

BOOK REVIEWS

Cockaigne: essays on Elgar 'In London Town'

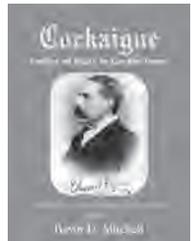
Essays given to the Elgar Society, London Branch
edited by Kevin D. Mitchell

The idea for such a book was mooted over twenty years ago when London Branch undertook an ambitious project to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Elgar's death. Over the course of two seasons (1983–4 and 1984–5) under the title 'Aspects of Elgar' some sixteen presentations were given by eminent Elgarians and others, including Lord Asa Briggs and a lecture-recital by Brian Rayner Cooke. The intention was to produce a commemorative book containing the texts of all the lectures. For various reasons this did not happen, although some of the material has since appeared in print in various publications.

I was present at the first lecture given to the branch, by Wulstan Atkins, who spoke about *The Apostles* prior to a performance which Vernon Handley gave in Guildford in February 1972. He played extracts from a tape of a performance under Malcolm Sargent in 1957. 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive', as in those early years of the branch we were treated to presentations by Menuhin, Tortelier, Groves, as well as the 'big names' of the Elgar world. I am sorry that none of these early lectures is included in this new publication, although I accept that many years have passed: nevertheless, William Alwyn's 1975 lecture on Elgar as conductor (he played in the London Symphony Orchestra under Elgar at the 1927 Three Choirs), which appeared in the *JOURNAL* in 1993, surely deserves to be more readily accessible.

In fact, only one of the 1983–5 lectures survives—'Elgar's Legacy' by Michael Oliver, a well-crafted and perceptive piece of writing, which rounds off the collection: all the other contributions were given in the last ten years. The articles are, as one might expect, something of a mixed bag, and of varying length: several of the original lectures are expanded for publication purposes. Credit must at once be given to Kevin Mitchell, London Branch vice-chairman, who has brought the book together: from experience I can say that editing a book is as demanding as writing one! Kevin's introduction 'Elgar the Londoner' is helpful in setting the scene, and spelling out the tension of Elgar the composer hating London, but Elgar the man being drawn to it. Kevin makes much of the fact that the Violin Concerto was largely written (out) in London (and at Bray by the Thames). Yet we should always remember that original inspiration was for Elgar inseparable from the natural world. He said that 'inventing... comes anywhere and everywhere. It may be when I am walking, golfing, cycling...' The war pieces aside, the major works written at Severn House—*The Crown of India*, *Falstaff*, *The Music Makers*, *The Starlight Express* and the chamber music—all began life out of London.

Andrew Neill's chapter on the history of the Elgar Birthplace and its transition into a



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museum is very welcome. He has drawn together much material from a wide variety of sources, and has elicited information from a number of people who have been involved in the Birthplace and its affairs. Despite gaps in the story (like the twenty missing years of minutes of trustees' meetings) we can now see how the Birthplace, its environs and its management have arrived at where they are today. With his gift for diplomacy Andrew has drawn a veil over certain events, like the details of the 'Van Dieren affair' in 1971, the resignation of some well-known names as trustees during the 1980s, and the controversy surrounding the building of the Elgar Centre. What really comes through strongly is the devotion and commitment of Carice Elgar Blake to the provision of a lasting monument to her father.

Michael Kennedy's 'Elgar, Strauss and their Wives' does not contain much about Elgar that devotees will not be familiar with, but the writer cleverly interweaves the lives and careers of the two men and their wives. Unlike Alice Elgar, Pauline Strauss was a career musician and not a little headstrong; their relationship was occasionally stormy, but they were ultimately as devoted as the Elgars.

Carl Newton's provocative and confrontational style is well-known to Society members. His piece, sub-titled 'The Historical Elgar', offers a challenging view which many might feel goes against the weight of evidence. In truth Carl's is a cynical, depressing world in which everyone has an 'angle'. Apparently we cannot trust the memoirs of Dora Penny, Rosa Burley or Vera Hockman: they are 'tainted by the fact that they would have remained unheard of had they not chanced to meet Elgar. They were determined to make the most of the opportunity'. Even poor Alice does not escape censure: 'It may well be that she saw marriage to Edward as an effective meal ticket'. As for Elgar himself, Carl seems to despise him as much as he professes to love his music. 'No one in English history'—not just English *musical* history, note—'was more self-promoting, though, no doubt, few have been so subtle about it'. There is much more in a similar vein.

David Bury has written before about A. C. Benson, Elgar's librettist for the *Coronation Ode*, but this is an admirable piece looking at the relationship between the two men (they didn't actually meet until over a month after the work's première). The quotes from Benson's diaries are most informative, and David gives a postscript concerning Elgar's request, at the start of the Great War, for Benson to rewrite the words of *Land of Hope and Glory* to be more appropriate for the new situation. Benson duly obliged but, as we know, the public were too attached to the version they knew. The one strange omission from the article relates to the extra movement for the *Ode*, written by Benson and Elgar for Queen Mary for the 1911 coronation: it receives merely a brief mention in a footnote.

Elgar's 'Enigma' has produced a long list of those who profess to have solved it, and has also caused many to see other 'enigmas', possibly where there are none. John Kelly in his chapter 'Windflowers' has tackled the other great Elgarian mystery—the Violin Concerto and its 'Soul'. Without giving the game away, it's fair to say that John has not come up with anything spectacularly original, but he does provide a thorough history of the work and its background. Possibly *too* thorough, as his trail leads far and wide—through botany, Greek mythology, Botticelli, Millais, J. W. Waterhouse, Titian, Sterndale Bennett, *The Language of Flowers*, the *Greek Anthology* songs, the Song of Solomon, heraldry and elsewhere. Some of the links are tenuous to say the least. Like most 'Enigma' solutions, John's thesis stands or falls on the presumption that Elgar planned

all these extra-musical associations before composing: there is nothing to suggest that with Opus 36, nor is there here. Some of the evidence is frankly risible: the use of the windflower as a possible cure for tuberculosis (from which Helen Weaver suffered); and Botticelli's link with the suburb of Florence where the 'weavers' lived. However, the amount of research is impressive, and to encourage John further I proffer the following three points. First, 'Helcia' (not 'Helicia', p. 139), Elgar's name for Helen Weaver, is also the name of a flower—an Andean orchid, discovered in 1845. Second, I have seen Elgar's copy of a 1909 children's book by Maurice Baring entitled *The Story of Forget-Me-Not and Lily of the Valley*: on the flyleaf he has written 'See p 64', and on that page has underlined the words 'and the windflowers who danced like the wind'. Baring met with Elgar in 1911 to discuss the possibility of writing an opera libretto, and the composer's letter to Alice Stuart Wortley of 20 July makes clear that she knew (of) him also. Third, in the concerto's cadenza at cue 102, where the solo violin part sounds full of yearning and almost of trying to break away, the 'thrummed' strings play the three notes C, A and E. These three facts probably mean, as Elgar famously said, 'nothing, but something might be made of it'.

Robert Anderson's all-too-brief account of the genesis of *The Crown of India* and the Indian artefacts which came to the Elgar household via Alice appeared in the JOURNAL in 1995, as did Arthur Reynolds' intriguing detective work on the manuscript full score of *Falstaff*. Arthur reveals just why six pages were removed—linked to Elgar's love of the cinema—and his own part in ensuring they have not been lost. What one would not give to come across a copy of reel 19 of William Gimber's novelty featurette 'Around the Town', containing 'At home with Britain's great composer, Sir Edward Elgar, OM'!

George Bernard Shaw's biographer Michael Holroyd's chapter is a valuable account of the friendship between G.B.S. and Elgar, one of the most important of the composer's later life. The relationship is the more amazing given the many differences in the temperaments of the two men.

There are mercifully few typos (though I loved 'the trees are signing [sic] my music' on p. viii). The book is well-produced, with some interesting and unusual black-and-white illustrations. London Branch, and Kevin Mitchell in particular, deserve our congratulations and gratitude.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

CD REVIEWS

Sea Pictures

Elgar, *Sea Pictures*; Walton, *Coronation Te Deum*; Britten, *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*; Bax, *November Woods*.

Catherine Wyn-Rogers (mezzo-soprano)
BBC Singers, BBC Symphony Chorus

BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis

It's not quite the same as being there, but this disc of a live Prom (given before the Queen and her consort on 30 July 2003) does its level best to capture that unique atmosphere so peculiar to the Royal Albert Hall. Davis is in his element in Walton's *Te Deum*, with a magical contribution from boy choristers from Eton College and Winchester College/Cathedral, as well as the BBC Chorus and BBC Singers. For Elgarians Catherine Wyn-Davies's lustrous contralto tones in her performance of *Sea Pictures* will give much pleasure. Her performance is generally stylish (some missing *portamenti* reflect a general shyness nowadays to indulge in what was common at the time), her diction a model of impeccable clarity, while the partnership with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Davis achieves sensitive balance if not immaculate intonation at the orchestral introduction to 'Where Corals Lie'. This account gets immediate (and fully justified) applause after the stunned silence which had greeted the less obvious ending to the Walton. I do have an observation however. We live in an age in which contraltos describe themselves as mezzo-sopranos (no exception here), their teachers pushing the voice ever upward, often with resultant strain at some high notes. Such reluctance today to acknowledge the contralto voice is regrettable, for who would describe Clara Butt, the cycle's dedicatee, as anything but a contralto?

The remainder of the disc is taken up with Bax's superb tone poem *November Woods*, which Davis clearly loves, and Britten's evergreen *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* in which all departments of the BBC Symphony Orchestra shine. This is a feast of British music given notable and idiomatic performances by all concerned.

Christopher Fifield

Music for a Festival

The Art of the Military Band, Vol. 1

including Elgar, *Sursum Corda*, op. 11, *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 4 in G major, op. 39; Vaughan Williams, *English Folk Song Suite*; Gordon Jacob, *Music for a Festival*; Milhaud, *Suite Française*.

The Band and Fanfare Trumpets of HM Royal Marines School of Music, conducted by Lt. Col. Vivian Dunn
Barry Rose (organ)



Warner Classics
2564 61550-2

The word 'heresy' may spring to the minds of some readers as I confess a preference for the sound of the military band over that of its civilian competition, the brass band, by a long chalk. Heresy, because Elgar's *Severn Suite* remains one of the greatest works composed for the sound of the latter. However it is difficult to imagine that, had he heard this recording, Elgar would have been anything but deeply impressed. It is the use of the woodwind by the military which does it for me, and this record reproduces the sound of the military band which the Royal Marines under the leadership of Sir Vivian Dunn had polished to within a glimpse of perfection. Brian Culverhouse was behind the original recordings and has supervised this outstanding reissue.

These recordings date from between 1962 and 1968, and most remain in the demonstration class with a wonderful unified sound and brilliant playing. In some ways the most important works on the disc are the Vaughan Williams, Milhaud and Jacob, all written directly for the medium. Indeed the disc is worth it for these three works alone. But without the two Elgar pieces this review could not be justified within these pages. I recall when the original LP was issued, containing what was then the first recording of *Sursum Corda*, and playing it over and over again. For despite Alan Webb's review for the Society at the time, which dismissed the arrangement out of hand, it remains a compelling and beautifully realised performance, using rather than competing with the resonance of Guildford cathedral in which it was made. J. A. Kappey was the bandmaster of the Royal Marines Chatham Division in the 1890s and would have made this arrangement shortly before his retirement in 1897. It struck me then and strikes me now that this is a masterly arrangement and is so skilful that I am barely aware that Elgar's orchestra is not there. The band is balanced so well with the organ that one is overwhelmed by the great sense of occasion as that last great chord echoes around the room.

The *Pomp and Circumstance* march was recorded in 1962 in No. 1 studio, Abbey Road, and is again a fine example of subtle arranging by one Retford, who seems something of a shadowy figure. Perhaps a reader might be able to throw some light on his career and contribution to music. Again, the listener is made to forget the absence of strings and to accept the sound of this fine body of musicians. Sir Vivian Dunn in the sleeve notes sums up the issue and why it is worth seeking out this recording: 'By far the greater part of the military band repertoire consists of arrangements of works originally written for orchestra and other media... nevertheless through greater knowledge and understanding of the tonal range of wind instruments arrangers have been able to produce the very authentic sound when properly transcribed.' Exactly!

Andrew Neill



Eastney Collection
RHMSEC010

Everyman

by Sir Henry Walford Davies (1869–1941)

Elena Ferrari (soprano), Jennifer Johnston (contralto), Andrew Staples (tenor), Pauls Putnins (bass)

London Oriana Choir

Kensington Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Drummond

Although occasionally we get glimpses of the importance of Sir Henry Walford Davies to British musical life in the first half of the twentieth century, to modern audiences he remains a shadowy figure. Sir David Willcocks's encounter with Davies (see NEWS) is important for it shows that he occupied an important position as a broadcaster, and as such was well-known when he succeeded Elgar as Master of the King's Music. The interview also shows how central his faith was to his existence. Nevertheless we have to acknowledge that Davies's music is largely unknown, with the exception of *Solemn Melody* and the *RAF March Past*.

Therefore I went, at the urging of Lewis Foreman, with only a little enthusiasm to a

performance of *Everyman* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in February 2004. To be honest, I was expecting to hear yet another justly neglected choral work by a composer who had been left behind by stronger musical personalities such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Walton. My doubts were quickly put aside by the striking chromatic opening of the work, and I was quickly drawn into Davies's musical world and his setting of a drama which owes not a little to mediaeval morality plays (see below) and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Listeners will also note echoes of *The Dream of Gerontius* and the Book of Job.

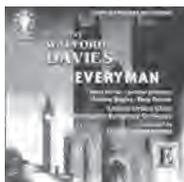
Everyman, commissioned by the Leeds Festival Chorus in 1904, has been called Davies's masterpiece (see Nigel Burton, *Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 237) and, although there are obvious influences from Wagner, Strauss and Elgar (Scene 6 in particular), he also anticipates Holst and Vaughan Williams. It is likely that by the time he completed *Everyman* Davies would have heard all Elgar's choral music up to and including *The Apostles*. Thus it is an important stepping-stone on the road of British choral music which culminated in Britten's *War Requiem*. Because it was, for a time before the Great War, a success and popular, it behoves all Elgarians to take the opportunity of hearing this excellent recording.

Everyman is a setting of a Victorian reworking of a 'well-known mediaeval Morality Play in which God, dissatisfied with the immoral state of humanity, sends Death to summon a representative human soul into his presence. There Everyman will have to examine and justify his life. In the course of his journey to the other side he learns that all the things he holds in high esteem on earth (friends, possessions, physical attributes) cannot be taken with him and he begins to appreciate which things are of true and lasting value' (from David Drummond's insert note accompanying the CD).

The recording is warm and of the highest quality although I would have preferred the soloists to be slightly less prominent. Pauls Putnins, a dark-voiced Latvian, sings the role of Everyman with insight and emotional commitment, as do Elena Ferrari and Jennifer Johnston (as Good Deeds and Knowledge respectively). I found Andrew Staples (Death) somewhat bland but the Kensington Symphony Orchestra and London Oriana Choir are excellent. David Drummond conducts with commitment and allows the work to make its own case effectively.

Once again we are in debt to Mike Dutton for having the courage to record a byway of British music and to Lewis Foreman for what I know was an exceptional amount of hard work behind the scenes.

Andrew Neill



Dutton (Epoch)
CDLX 7141

'Enigma' Variations — Otaka

Elgar, *Variations on an Original Theme* ('Enigma'), op. 36; Vaughan Williams, Five Variants of *Dives and Lazarus*; Michael Tippett, Ritual Dances from *The Midsummer Marriage*.

BBC National Orchestra of Wales
conducted by Tadaaki Otaka, David Atherton and Lesley Hatfield

During his time as principal conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Tadaaki Otaka quickly built up a reputation for conducting British music. He seemed to possess a particular affinity with the music of Elgar, and in November 2000 was presented with the Elgar Medal at a concert which included a performance of the Violin Concerto played by Dong-Suk Kang. His only recorded Elgar so far is the First Symphony and the Introduction and Allegro (BIS-CD 727, reviewed in the JOURNAL, July 2000).

This recording of the Variations was made at a concert in St David's Hall, Cardiff in 1997. Live recordings are most at risk from orchestral 'blips' and audience participation: this one is almost free from these, though there is the suggestion of a distant cough in 'Dorabella'. The recording is clear and generally well-balanced, though the strings are slightly under-recorded and tend to struggle against brass and percussion in the louder movements such as 'Troyte'. The fast movements are always a good test of this work: Otaka keeps the rhythm firmly in control, and the orchestral playing is excellent. He gives 'Ysobel' a sprightly air by paying close attention to the staccato markings; and 'Nimrod' is prepared for by holding the pause at the end of 'W.N.' longer than I can remember—about fifteen seconds!—but the *ppp* string entry is magical. Altogether a very gratifying performance.

The other works are Vaughan Williams's haunting Five Variants of *Dives and Lazarus*, conducted by the orchestra's leader, Lesley Hatfield. This is a recent studio recording, and although nicely conducted and beautifully played, it sounds a little dry and I longed for a richer acoustic such as a cathedral. David Atherton's splendid account of the Ritual Dances from Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* completes the disc. It was included with the February 2005 issue of the *BBC Music* magazine. Back issues can be obtained on 0870 444 7024 (for UK), 1 800 234 6706 (USA and Canada), +44 1795 414749 (Europe and Rest of the World), or on-line at www.bbcmusicmagazine.co.uk.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

Enigma

Elgar arr. Eric Ball, 'Enigma' Variations, op. 36; Vaughan Williams, Overture *Henry V*; John Ireland, *A Downland Suite*; Arthur Bliss, *Kenilworth*.

Fairey FP (Music) Band conducted by Allan Withington

(Available from: Midland CD, 201 Callowbrook Lane, Rubery, Birmingham B45 9TG, tel. 0121 244 4605. Cost per disc is £12.95 plus postage (UK 60p; Rest of the World £1.40). Web site: www.ukcd.net)

The Trumpets That Time Forgot

Music arranged for two trumpets and organ including Elgar, Sonata No. 2, op. 87a; Rheinberger, Suite, op. 149; Richard Strauss, three movements from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, op. 60.

John Wallace (trumpet), Jonathan Freeman-Attwood (trumpet), Colm Carey (organ)

Arrangements for brass band of Elgar's music are not in short supply. Those made during the composer's lifetime include, surprisingly, a short and in places clumsy selection from his cantata *Caractacus* (including the 'Triumphal March') published in 1903, only some five years after the original. Then in the early 1980s there occurred a veritable Elgar feeding frenzy amongst arrangers which introduced a new and wider array of his music to band enthusiasts. (No coincidence, of course, that this was around the time Elgar's music first dropped out of copyright, prior to the new terms of the 1988 Copyright Act.)



BBC Music
BBC MM250

The most ambitious of these arrangements was undoubtedly Eric Ball's transcription of the 'Enigma' Variations. Ball was devoted to Elgar's music, and reportedly received encouragement by letter from the ageing composer on the basis of one of his early compositions. There is no doubt then that Ball's transcription was a labour of love, completed at the tail-end of his life, and bringing into play all his resourcefulness, expertise and experience in writing for brass band. Such is its faithfulness to the colours and inflections of Elgar's writing, it is easy to follow the entire arrangement from an orchestral score (assuming one does not have perfect pitch—the transcription sounds a tone lower than the original). However, the version recorded here is a heavily cut seventeen-minute selection (performed as a test-piece at the 2003 National Brass Band Championships) comprising the theme, two continuous sequences (variations I–III and VII–IX) and the finale. Those not already up in arms at the idea of arranging works from the sacred canon will probably have little problem with this compressed version, which seems to work well in maintaining the broad outlines of the work.

To my mind the most impressive passages in this performance by the Fairey FP (Music) Band—in days gone by the Fairey Aviation Band—are the slower and more lyrical. The theme is given space and shaped with great feeling, as are 'C.A.E.' and 'Nimrod' (despite an alarming glimpse of daylight before the final *fortissimo*). Only a little less convincing, I feel, are Variation VII where the rushing cornets crackle intrusively as if the pin-wheeling Troyte has playing-cards in his bicycle spokes, and the finale, which just manages to maintain momentum before gathering itself for the final pages. Also, noticeable by its virtual absence in the finale is the percussion, pushed so far into the background as to be felt rather than heard distinctly. I miss the loud report of the snare drum, the splash of cymbals, and the shuddering boom of the bass drum, which never fail to raise a smile in orchestral performances.

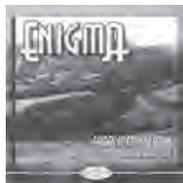
Other works on this disc are also worthy of recommendation. Vaughan Williams's overture *Henry V* is an interesting and substantial original work for brass band which predates his better known *Variations* of 1957. Only unearthed in 1980, its origins and history need more careful study. Like Walton's film score, it incorporates traditional melodies including the *Agincourt Song*, and at times it seems to momentarily anticipate the icy, windswept sound world of the *Sinfonia Antartica*. Ireland's *Downland Suite* is an indispensable masterpiece of brass band writing; less so, Bliss's *Kenilworth*, whose substance and merit rest virtually entirely on its third movement march.

Both *Kenilworth* and *Downland* arrived in the wake of Elgar's *Severn Suite* which he wrote for the 1930 National Brass Band Championship. Elgar's own subsequent orchestral arrangement, Henry Geehl's rendering for military band, and Ivor Atkins's

composer-sanctioned 'edition' for organ (published as Elgar's Second Organ Sonata, op. 87a) would appear to have the material covered from most angles. However, a new perspective is offered on a disc which aims to plug the gap left by the nineteenth century in the repertoire for solo trumpet.

The learned insert notes for *The Trumpets That Time Forgot* state this version—for two E flat trumpets and organ—represents 'a hybrid between the *Severn Suite* and the Organ Sonata no. 2... the former as a source of inspiration'. This points to the fact that the basis of the arrangement is virtually entirely the organ sonata, with the occasional interpolation of cornet writing inspired by the brass band original (but only in the 'Toccata' movement, as far as I can tell). So the 'Minuet' surrenders its position in the suite to an organ cadenza, and there are a number of chops and changes in the 'Toccata'. Whilst admiring the stated purpose of the transcription, 'to restore the freshness of Elgar's original invention in an idiom he might have enjoyed', I don't find the material particularly lends itself to this treatment. Perhaps lack of knowledge of the original permits me to find the Strauss and Rheinberger arrangements more convincing. Nevertheless, the performances are immaculate, and the disc affords an opportunity to hear the Willis cathedral organ at Hereford, which is extensively documented in the accompanying notes.

Philip Maund



Egon SFZ 121

Elgar's Finest

Various

This CD is one of two cover discs which accompanied the February 2005 issue of *Classic FM* magazine, and as such sends a clear message about the current popular perception of the composer: Elgar sells! (Well, sells magazines, at least...)

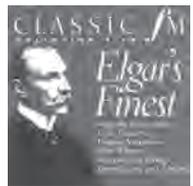
This twelve-track compilation lasts just over sixty minutes, and is composed largely of three- to nine-minute samples from a range of recordings released over the last five years on budget and mid-price labels including Naxos, Apex, Elatus and Helios. There are one or two predictable choices, including *Salut d'amour* and 'Nimrod' (but, mercifully, no *Land of Hope and Glory* or *Pomp and Circumstance* No. 1). Otherwise, the selection is interesting and varied, covering a range of orchestral, chamber and vocal music. (The obvious omissions from a representative sample are the oratorios and other large-scale choral works.) I found my ear particularly drawn to Lydia Mordkovitch's thoughtful and expressive 1998 reading of *Chanson de matin*—one of two older Chandos samples; and Christopher Robinson's *Ave verum corpus* from St John's College, Cambridge, recently released along with other Elgar sacred choral music on Naxos.

This is a selection which offers a choice survey for recent converts which would not offend hard-bitten Elgar enthusiasts either. Back issues of the magazine (including the cover discs) may be obtained by calling 08456 777824 at a cost of £4.75 each.

Philip Maund



Linn CKD 242



Classic FM
Collector's CD 122

LETTERS

From: Carl Newton

Oh dear! It's the Enigma-solving season again (JOURNAL, November 2004). Why is it that so many Elgarians, including some serious biographers, seem to want to make their hero into a neurotic idiot? If he had had half the ideas in his mind that have been suggested as 'solutions' he would certainly have been in Powick and not as musical director.

I do not wish to add to the confusion, but I have been researching early performances of Elgar works and have noted some interesting points about the programme notes for the Variations. They almost universally regard the abbreviations of the dedicatees as irrelevant, the work is simply a piece of symphonic music and no note is taken of supposed 'hidden themes'. But the most interesting comment of all is made in 1905 when the writer (unidentified) says, 'the real melody is never heard—is in fact unknown, the "theme" on which the variations are built is itself a variation'. Surely this is the most common-sense view of the whole affair. If that theme were indeed counterpoint to a popular tune it would be extremely hard, if not impossible to identify now. In this context surely Elgar's comment, 'I warn you that the apparent connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture', has added significance. No one seems to have noticed what an odd sentence this is, even allowing for Elgar's normal cavalier treatment of the English language. What terrible thing happens if we do not heed the warning? Even the veriest musical tyro can see that the 'variations' do not always make much use of the supposed 'theme'. But if it is not the theme then Elgar's words make sense. The disaster that ensues if the warning is not heeded is that a vast amount of time is expended by ingenious minds on an essentially insolvable riddle. This is precisely what has happened for the last hundred years. But, Mr Editor, do we as the Elgar Society really need to give credence to the fantasies that the composer's brilliant piece of marketing has produced?

From: Alan Tongue

Following Ernest Parkin's delightfully informative article 'Elgar and Literature' (JOURNAL, November 2004), readers might like to know a little more about Elgar's Irish connection with Grania and Diarmuid, the play by W. B. Yeats and George Moore. A recent book, George Moore, 1852–1933 by Adrian Frazier, published by Yale University Press in 2000, shows the centuries-old animosities between Ireland and England rearing their head. After Augusta Holmes, an Irishwoman living in Paris, had turned down an offer to compose music for the play, Moore had approached Elgar. In his autobiography, Hail and Farewell, published in 1911, Moore writes that while talking to AE (George Russell, the artist, poet, mystic and social reformer) 'the memory of some music I had heard long ago at Leeds, by Edward Elgar, came into my mind.' Moore was later asked by a Freeman's Journal reporter why an Englishman was composing music for an Irish play. Moore explained that Elgar was a Wagnerian and that there were no adequate Irish composers, a reply that prompted correspondence to the Journal. One review of the play's first night in 1901 said, 'In the first act of Diarmuid and Grania the actors fall asleep; in the last act the audience do... [consequently] "not a drum was heard, not a funeral note" of Dr Elgar's music' (James H. Cousins, quoted in Hogan and Kilroy, The Irish Literary Theatre 1899–1901, published by the

Dolmen Press). Moore describes the first run-through of the music in his book:

...I stood for a long time admiring the crotchets, the quavers, the lovely rests; and the long columns set apart for violins, columns for flutes, and further columns for oboes, fairly transported me. Elgar sent me a letter with it saying that the manuscript was the only one in existence, and that if it were lost he could not supply me with another; so it was put hurriedly under lock and key, and the rest of my day was spent going up one mean street and down another, climbing small staircases, opening bedroom doors, meeting disappointment everywhere. At last, a tenor from a cathedral choir was discovered, swearing from among the bedclothes that he could do musical copying with anyone in the world, and pledging his word of honour that he would be with me at ten o'clock next morning. He smelt like a corpse, but no matter, a score is a score, and Benson [the actor-manager] had to receive a copy of it within the next fortnight. The conductor at the Gaiety [Theatre] said he would like to copy the parts; in copying them he would learn the music, so I yielded to him Elgar's score, begging of him not to lose it, at which he laughed; and some days afterwards he asked me to the music-room and called to his orchestra to follow. The parts were distributed, and the conductor took up his baton, and singing to the fiddles, the slow and melancholy march began, the conductor singing the entrance of every instrument, preserving an unruffled demeanour till the horn went quack. We will start that again, number seventeen. The horn again went quack, and I shall always remember how the player shook his head and looked at the conductor as if to say that the composer should have been warned that, in such a long interval, there is no depending on the horn. When it was over, the conductor turned to me, saying: There's your march. What do you think of it? It will have to be played better than that before I can tell, a remark the orchestra did not like, and for which I felt sorry, but it is difficult to have the courage of one's opinions on the spot, and, while walking home, I thought of the many fine things that I might have said; that Elgar had drawn all the wail of the caoine [keening at a wake] into the languorous rhythm of his march, and that he had been able to do this because he had not thought for a single instant of the external forms of native music, but had allowed the sentiment of the scene to inspire him. Out of the harmony a little melody floats, pathetic as an autumn leaf, and it seemed to me that Elgar must have seen the primeval forest as he wrote, and the tribe moving among the falling leaves—oak-leaves, hazel-leaves, for the world began with oak and hazel.

When later asked by Elgar to give permission for him to publish the song from the play, Yeats wrote: 'Yes certainly. With great pleasure. I must give myself the pleasure of letting you [know how] wonderful, in its heroic melancholy, I thought your Grania music. I wish you could set other words of mine and better work than those verses, written in twenty minutes but you are welcome to them' [quoted in Hogan and Kilroy].

From: Ian Parrott

Even if Elgar wrote some of the Organ Sonata as if for orchestra, three years later in the 'Enigma' Variations he was paying tribute again to his friend Dr Sinclair, organist of Hereford cathedral, who had a reputation, as I know, for never playing a wrong pedal note. Here, in the variation 'G.R.S.', he writes for orchestra as if for organ. The busy passage in the bass depicts an exceptionally brilliant organ pedaller—not an undisciplined doggy paddler!

Why should the media (BBC 1, 19 September 2004) continue to perpetuate the myth of a bulldog? It was originally only an Elgarian 'jape' and it has become an insult to Sinclair's memory.



100 YEARS AGO...

The new year of 1905 found Elgar taking up Jaeger's suggestion of writing something for the newly-formed London Symphony Orchestra. He had composed little since *In the South* the previous spring. He went back to sketches he had made during his Welsh holiday in 1901, and by 26 January he was able to write to Jaeger, recuperating in Davos: 'I'm doing that string thing in time for the Sym: orch: concert'. During the first weeks of January the artist Talbot Hughes came to paint Elgar's portrait. He was also beginning to set his mind to the inaugural lecture at Birmingham University.

On 7 February the Elgars were in Oxford where Edward was awarded an honorary degree; it had been arranged by Parry, who 'made a fine Oration'. The following day Elgar conducted the LSO in the *Variations*: they 'played superbly for him'. Back at Malvern the new work, the Introduction & Allegro for Strings, was completed on the 13th, and Elgar turned to compiling a libretto on the subject of 'faith' for Ivor Atkins, who had been commissioned to write a work for that year's Worcester Festival. Sending it to Atkins on the 21st, Elgar wrote: 'Here is the "Faith" Hymn. If you don't use it be sure do not let anyone else have it. I want it myself.'

On 1 March Elgar went to Birmingham to 'prospect all day. Returned mis'. Clearly the impending lecture was worrying him. Before that, he and Alice went to London to stay with Frank Schuster. Several rehearsals took place for the new string piece, which was premiered on 8 March, together with the third *Pomp and Circumstance* march. The performance was not perfect—possibly needing more rehearsal time—and Elgar was not well, suffering bad headaches. A whirl of social gatherings preceded the journey to Birmingham on the 16th. The loyal Alice commented: 'E. lectured most splendidly, held his audience breathless'. However, Elgar's friends saw it differently: Rosa Burley said it was 'one of the most embarrassing failures to which it has ever been my misfortune to listen', while Ivor Atkins called it 'an uncompromising survey of music in England... Elgar lashed out fiercely at musicians and critics alike'. The *Musical Opinion* said: 'It is generally held that a composer in the position of Sir Edward ought not to have made public such opinions', but went on to praise his courage, honesty and perception. A month later Elgar told Professor Fiedler, dean of the arts faculty, that 'all the remarks I have seen... are absolutely beside the point & futile to a degree more than ordinary even in musical criticism'. Back in London the next day, he 'seemed better', but was then ill again. They returned to Hereford on the 20th and the doctor was called. Despite not feeling well, Elgar was able to arrange the 'Wayside' theme from *The Apostles* as an Anglican chant for Robert Howson's church choir in Morecambe. His health had improved enough to conduct *The Apostles* in Hanley on 30 March. There he and Alice made the acquaintance of the young Havergal Brian, who showed Elgar some of his scores. On 13 April Elgar conducted *Gerontius* in Leeds, having cried off an earlier performance on 20 March.

Back in Hereford there was much work in the garden; 28 March: 'Hard at work all day at new rockery'; 6 April: 'E. very busy with pipes for the fountain'. He also built hutches for Carice's two rabbits, one white (named Peter) and one brown. On 28 April Elgar was in London for the Royal Academy exhibition and dinner, to which 'the Prince of Wales invited him & took him off thru' 2 or 3 rooms & discussed the pictures & talked'. Elgar had been unable to attend in 1904 as it had clashed with the Morecambe Festival; this year the Festival was accordingly delayed by three weeks so that Elgar could attend both events.

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