigma Variations* was a testimony to Mr Barbirolli's love of Elgar and his technical resource; also it was a testimony to the orchestra's ability to read a score.

Cardus also mentioned that the concert was being broadcast, and that the composer was known to be unwell: 'the performance held the attention and must have given a deal of pleasure to the composer, as he listened in miles away on his bed of sickness at Worcester. Let us hope that the audience's applause heartened him and acted better than medicine. The concert proved his genius; we can take pride in the fact that England has produced him'. Elgar had been due to conduct the concert himself. In August of 1933 Barbirolli and a friend visited Elgar at his home in Worcestershire. They were shown round his garden and Elgar talked to them about his music, bestowing an emotional hug on 'JB' as he left and thanking him for liking his music.

The first Hallé concert after Elgar's death was on 1 March 1934. The orchestra was conducted on this occasion by Sir Thomas Beecham (it was during the interregnum after the departure of Sir Hamilton Harty). Elgar's *Elegy for Strings* was played in his memory. It was the start of a new relationship for the Hallé – one that was partly built on a reputation for interpreting English music. When John Barbirolli took up the position of Principal Conductor he once more brought Elgar's music to the fore.

In all there are 221 entries for JB and pieces by Elgar in the repertoire database over the years 1934-70, bearing in mind these are by and large, just Manchester concerts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *Variations* is the most played piece. For me, despite the link to the Symphony, this is the work that represents the relationship between the Orchestra and Elgar. It has featured in many key concerts over the years, including of course the Centenary performance of the First Symphony; in foreign tours, where a point was often made of taking British music overseas. In 1948 when the Hallé went to Austria the report for the British Council (which had funded the tour) commented: 'The *Enigma Variations* in particular aroused astonished and enthusiastic admiration. Austrians spoke of the English Brahms and asked why they not heard Elgar's music before'.

That the Hallé and its conductors have continued to maintain a special relationshsip with the music of Elgar seems all the more natural and is a legacy which it is to be hoped will contomnue long into the future. Most memorably, for me, was when 'Nimrod' was included on the joint concert with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra for the Tsunami victims in January 2005: the massed forces of both orchestras under the baton of Sir Mark Elder being brought to that magically quiet end was spine-tingling and unforgettable.

*Eleanor Roberts is Deputy Director of Development and Archivist of the Hallé Concerts Society.*

7 Hanmilton Harty (1879-1941) Principal Conductor of the Hallé 1920-1933.


LSO 0572, 4 CDs

**Elgar: Symphonies Nos.1-3; Enigma Variations, Op.36; Introduction & Allegro, Op.47 (a); Pomp & Circumstance Marches Nos. 1-5; Coronation March, Op.65; Empire March, Op.32 (b); Cello Concerto, Op.85 (c); Vaughan Williams: Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis (d)**
London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Colin Davis (a), Barry Tuckwell (b), Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos (c), Sir Antonio Pappano (d), Felix Schmidt, cello (c).

This review starts with praise for the beautiful packaging design, of matt black with a lovely knot emblem in appropriate majestic purple. The set is a rather quirky collection of well-known compositions which, I venture to suggest, most Elgarians will already have in their CD collection.

However, there is much of interest to listen to and enjoy, even if the dry acoustic of the Barbican takes a little time to get used to.

The obvious affection for the symphonies by a favourite conductor, Sir Colin Davis, is well known and even his humming adds to the emotion he feels. The slow movements are particularly beautiful and expansive and although the relative unfamiliarity with the third symphony shows very occasionally, these recordings from 2001 are a reminder of what a keen Elgarian like Sir Colin Davis can bring to our ears!

The Marches are placed in a very curious way and anyone like me who likes to 'binge' listen to them in order will have to put up with changing the discs three times! These recordings date from 1988 and are conducted by Barry Tuckwell, not previously known to this reviewer as a conductor but he brings out the melodies and majesty of each piece. Recorded at the Walthamstow Assembly Hall, they are especially welcome as they have not been available for many years.

The curiosity in this set is the 1988 recording of the Cello Concerto played by Felix Schmidt and conducted by Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, not well-known as an Elgar conductor. This is an eloquent performance, bringing out the regretful longings.

In addition, there is a competent performance of *Enigma* conducted by Colin Davis and a well-played and expressive performance

of the *Tallis Fantasia* conducted by Sir Antonio Pappano; well worth hearing!

The addition to this set of two more marches not often performed - the *Coronation March* and the *Imperial March* - is a reminder of Elgar's talent in capturing the ceremonial atmosphere needed for such pieces. The *Introduction and Allegro*, that so typical Elgar piece, is always a joy to listen to and be reminded of Elgar's wonderful writing for strings.

This set would make a fine addition to any Elgarian's CD shelf.

Wendy Hill


Albion Records

ALBCD059

**Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Serenade to Music*, and other music exploring the sixteen singers chosen for the first performance**

Isobel Baillie, Elsie Suddaby, Eva Turner, Stiles-Allen, Muriel Brunskill, Astra Desmond, Margaret Balfour, Mary Jarred, Walter Widdop, Parry Jones, Frank Titterton, Heddle Nash, Roy Henderson, Robert Easton, Harold Williams, Norman Allin & Keith Falkner with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Henry Wood.

Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*, a setting of Act V, Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice,* is one of those rare compositions that seems to me to be perfect. The choice of text and the way VW sets Shakespeare's words, his orchestration and changes of pace make it, for me, irresistible. The idea of celebrating Sir Henry Wood's Jubilee in 1938 was inspired: that sixteen of Britain's finest singers could be brought together for its premiere but were also around to make this recording was something of a miracle. The singers, all close to Sir Henry Wood, gave their services as their contribution to his 50th anniversary as a conductor. All proceeds from the event went towards Wood's chosen charity: 'a Hospital Fund' providing beds in London hospitals for orchestral musicians.

The brilliant idea behind this release is not only to issue that 1938 recording in a new remastering but to include separate recordings of all sixteen singers. There are eighteen tracks – all sixteen soloists given a track each - followed by the Columbia recording of VW's *Serenade.*



However, Stephen Connock, who master-minded this release has gone one better and included seventeen singers. The final track consists of Sir Keith Falkner and Gerald Moore performing Butterworth's 'Is My Team Ploughing?' Falkner was to be one of the original soloists, but his absence abroad meant his place was taken by the almost forgotten Robert Easton who, with another of VW's soloists, Harold Williams, recorded 'By the Wayside' from *The Apostles* in 1927.

A friend asked, recently 'why has no one thought of doing this before'? Indeed, one might well ask such a question, but the point is that it has not been done before and here, in these new transfers, is a disc that should excite all lovers of good and great music. Perhaps, in addition to Vaughan Williams the other 'great' composers included here are Elgar and Puccini but, equally, there is a greatness in such songs as those by Butterworth ('Loveliest of Trees' and 'Is my team ploughing?') sung by Roy Henderson and Keith Falkner respectively.

Many of the singers were once household names and a few remain in our consciousness today. It is, therefore, a wonderful opportunity to hear each of the sixteen singers separately in other music as a complement to Vaughan Williams and Wood. Furthermore, many of these tracks have not been heard in another form since their original pressing. There is a touching 'Prologue' from *Pagliacci* sung by Harold Williams and, of course, Heddle Nash is glorious in *Linden Lea* and Walter Widdop, a great Heldentenor of his day, even sings a song by Amy Woodforde-Finden. Then there is Eva Turner. Her 'Vissi d'arte' from *Tosca* is unforgettable: stunning, fearless, at times histrionic but also devastating. Perhaps that is worth the price of the disc alone?

Readers of this *Journal* will have their eyes drawn to the famous excerpt from the performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* conducted by Elgar in the Royal Albert Hall on a cough-afflicted evening in 1927. Margaret Balfour proves herself a glorious Angel, at one with the composer whose unsentimental reading is enforced by a strongly emphasised 'men' on 'amen' as the work concludes. I can only urge those interested in performances such as these to hear this new version, beautifully remastered by Pete Reynolds who has brought a touch of magic to all these tracks. Of course, many of the other singers included in this release also sang under Elgar or were notable interpreters of his music: such as Elsie Suddaby whose *Spirit of England* with Sir Adrian Boult remains a vital memento of performance practice prior to the second world war.

For those who might feel their old CD transfer of the VW *Serenade*

is sufficient need not hesitate; this is a substantial improvement on the sound and quality of the former issue. Those who read CD booklets will note the inclusion of my name in the credits. I must, therefore, declare an interest in this production, for which I offered no more than some minor suggestions in support of the imagination of Stephen Connock whose 'brainchild' this production is. It is also a tribute to the discerning collecting skills of the late David Michell whose collection of recordings inspired this release, as Stephen and I sifted through what he had left on his death. I cannot recommend it highly enough. [A full track listing can be found on the website of Albion Records: https://rvwsociety.com/albionrecords/]

Andrew Neill



# LETTERS

Dear Sir,

On 13th January, the Society presented an admirable Zoom dissertation by Duncan Eves on Elgar's Second Symphony. Disappointingly, almost a third of the otherwise erudite Zoom discussion which followed that talk was devoted to an exchange of innuendo about Edward's relationship with Alice Stuart-Wortley.

Edward corresponded intensively with Alice Stuart-Wortley for more than 30 years, and Alice Elgar warmly acknowledged her namesake's encouragement and support for Elgar's work, especially during his 'low' moments. Alice Elgar herself corresponded extensively and affectionately with ASW; in particular, Jerrold Northrop Moore's biography of Elgar records Caroline Alice's letters to her in January 1911 ("*The Second Symphony is wonderful!"*) and again in February 1911, jubilating at having found what became Severn House, the Elgars' London home. Significantly, the Elgars' daughter Carice continued her own correspondence with the then Lady Stuart of Wortley well after her mother's death in 1920.

Neither the 30 year-old Carice nor her mother were starry-eyed imbeciles. We surely have to conclude that Edward's relationship with ASW was wholly appropriate and beneficial to the Elgar family and – perhaps more significantly – to Elgar's music?

Yours truly
Paul Grafton

# RECORDING NOTES FROM FEBRUARY TO APRIL 1924

By February 1924, Elgar had been recording with The Gramophone Company for ten years and had carried out eighteen recording sessions. He received an offer from the Columbia Company to record with them but refused to consider it and sought reassurance that his existing contract would be renewed on its expiry on 31 December 1925 – he received such an assurance.

On 5 March he went to Hayes to begin recording his Second Symphony, with a reduced Royal Albert Hall Orchestra. Most of the first movement and part of the second movement were recorded that day although there were many takes. On 20 March the remaining part (the end) of the second movement was recorded together with the third and fourth movements. Attempts to finish recording the first movement were not successful.

This was a huge undertaking, being the first time a major Elgar work was set down uncut. Recording the first movement on 5 March proved to be problematic, with the balance of the strings with the remainder of the orchestra being difficult, and the movement is rushed in places. Cue 33 proved troublesome with the timpani player losing all track of the tempo and Elgar appears to have struggled with his conducting that day.

Matters considerably improved by 20 March and the final two movements are very successful. Of course, the high B flat trumpet note at cue 149 in the finale is not apparent as that only originated at the 1927 recording of the symphony when Ernest Hall, the first trumpet of the LSO, held the note over to the next bar.[1]

Carice Elgar told Jerrold Northrop Moore that in the unpublished 'takes' Elgar could be heard singing.

Elgar's first broadcast and his first electrical recording took place on 23 April 1924 when he conducted at the opening of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium. The BBC broadcast the event and attempts were made to make records from the wireless broadcast. Elgar conducted *Jerusalem* and *Land of Hope and Glory*: other music was recorded (not conducted by Elgar) together with the speeches given by the Prince of Wales and the King. The technical difficulties proved to be too much for the engineers and the records were a failure. At some point the shells were destroyed - it is believed that a set was in private hands in the 1940s, but this has not come to light.

Kevin Mitchell

*Acknowledgement is made to Jerrold Northrop Moore's* Elgar on Record *(Oxford University Press, 1974) when compiling these notes.*

1 See the letter from Ernest Hall to Sir Adrian Boult dated 3 August 1977 in *Music & Friends* ed., Jerrold Northrop Moore (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), 196. Elgar told Hall that he had intended to write it in that way but thought it would be too high to hold.

# 100 YEARS AGO…

Elgar returned to London from Bromsgrove on 4 January 1924. He was elected to be a member of the Council of the London Library telling Carice on 7 January 'How pleased your dear mother would have been'. At about this time he was also contacted by Walter Creighton, the Controller of the 1924 Empire Exhibition to be held at Wembley, and was asked to write a series of songs and choral songs to words by Alfred Noyes for a 'Pageant of Empire' to be performed at Wembley Stadium. Elgar went to The Hut and told 'the Windflower' on 10 January that he had 'composed! *five* things this week – one about 'Shakespeare' you will love when I shew it you'. The songs were *Shakespeare's Kingdom*, *The Islands*, *The Blue Mountains*, *The Heart of Canada*, *Sailing Westward*, *Merchant Adventurers*, *Immortal Legions* and *A Song of Unison*. He was also requested to write an *Empire March* and on 27 February signed a contract with Enoch with a £100 advance against a 10% royalty.

He was at his sister's home for a fortnight in late January and started work on the March there. On returning to London he informed the 'Windflower' that: 'I have brought the "frame" of the March back & am working hard at it' and Carice recorded on 8 February 'Heard father had written outline of a Wembley Exhn. Opening March'.

Elgar attended the first night of Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* on 18 February with the Stuart-Wortleys and nine days later saw Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound*.

Carice met her father in London on 20 February: 'Lunch at Pall Mall – long talk – heard all about Amazon – seemed to have loved it & looked well. Heard sketch on new March for Wembley Exhibition'. On 5 March he started to record the Second Symphony at Hayes and had a second recording session there on 20 March. In between he went to Liverpool on 10 March to conduct a *Wand of Youth Suite*, *Sea Pictures*, The Handel-based *Overture in D Minor* and the Second Symphony.

On 8 March he was told by Novello's American agent that on 12 February Paul Whiteman and his jazz band had performed 'Pomp & Circumstances' in New York. That concert also featured the first performance of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Sir Walter Parratt, the Master of the King's Musick, died on 27 March. The following day Elgar wrote to Lord Stamfordham, the King's Private Secretary to ask if he could 'hold the position'. There followed discussions in the Royal Household as to whether the position should be retained but eventually it was decided that Elgar was 'the right man in the right place' and on 25 April he was offered the position at a nominal salary of £100 per annum. Elgar signified his acceptance on 28 April.

On 30 March Elgar rehearsed the massed choirs in Wembley Stadium. After a later visit he told the 'Windflower' that when standing on the turf in the stadium 'at my feet I saw a group of real *daisies*. Something wet rolled down my cheek - & I am not ashamed of it … Damn everything except the daisy – I was back in something sane, wholesome & GENTLEMANLY – but only for two minutes'. He conducted at the opening ceremony on 23 April, which was also broadcast. He told Carice that it was 'a really gorgeous sight. The King gave me a bow all to myself'.

*King Olaf* had recently been performed in Malvern and Troyte Griffith had heard it. Elgar wrote to him on 25 April that 'If I had to set K.O. again I shd. do it just the same – the atmosphere is 'right' & the technique'. He also informed Troyte that he liked Liberty's new building which was half timbered.

Kevin Mitchell

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