

The Elgar Society

# Journal



MARCH 2007 Vol. 15, No. 1

# The Elgar Society

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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March 2007 Vol. 15, No. 1

Editorial	3
A High-Victorian Spyglass: Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf and Late Nineteenth-Century British Idealism <i>Róisín Blunnie</i>	5
The Seas of Separation <i>David Owen Norris</i>	15
Touching Snow: The Story of the 'Dorabella Bequest' Part Two – The Riddle of The Shepherd's Song <i>Sylvia Bennett</i>	31
From a Cellist's view: Symphony no. 2 in Eb <i>Patrick Jones</i>	39
In Search of Fritz Kreisler <i>Michael Plant</i>	39
Conference reports <i>Aidan Thomson, Philip Petchey</i>	47
Book reviews <i>Relf Clark, Julian Rushton, J.P.E. Harper-Scott</i>	53
CD reviews <i>Aidan Thomson, Andrew Neill, Paul Adrian Rooke, Barry Collett</i>	64
Letters to the Editor	74
100 years ago... <i>Geoffrey Hodgkins</i>	75

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

Front Cover: H.A. Payne, The Enchanted Sea

## Editorial

Welcome to 2007. By the time this issue of the Journal appears, we shall be well beyond the mid-point of Elgar's 150<sup>th</sup> year which began, of course, in June 2006. But the year of the anniversary is what people always fasten upon for such a celebration, and it is just as well that Elgar was born in 1857, so that this commemoration of his life and work can avoid the clash with Mozart, Schumann, and Shostakovich (2006), while slipping in comfortably ahead of the formidable trio Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn (2009).

Curiously, between *The Kingdom* (1906) and the First Symphony (1908), Elgar completed no major work. Thus freed from such focused centenaries, we have the more time and space to celebrate his work as a whole, and this issue ranges widely.

I am delighted to open with a study of *King Olaf*, a work of great importance in Elgar's developing reputation. We have had much work on Newman in connection with *Gerontius*; here Róisín Blunnie, who has not previously contributed to the Journal, discusses the work of the librettist Acworth and composer within a richly evoked cultural context. Incidentally the forthcoming *Elgar Studies* from Cambridge University Press includes a chapter by Charles Edward McGuire who assesses Acworth in the context of *Caractacus*.

In our longest article, David Owen Norris also turns to poetry in a new look at the perennially fresh *Sea Pictures*, including fascinating glimpses of Elgar's workshop. I am grateful to David not only for the article, but also for the cover illustration, whose origins he describes near the end of the article.

Elgar's work lives best in sound, and in this issue considerations of performance spill over from CD reviews into the articles. The shorter pieces that follow Part 2 of Sylvia Bennett's tale of her personal quest nicely contrast the career of a professional virtuoso violinist, one of the greatest, with the experiences of an amateur cellist, surely not one of the least. Performance plays its part in David Owen Norris's discussion, and the letter he cites (see footnote 11) made me wonder whether the 'flummery' (or 'a lot of stuff') Clara Butt asked for implies that she did *not* take the top A at the first performance of *The Swimmer*. If the outcome was to make that splendid climax safer for the modern mezzo-soprano, we may be thankful that, a matter of weeks after the finale to the Variations was altered at Jaeger's behest, another climax benefited from good outside advice. As the recent recording of the violin concerto reminds us (see the review, November 2006, p. 49), Elgar was ready to listen to performers – and perhaps made less of a fuss than when the advice came from Jaeger whose effect, however, on that finale and on *Gerontius*, was probably greater.

Before the reviews, we have a report from a conference in the U.S.A. in which

Elgar was a major topic of discussion. Aidan Thomson mentions the biennial conferences on 19th-century British music; the next is to take place this year, at the University of Birmingham (3–8 July). And Philip Petchey has kindly reported on the enjoyable study weekend at Midhurst.

#### *Corrigendum*

No doubt because of a slip of somebody's eye, or digit, in preparing the November 2006 issue of the *Journal* (p. 52), the Dutton Digital recording under David Lloyd Jones of *The Spirit of England* was incorrectly numbered; it should be CDLX 7172 (not 7122). My thanks to Michael Toseland, who kindly pointed this out to me. I hope not too many other readers were inconvenienced; the disc sent to him under the incorrect number was, he tells me, kindly replaced.

#### *Addendum*

Then there is the question mentioned in my last Editorial, of the recurrence of material – outstanding material, but still we should not want the *Journal* to recycle older material too often. Thanks to Michael Plant's letter, with the sentiments of which I heartily concur, I now perceive that J.B. Priestley's contribution to Elgar criticism has appeared three times ... which is surely often enough.

As a result of this little oversight, I have prepared a searchable index of articles in the *Journal*, though only from 1992. Anyone who would like to use it, and can take an e-mail attachment in Microsoft Excel (it does not exist on paper) is welcome to a copy, and suggestions for developing and improving it will be gratefully received. I would also like to know if anyone has an index to earlier volumes that I could incorporate without too much trouble in a busy year.

And a happy sesquicentennial to all our readers.

Julian Rushton

## A High-Victorian Spyglass: *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* and Late Nineteenth-Century British Idealism

Róisín Blunnie

Commissioned for the North Staffordshire Music Festival, Elgar's *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* for soprano, tenor and bass soloists, choir and orchestra, was conducted by the composer at Hanley on 30 October 1896. The libretto, based on one section of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's historical poem *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, presents a series of events in the life of Olaf Tryggvason, a tenth-century Norwegian king and Christian champion.

Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*, containing twenty-two episodes and a total of almost eight thousand words, required significant abridgement to facilitate the creation of a manageable, performable, and comprehensible work, and for this task Elgar enlisted the help of his Worcestershire neighbour, Harry Arbuthnot Acworth. Out of Longfellow's twenty-two episodes, Acworth prepared a libretto of eight scenes, an introduction and epilogue, and seven connecting recitatives. Of the eight scenes, four were taken either entirely or partly from the Longfellow poem, and four were completely revised versions of Longfellow.

The Elgar/Acworth redaction is more than just an abridgement, however; the musical setting features a much stronger and more clearly defined moral course than Longfellow's version, and is clearly a product of its time and of the beliefs and pragmatic intentions of its Victorian creators. In short, it is tailor-made for its target audience, with its excisions and revisions at times revealing radical dramatic and moral implications. Aided by the manifold advantages of musical expression and heavily influenced by the late-nineteenth-century British context of its birth, *King Olaf* makes quite a journey from Longfellow's poem to Elgar's cantata.

### **Harry Arbuthnot Acworth**

A variety of sources provide sketchy details of the life of the amateur editor Acworth, and guide us towards an understanding of his attitude to religion and his stance on the ideas of conquest and conversion, which are central to this work. Prior to his collaboration with Elgar, Acworth worked with the civil service in India, for which he was awarded the Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire. From 1890 to 1895 he served as Municipal Commissioner of Bombay (Mumbai), and was involved in the establishment of a leprosy hospital at Wadala, which still functions as the

Acworth Municipal Leprosy Hospital. Both of his sons died in military service, during and after the First World War, and the obituaries of these young men are useful as indirect indications of Acworth's religious views, so influential on the compositional path of *King Olaf*. The *Malvern News* of 10 November 1917 tells us that his younger son was a man of deep and genuine faith,<sup>1</sup> while his elder son, who died in February 1919, is described in the same source as 'a simple-hearted and earnest member of the Church of England, and a regular communicant'.<sup>2</sup> It is also known that Acworth's grandfather on his mother's side was a clergyman, the Reverend Francis Close DD.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is likely that Acworth was steeped in the Anglican tradition, a point that, as we shall see, impinges on his redaction of *King Olaf*.

It is difficult to tell exactly what degree of influence Acworth had on the libretto of *King Olaf* – if he prepared the entire redaction, if he was subject to the direction of Elgar, or if both men had some involvement in the editing process. Acworth is placed on an equal footing with Longfellow on the score's title page, with both names appearing before that of the composer. He did have some previous literary experience, having translated and published a collection of Indian folktales, *Ballads of the Marathas*, in 1894;<sup>4</sup> but *King Olaf* seems to have been his first involvement in the preparation of a musical work, and he continued as Elgar's librettist for *Caractacus* in 1898.

### **The Elgar/Acworth Redaction**

In order to reduce Longfellow's text to manageable proportions, certain criteria had to be applied to determine what should be included and what was dispensable. A comparison of the Acworth redaction with the Longfellow poem reveals a number of interesting reasons for omissions.<sup>5</sup> Twelve of Longfellow's episodes were removed in their entirety. Some of these consist of plotlines, characters and locations not directly relevant to the fortunes of the all-important hero, King Olaf, while others display the protagonist in an unfavourable, even unsavoury light.

A notable excision, which significantly alters our perception of the title character, is that of Longfellow's Episode V: 'The Skerry of Shrieks'. Here Olaf is revealed at his most merciless and detestable in a bloodcurdling scene. Having feasted into the night with his men-at-arms, the slumbering king is surrounded by a band of warlocks. With the break of dawn he and his men arise and proceed to capture the dazzled sorcerers.

They then bind them hand and foot on shoreline rocks, sit calmly with lighted candles and wait for the tide to turn.<sup>6</sup> As Longfellow writes (Episode V: Verse 15):

- 1 *Malvern News*, 10 November 1917 ([http://www.malvernremembers.org.uk/HPAcworth\\_JAMore.htm](http://www.malvernremembers.org.uk/HPAcworth_JAMore.htm)).
- 2 *Malvern News*, 15 February 1919 ([http://www.malvernremembers.org.uk/HPAcworth\\_DHMore.htm#1](http://www.malvernremembers.org.uk/HPAcworth_DHMore.htm#1)).
- 3 *Arbuthnot as a First or Middle Name* ([http://www.kittybrewster.com/middle\\_name.htm](http://www.kittybrewster.com/middle_name.htm)).
- 4 Michael Pope, 'King Olaf and the English Choral Tradition', in Raymond Monk (ed.), *Elgar Studies* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 46–80 (see p. 61).
- 5 The complete Longfellow text can be found at <http://www.hwlongfellow.org>.
- 6 See also Robert Anderson, *Elgar and Chivalry* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2002), 136.

Shrieks and cries of wild despair  
Filled the air,  
Growing fainter as they listened;  
Then the bursting surge alone  
Sounded on; —  
Thus the sorcerers were christened!

Not surprisingly, this proved unpalatable and irreconcilable with the type of Olaf desired by Elgar and Acworth, who preferred to afford greater attention to 'the more visionary and romantic elements of the hero's life'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Olaf's words and actions in Longfellow's Episodes X and XI were thoroughly at odds with the carefully moulded evangelical hero of the cantata. Olaf's zeal of Episode V to 'preach the Gospel with [his] sword' would perhaps not have endeared him to audiences of the late nineteenth century, while the grisly murder of the inexorable pagan Raud the Strong, using a provoked snake, is thoroughly nauseating:

Sharp his tooth was as an arrow  
As he gnawed through bone and marrow  
But without a groan or shudder  
Raud the Strong blaspheming died.

By omitting these distasteful sections, Elgar and Acworth sanitised the character of Olaf and afforded greater attention to his more romantic, admirable and heroic traits.

### **Rewritten Scenes**

In order to show what Acworth and Elgar aimed to create, I shall look briefly at some of their rewritten scenes and then in closer detail at the Epilogue, in which Acworth's excisions from an otherwise unaltered Longfellow reveal his high-Victorian, Anglican-inspired moral purpose. One of the clearest demonstrations of the motivations, methods, and consequences of the Acworth revision is the Conversion Scene (Elgar's No. 5). This colossal section features fundamental changes to its principal characters as well as to the moral thrust of the work. An entirely rewritten and drastically altered version of Longfellow's Episode VII, it concerns Olaf's confrontation with the Norse leader Ironbeard and the Christianisation of the pagans of Drontheim, and differs significantly from Longfellow's account in a number of crucial respects.

The opening stanza of Longfellow's 'Ironbeard' Episode clearly indicates that it is Olaf himself who instigates the impending confrontation with the pagans. Ironbeard is described as an old farmer, with passions 'as bitter as home-brewed ale', who 'loved the freedom of his farm [...] his horses and his herds, the smell of the earth, and the song of birds' and who cared little for the activities of 'king or earls'. His response to Olaf's challenge is presented as one of duty and necessity rather than of aggression, and his status as a leader is barely mentioned.

The Ironbeard of the Acworth edition is antagonistic, bold and defiant. From

- 7 Gillian Fellows-Jensen, 'King Olaf Tryggvason and Sir Edward Elgar', this Journal 11/4 (March 2000), 202–18 (see p. 216).

the outset it is clear that this is the leader of pagan forces, who have themselves instigated the attack on Olaf's army. Acworth thus transfers the initiative for attack and the responsibility for the forthcoming destruction from Olaf onto Ironbeard and his men. Acworth's account of the pagan advance is far from the image of the old farmer Ironbeard presented by Longfellow. Acworth writes:

Clad in mail they came and sworded  
 Corslet and buckler ring,  
 As they throng behind the Ironbeard  
 Who leads them to the King.

Elgar's setting of this stanza, as well as laying huge emphasis on its contents, illustrates the use of music to create the impression of strength and motion. His treatment of the melodic theme below displays a clever manipulation of the medium for dramatic and spatial purposes:

**Ex. 1: No. 5, C**

Clad in mail they came and sworded

This theme is sung first by the basses, then by tenors, altos, and finally sopranos.<sup>8</sup> Rising through the vocal lines, with entries a consistent four bars apart, the theme seems to swell the numbers of the pagan throng and propel them forward rank on rank at a steady, marching rate. Added to this are the repeating and somewhat sinister 'corslet and buckler ring' in the alto, tenor, and bass parts, and the use of a militaristic snare-drum pattern, with the whole cycle gradually building up to a fearsome climax on the word 'Ironbeard', sung *fortissimo* by full choir and featuring bass drum, cymbals and warlike brass. Out of the twenty-three words of Acworth's stanza, Elgar builds a mammoth structure, with constantly overlapping and dovetailing vocal entries creating an impression of perpetual and forceful forward motion. The textual organisation of Elgar's forty-bar verse setting demonstrates clearly the vast increase in the ferocity and antagonism of Ironbeard, his transformation from a protective farmer to an aggressive warrior.

The title character, too, undergoes a marked change in the Elgar/Acworth redaction. The ruthless brutality shown by Olaf in Longfellow's Episode VII is suppressed to such an extent that the king becomes a venerable and righteous champion of Christianity. In Longfellow's poem, Olaf responds to Ironbeard's taunts by commanding the pagans to convert and threatens to 'offer human sacrifices' if his demands are not fulfilled. Moreover, he is specific about the status of his potential victims, stating his willingness to slay not merely peasants but nobles of high degree. Even more striking is the omission of Olaf's ultimatum to the pagans following Ironbeard's death in the skirmish with the Christian warriors:

<sup>8</sup> For a contemporary analysis of themes in this work, see Joseph Bennett, *Scenes From the Saga of King Olaf by H.W. Longfellow and H. A. Acworth: Book of Words with Analytical Notes* (London: Novello, 1900).

King Olaf from the doorway spoke  
 Choose ye between two things my folk  
 To be baptised or given up to slaughter.

This tyrannical missionary is replaced by a veritable 'vicar of Christ', a Christian hero sanctioned and visibly supported by his Maker. Following the slow demise of Ironbeard, Acworth inserts, and Elgar exploits, a divine apparition above the battlefield:

Then o'er the blood-stained Horg-stone  
 The Cross of Christ was seen.

Using musical means to indicate motion and distance, Elgar creates the impression that the choir, imparting details of this vision, is a heavenly commentator looking down from above: the gradual thinning of orchestral texture and decrease in volume after the last, defiant iteration of the 'Ironbeard' or 'Clad in Mail' theme (Ex. 1, above) suggests that the position of the hearer or narrator is moving away from the death scene, as if rising further and further from preceding events to the source of the subsequent sound. An almost unnoticeable transition from brass to strings and *pianissimo* tremolos seem to represent a withdrawal from the scene of the action, rather like a camera retreating from a close-up to a wide-angled view, while the use of woodwind instruments and harp *glissandi*, as well as the concentrated choral harmonies, create a thoroughly celestial sonority. Again, Elgar succeeds in exploiting the nature and capabilities of music to convey ideas of motion and distance.

Acworth's change to the conversational catalyst in this scene is revealing. In Longfellow the pagans were forced to convert on pain of death: through absolute necessity and a complete lack of alternatives. In Acworth's revision the defeated men of Drontheim, awe-struck by the heavenly vision of the holy cross, are thereby convinced of the power and superiority of Christianity and humbly seek baptism. Employing the full force of his orchestral and choral resources, Elgar unleashes a gargantuan climax on the words 'the power of Christ was felt', a tremendous musical endorsement of Acworth's textual ideals.

These alterations seem to embody the ways in which Acworth and his British audience saw themselves in their role as citizens of the world's richest and most powerful country. According to historian Niall Ferguson, a central tenet of late-Victorian imperialist thought was that military occupation in itself was insufficient: cultures must also be improved by their civilised conquerors: Victorian colonialists, he says,

dreamt not just of ruling the world, but of redeeming it. It was no longer enough for them to exploit other races; now the aim became to improve them.<sup>9</sup>

A butchering conqueror, then, may not have been the most attractive of heroes from the Victorian perspective. Elgar's letters indicate that he was conscious of the desires and values of his audiences and sought to cater for their tastes, often for financial

<sup>9</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Penguin, 2004), 113.

and practical rather than purely artistic reasons. In response to a suggestion from A. J. Jaeger that he set a text by Lewis Carroll, Elgar wrote in 1899:

As to Jabberwock the English never take to anything of that sort – treated mock-heroically [...] I know my twaddly grown up countrymen & women & am sick of 'em.<sup>10</sup>

As well as demonstrating the composer's pragmatic attitude with respect to his choice of subjects for musical setting, this comment suggests that English audiences of the late nineteenth century were – according to Elgar at least – keen on serious history and heroism. A letter of February 1899 further exemplifies the point:

The symphony for Worcester is to be titled 'Gordon' — appealing to the feelings &c, &c.<sup>11</sup>

The pattern of the Conversion Scene is consistent with other alterations. For example, the Sigrid Scene (Elgar's No. 11) is transformed from a multifaceted argument between King Olaf and his second love interest, Queen Sigrid the Haughty, into a single-issue debate in which religion is paramount; while Olaf himself, instead of appearing tight-fisted, cunning and bad-tempered as he does in Longfellow, is presented by Acworth as a principled defender of Christianity. King Olaf's encounter with Queen Thyri, his third love interest, is entirely rewritten by Acworth: Longfellow's Episode XVI is transformed from a terse and accusatory exchange into a meeting of lovers, a thoroughly romantic encounter between an attentive husband and his sensitive and undemanding wife; a scene perhaps affected by what Robert Anderson terms 'Elgar's instinctive chivalry'.<sup>12</sup> From Longfellow's original, where third-person narrative dominates seventeen of the episode's twenty-four four-line stanzas, Elgar and Acworth create a dramatic dialogue between soprano and tenor that, as well as reducing the length by half, provides an opportunity to include an indulgent operatic love duet as the scene's climactic and crowd-pleasing conclusion. Indeed, Robert Anderson rather mischievously suggests that 'Olaf is so relieved to find a Norsewoman who does not wish to do him in that he is ready to indulge' in such a duet.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Death of Olaf**

The details and implications of Olaf's death recounted in Elgar's No. 16 reveal a subtle and yet significant alteration from Longfellow's description. In the poet's Episode XXI Olaf is slain by the Norseman Eric the Earl. The earl's motive was vengeance for his father, Hakon Jarl, whose head was swung from a gibbet, at Olaf's behest, in Episode III. A different slayer is presented by Acworth, with noteworthy consequences: the redaction reveals King Svend the Dane as Olaf's killer. Svend's

10 Elgar to A.J. Jaeger, 27 January 1899, in Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers: Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 105.

11 Elgar to F.G. Edwards, 16 Feb 1898, in *Elgar and his Publishers*, 108.

12 Anderson, *Elgar in Manuscript* (London: British Library, 1990), 26.

13 Anderson, *Elgar and Chivalry*, 140.

new wife, Queen Sigrid the Haughty, was earlier rejected and scorned by Olaf on the grounds of her steadfast paganism. In Elgar's No. 11, Olaf stated: 'I will give my body and soul to flame, ere I take to my heart a heathen dame', before insulting the queen and striking her with his glove. Her resultant anger and insistence on retribution are given by Acworth as the seeds of Olaf's demise, with the implication that he died a martyr's death, slain for his dedication to the purity of his faith. Not only are details of his butchery again omitted, but Olaf, in his Victorian manifestation, dies a principled fighting man, in the line of duty, just like General Gordon, a hero for those times and on whom, as we have seen, Elgar had planned to write a symphony.

### **The Epilogue**

This section is an abridged version of Longfellow's Episode XXII, with three full stanzas and parts of three others excised. References to 'The Virgin and Mother' and 'the voice of Saint John' are omitted – probably to spare the sensibilities of a largely Protestant audience – and their absences are passed over seamlessly. The words of St John are delegated to unidentified soloists and choir, and the scene takes on the character of a sermon. An interesting point is that the Epilogue's apparent moral, that Christianity is the peaceful religion, that peace is preferable to war, and that violence is not the correct medium for the spread of Christianity, does not follow the pattern of Longfellow's Episodes, in which violence was clearly the *only* method of spreading Christianity; but it fits well with the righteous, sanitised Olaf moulded by Acworth and Elgar.

The king is Christ-like in his helplessness at his hour of death. The 'Peace-God', highly praised in the Epilogue, had visibly and miraculously supported the Christian messenger during the Conversion Scene, but does not save him from an ignominious death at the hands of earthly killers bearing earthly grievances. Elgar throws the full weight of his musical muscle and imaginative capabilities behind the ideals of the Elgar/Acworth Epilogue, and this section features some of the work's most inspiring and powerful music, as well as revealing much about the imperialist attitudes of its creators and its time.

Elgar's treatment of themes associated with the pagan gods links the Epilogue with the work's opening 'Challenge of Thor' and goes further than the text to indicate the demise of the old order, the end of pagan primacy. The antagonistic 'Thor' motif from the opening is, in the Epilogue, sung by much smaller forces, slowed to Andante and reduced to *pianissimo* (ex. 2).

Its rhythm is also applied to a descending chromatic scale underpinned by a heavy, mournful variant of the bass pattern originally heard in its fearsome fullness at the outset (ex. 3).

Here, it accompanies the words 'But not with the weapons of war that thou wieldest'. Whether the text refers to Thor or to Olaf,<sup>14</sup> the music is clear: the old violent ways are no longer acceptable; Christianity and peace are henceforward to be intertwined. Conquest is not for self-aggrandisement, but for the perceived

14 On a possible lack of narrative clarity in the Epilogue see Robin Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', in Daniel Grimley and Julian Rushton (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63–80 (see p. 74).

**Ex. 2: Epilogue, C**

Andante  
Solo Soprano *pp*

It is ac - cept - ed, the an - gry de - fi - ance

Solo Tenor *pp*

It is ac - cept - ed, the an - gry de - fi - ance But

Solo Bass *pp*

It is ac - cept - ed, the an - gry de - fi - ance But

not with the wea - pons of war that thou wield - est!

not with the wea - pons of war that thou wield - est!

**Ex. 3: Epilogue, 5 after C**

Andante

*pp*

**Ex. 4: No. 2, H**

improvement of the conquered. A further musical connection with, and rebuke of, 'The Challenge of Thor' is the return of a melodic theme originally heard near the opening with the words 'Force rules the world still, has ruled it, shall rule it. Meekness is weakness, strength is triumphant' (ex. 4).

This theme is thoroughly subdued, as are the ideas that it represents, when heard *legato* and *pianissimo* in the Epilogue. Here, accompanying the words 'Cross against corslet, love against hatred, peace-cry for war-cry', it captures and strengthens the idea of the pagan demise, and of correct, even British-Victorian, imperialism. The dominance of the 'peaceful' religion, and the righteous colonists, becomes even more emphatic through Elgar's use of combined soloists and chorus for the words

'Patience is powerful, He that o'ercometh hath power o'er the nations'. This is a key statement, an apparent description, or justification, of imperial expansion, which, particularly when read in its Scriptural entirety, is of great significance both to the story of Olaf and to Victorian Britain.<sup>15</sup> The line is Longfellow's, but the artistic intention is Acworth's and Elgar's: true late-Victorian, not-for-profit, 'White Man's Burden' British.

That these words are sung in an isolated unison is both revealing and emphatic, and the fact that each line of text is sung a third higher than its predecessor contributes to the dignified exaltation of Christianity. Where Longfellow relies on alliteration for emphasis, as in 'Patience is powerful', Elgar capitalises on the advantages of his medium of music by utilising the expressive capabilities of his extensive choral resources to praise those who spread their religion peacefully, as a matter of duty and for the benefit of less civilised races, as Rudyard Kipling would encourage three years later in his famous poem of 1899.<sup>16</sup>

Dignified adulation is epitomised by Elgar in the freestanding chorus 'As Torrents in Summer', a massive and yet calm testament to the power of faith. Resisting the obvious opportunities for musical magnitude suggested by words and phrases such as 'torrents', 'suddenly rise', 'sky', 'rain', 'fountains', 'full to o'erflowing', and 'marvel', Elgar creates a quietly powerful statement using the rhythmic pattern of the aforementioned 'Thor' motif as his basic building block. This is rendered all the more effective by the fact that it is the only prolonged example of writing for unaccompanied chorus in the entire work. Indeed, such was the impact of this section of the Epilogue that Elgar wrote proudly of it in 1924:

28 years ago and the thing [*King Olaf*] is alive; of all the lucky accidents the PLACING OF 'As torrents' was worthy of all praise.<sup>17</sup>

*Daily Telegraph* critic Joseph Bennett's observation in both his analysis and his review of *King Olaf* that 'impressiveness has no essential connection with noise' is particularly applicable to this powerful reflection on the mystery of faith,<sup>18</sup> in which the music far surpasses the text in the expression of the Elgar/Acworth manifesto.

Elgar's management of choral forces in the Epilogue ensures that each change of vocal texture brings a new freshness and a new emphasis. Following the unaccompanied choral section, the words

15 'And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations'. Revelation 2:26, "King James" Bible.

16 Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*. For full text see [http://www.kipling.org/kip\\_fra.htm](http://www.kipling.org/kip_fra.htm).

17 Elgar to Ivor Atkins, 1924, in E. Wulstan Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1984), 374.

18 Joseph Bennett, Review of *King Olaf*, *Daily Telegraph*, 31 October 1896, reprinted in Christopher Redwood (ed.), *An Elgar Companion* (Ashbourne: Moor, 1982), 14–18 (17).



Stronger than steel  
Is the sword of the Spirit;  
Swifter than arrows  
The light of the truth is,  
Greater than anger  
Is love, and subdueth

are delivered first by the soprano and then by the ensemble of soloists. The solo soprano has not been heard since the Thyri scene (Elgar's No. 14), and her appearance here creates a complete contrast with the preceding chorus, while the repetition of the verse by the trio of soloists constitutes both a reinforcement of this significant portion of text and a stepping-stone to the following choral entry. Out of the final six-line stanza of the Epilogue, Elgar creates a great amalgam of praise and affirmation for the Christian faith, exploiting the polyphonic capabilities of music to symbolically prolong lines such as 'Love is eternal' and 'God is still God and His faith shall not fail us'.

Lest we forget that this is primarily a story of an individual, Elgar and Acworth remind us of the title character's recent death with their inclusion of four lines from the Interlude that follows Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*:

A strain of music ends the tale,  
A low, monotonous funeral wail,  
That with its cadence, wild and sweet  
Makes the saga more complete.

Here, Elgar's return to the work's sombre opening music brings the ultimate focus back from the wide issue of Christianity to the fate of the hero, and an acknowledgement of his central role in the eponymous Saga. The presence of the last four lines facilitates a musical ending appropriate to a tragedy, in which the protagonist is killed for his staunch opposition to paganism and his promotion of the Christian cause. Unlike Longfellow's butchering warrior, Elgar's Olaf is the figurehead, the white man, whose burden, whose thankless mission of peace and civilisation, is to be admired and promoted.

*Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* is a work that encapsulates not only the personal beliefs of its architects, but also the prevailing attitudes, expectations and values of its time. As a historical document, not to mention a musical creation, it is an item of immense worth.

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## The Seas of Separation: The mythic archetype behind Elgar's songs, with a performer's analysis of *Sea Pictures*

David Owen Norris

### *Helen Weaver again*

In February I shall be recording most of Elgar's songs, at Elgar's piano, with Amanda Pitt, Mark Wilde, and Peter Savidge.<sup>1</sup> In the course of my preparations I have become convinced that *Sea Pictures*, like the 'Enigma' Variations and the Cello Concerto, is connected with Elgar's lost love, Helen Weaver.<sup>2</sup> I find I am not the first with this idea: Patrick Little's confidently suggests as much in this Journal.<sup>3</sup> Little investigates the verses Elgar omitted in the two long songs to words by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Adam Lindsay Gordon, pointing out that *Sabbath Morning at Sea* could have included a reference to children which Elgar was not ready to make until *Dream Children* (1902). Little also argues that *The Swimmer* represents Elgar's triumph over suicide (a fairly well-documented Elgarian obsession), and ends his article with the suggestion that not the least of Elgar's achievements may have been to die of old age.

Even after the article and comparative record review by Roger Hecht (who does not agree with Little on the subject of Helen Weaver)<sup>4</sup>, and Jerrold Northrop Moore's analysis, much remains to be said.<sup>5</sup> I share Little's surprised regret that most published commentary on the cycle is dismissive and musically naïve. The gong and its sponge sticks tend to dominate most discussions. To avoid that pitfall, I shall refer mainly to the piano version. (The sketches of *Sea Pictures*, like many Elgar scores, are definitely laid out for piano, though indications of orchestration crop up from time to time.)

For readers new to Helen Weaver theories, I should explain that her parents kept a shoe shop in Worcester High Street; some of Elgar's early polkas were dedicated to her; he visited her in Leipzig where she studied the violin; they were briefly engaged; and in 1885 she emigrated to New Zealand, for the sake of her

1 The CD will be issued by Avie.

2 See Brian Trowell, 'Elgar's Use of Literature', in Raymond Monk (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press 1993), 182–326.

3 Patrick Little, 'Songs of Love and Death', this Journal, 9/4 (March 1996), 168–176.

4 This Journal, 11/13 (November 1999), 144–179.

5 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), 277–283.

health. Instead of dying, she married and had children. Elgar, still in touch with her brother, would have known of her news. Helen is sometimes claimed as (\*\*\*), the thirteenth 'Enigma' Variation, and the Cello Concerto may have its origin in a threnody for her son, who died in the Great War, and whom Elgar may have met when he was convalescing in Hampstead.<sup>6</sup>

This article falls into three sections: a consideration of the reasons for Elgar's selection of texts for his songs; an analysis of the connexions between words, moods and music in *Sea Pictures*, with a few interesting points from the sketches; and some general thoughts about the deep well-springs of Elgar's art.

### **The Autobiographical Song**

It is a striking how Elgarians are particularly ready to believe that the music of their hero is rooted in the incidents of his life. We should perhaps be more sceptical. Whatever the main inspiration of a piece of music, it will be broadened and universalised as the composer's technique is brought to bear, and, especially, as it is refracted through the necessary prism of the performer. The danger of too close biographical reference is brutally exposed in the New Zealand television programme 'Elgar's Enigma', where some of Brian Trowell's impassioned descriptions of the music are resolutely contradicted by Lynn Harrell's actual performance. As Elgar wrote of his own *Falstaff*: 'it is not intended that the meaning of the music, often varied and intensified, shall be narrowed to a corollary of these quotations only'.<sup>7</sup>

However, scanning the 25 songs for voice and piano that Elgar published up to the *Arabian Serenade* of 1914 (after which come only three songs directly connected with the war, the six *Pageant of Empire* songs, three unison children's songs, and only one non-occasional song, *It isnae me*, in 1930), one cannot fail to notice that two are songs of yearning for a paradise only to be brought into being through music (*Speak, Music* (1902) and the Shelley words fitted to the *canto popolare* from *In the South*); and no fewer than eleven are about loss, of which nine are about lost love.

Since Elgar's songs are not on everyone's shelves, a few examples may be welcome. The setting of John Hay's poem *Through the long days* (August 1885) has been linked with Helen Weaver's emigration in October that year, which must of course have been planned well beforehand.

What will my lov'd one be  
Parted from me?  
....  
Never on earth again  
Shall I before her stand  
....  
But, while my darling lives,  
Peaceful I journey on,  
Not quite alone.

6 On this last point see Brian Trowell, 'The Road to Brinkwells', in Lewis Foreman (ed.), *Oh, My Horses!* (Rickmansworth, Elgar Editions, 2001), 347-385; see pp. 349-364.

7 *Falstaff* by Edward Elgar. *Analytical Essay by the Composer* (London: Novello, n.d.), reprinted from *The Musical Times*, September 1913.

Elgar concludes by repeating : 'Not while my darling lives, While my darling lives'. Trowell has dealt with *After* (1895).<sup>8</sup> Marston's poem begins:

A little time for laughter,  
A little time to sing,  
A little time to kiss and cling,  
And no more kissing after.

and ends:

But long, long years to weep in,  
And comprehend the whole  
Great grief that desolates the soul,  
And eternity to sleep in.

Marston may have been writing about a death, rather than a separation. Elgar could possibly have been thinking of his dead siblings.

The lengthy and rather lovely ballad *As I laye a-thynkyng* sets the last poem of the olde-worlde Thomas Ingoldsby. (Gertrude Walker refused to be the dedicatee at Christmas 1887.) By omitting two of the verses, Elgar narrows the poem's focus to a Belle-Dame-ish heroine who dies for love, and who then appears to say from heaven (emphases original):

'Follow, follow me away,  
It boots not to delay' –  
'Twas so she seem'd to saye  
**'HERE IS REST!'**

*The Poet's Life* (poem by Ellen Burroughs) was composed in 1892, the time of Elgar's first flush of fame from the *Serenade for Strings*, *Spanish Serenade* and *The Black Knight*. He may have felt it had a personal resonance.

A poet sang, so light of heart was he,  
A song that thrilled with joy in every word:  
....  
The world pass'd by, with heavy step and loud,  
None heeding, save that, parted from the crowd,  
Two lovers heard.

There fell a day when sudden sorrow smote  
The poet's life.  
....  
But one sobbing note  
Reached the world's heart,  
And swiftly, swiftly in the wake  
Of bitterness and passion and heartbreak,  
There followed fame.

An uncharacteristically vengeful choice of verse, *Always and Everywhere* (1901,

8 (See *Literature* n.311).

translated from the Polish of Count Krasinski), failed to produce a good song. Since it's not easily found, here is the poem in full.

O say not, when my earthly days are o'er  
That I have only caused thee sorrows sore;  
For I have wrecked my own life even more,  
Always and Everywhere.

O say not, when on earth I no more dwell,  
That I have numbed thy young heart's joyous swell;  
I, too, have quaffed the Poison-Cup of Hell,  
Always and Everywhere.

But say, when soft the grasses o'er me wave  
That God is kind to hide me in the grass;  
For both my life and thine I did enslave,  
Always and Everywhere.

But say, O say! when my last hours depart,  
That my poor life was one long frenzied smart;  
For I have loved thee, though with bitter heart,  
Always and Everywhere.

Even the perky *Rondel* (1894) harps noticeably on the impermanence of love. Longfellow's translation from Froissart has 'naught see I fixed or sure in thee' twice, and then oddly changes it to 'naught see I permanent or sure in thee' for the final appearance. Elgar goes one better, and writes the first appearance as 'nought [sic] see I sure or fixed in thee'. Three versions of the same line – not very fixed at all! To ram the point further home, Elgar repeats both the second and third appearance of the line. In the musically positive *In the Dawn* (1902), the last four of the six verses are about separation and 'dreary wastes', and the beloved is absent throughout.

In 1909 Elgar planned a six-song orchestral cycle to poems selected from Gilbert Parker's collection *Embers* (a title to attract Elgar's attention!). All six poems deal with the same obsessions. Three – *Proem*, *The Waking* and *There is an orchard* – were never completed. Here are representative lines from each:

Behold, I bring one perfect yesterday. ....  
Who am I that I should hope?  
Out of all my life I have been granted one sheaf of memory.

To be young is to dream, and I dreamed no more.....  
She came like a song, she will go like a star;

and

There is an orchard beyond the sea.

Elgar completed three Parker songs. The last verse of *Was it some golden star?* runs:

Have you forgotten it,  
All that we said?  
I still remember though  
Ages have fled.  
Whisper the word of life,  
"Love is not dead".

and of *Twilight*:

Adieu! Some time shall the veil between  
The things that are, and that might have been,  
Be folded back for our eyes to see,  
And the meaning of all be clear to me.

Parker's title was *The Twilight of Love*. The melody is too fond of a scale of a falling fourth, but at the very end Elgar caps it with a new, extraordinary, thought (Ex. 1).

#### Ex.1 *Twilight* (Op. 59 no.6)

The phrase 'what might have been' (the second line above) is in the epigraph to *Dream Children*, and is applied by Elgar (in quotation marks, but unattributed) to the 'dream-interlude' in *Falstaff* in his *Musical Times* article on the piece.

The remaining Parker setting, *O soft was the song* (for me, Elgar's best song), was to open the cycle with a positive view ('thou wert mine own, and Eden reconquered was mine'), although Elgar's pasted-together final 'verse' makes sure we see the significance of the past tense. The words are in fact the second verse of a two-verse poem entitled *At Sea*. In the first verse, the two lovers are together:

And below, in the shadows, thine eyes like stars,  
And Love brooding low, and the warm white glory of thee.

I need not labour the significance of Elgar's selections, nor of his alterations (especially of two titles) and omissions. Two-thirds of Elgar's songs deal with lost Edens and lost loves.

Some of the other songs seem to bear strange messages. Of the two (only two) more-or-less straightforward love songs, *Is she not passing fair?* (written in 1886 shortly after he began to teach Alice Roberts, whom he married in 1889) has three verses, all extolling the beloved. Surprisingly for a song of such frank admiration, the main modulation in the first and third verses is to the dominant *minor*, while the whole of the middle verse is in the tonic *minor*.

Elgar's most positive song, *The Wind at Dawn* (1888) sets words Alice had written in 1880. The poem gives merely the meteorological details promised by its title; but it is hard not to put a biographical interpretation on such lines as:

the earth was grey....  
 And the moon had fled, with her sad, wan light,  
 For her kingdom was gone with night.  
 Then the sun upleapt in might and in power...

Alice could not have been thinking of Helen when she wrote the poem, of course, but Elgar might have when he chose it for music. The turbulent minor-key opening of this magnificent song is transformed by the sun as 'the sea stream'd red from the kiss of his brow'. But if Elgar thought Alice was to be his vanquishing sun, later songs suggest he was disappointed.

The second love song is *Love alone will stay* (1897), again to words by Alice, and sometimes called the 'Lute Song'. It was to this song that Elgar's thoughts turned when he began to think about the song-cycle commissioned for Clara Butt by the 1899 Norfolk and Norwich Festival. With some misgivings, he was finding himself drawn to the idea of the sea. Alice recast her words to suit. Here are the two versions side-by-side.

*Love alone will stay*

Closely cling, for winds drive fast,  
 Blossoms perish in the blast;  
 Love alone will last.

Closely let me hold thy hand,  
 Storms are sweeping sea and land;  
 Love alone will stand.

Kiss my lips and softly say,  
 "Joy may go and sunlit day;  
 Love alone will stay."

*In Haven*

Closely let me hold thy hand,  
 Storms are sweeping sea and land;  
 Love alone will stand.

Closely cling, for waves beat fast,  
 Foam flakes cloud the hurrying blast;  
 Love alone will last.

Kiss my lips, and softly say:  
 "Joy, sea-swept, may fade today;  
 Love alone will stay."

In the first version, the exultant dawn wind of 1880/1888 has become a threat, and love a substitute for joy. The second version is perhaps still bleaker. The sea is a threatening presence in each verse, its storm-beaten waves sweeping joy overboard. The body language has changed too. In the first version the progression from clinging to holding hands to kissing implies 'Goodbye': the progression from holding hands to clinging to kissing implies something quite different.

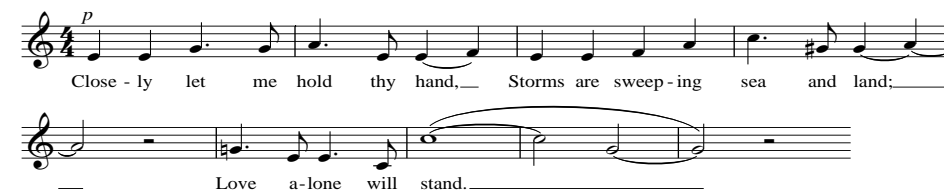
**Sea Pictures**

The remarks that follow are not a bar-by-bar analysis; they attempt to confine themselves to the most interesting points.

Elgar's little 'Lute Song', now *In Haven*, obviously held musical building-blocks that he could use to make his cycle. The opening minor third, and its link to the 'Enigma' theme, are often commented on. Still more significant are the diminished

fourth (bar 6), the rising semitones (bars 4–6), and the falling fourth at the end of each verse (Ex. 2).

**Ex. 2 *In Haven (Capri)* (Op. 37 no. 2)**



The rising semitones, here so unconfidently cajoling, will be used to positive effect in the final song, *The Swimmer*, especially in the bass of bars 19–21, and of 107–109. *Sea Slumber Song* (No. 1) prefers the falling semitone (after trying out both in its introduction), and makes sighing use of it in bar 28, and in the bass of bars 44–6. The falling semitone darkens the bass in the recitatives of the last song too.

*In Haven* barely modulates, suiting its new title. The long penultimate vocal note is also indicative of repose, or perhaps merely of permanence. The 3-bar coda is an afterthought: the original song ended with a C major chord followed by a staccato triple-octave C, half a bar in all. (Sketches confirm what every pianist must have suspected, that the pedal should be raised at the end of the penultimate bar of the coda.)

*Sea Slumber Song* begins with a plagal cadence – an Amen, to an organist like Elgar. An unusual way to begin anything, but perhaps an attempt at acceptance – of what? *In Haven's* drooping fourth is here (bar 1, left thumb) mournfully filled in with a descending scale. (Sketches show that giving this low phrase to the voice in bar 9 was an afterthought: 'shadowy sand' was to have been sung on the E, given in the score as a higher alternative).

When the 'elfin land' turns the music to the major, the descending fourth is taken by surprise, as it were, repeating its notes, and turning to rise in hope. The turning figure (d#–f#–e) both emphasises the achievement of *not* falling down a fourth, and allows the whole 'rocking' figure to cover that very interval. Essentially it is a decoration of the rising semitones from the 'Lute Song'. (The melodic twists I shall call the *turning figure* all involve three notes adjacent in the scale, but not in scale order, with an element of harmonic strain and resolution.) The words 'Forget the voices wild' – an important admonition – are emphasized by a rising fourth, and darkened by a minor chord. The new theme for the 'isles in elfin light' originally had the bar-lines a beat later, thus beginning on an upbeat. (The agogic accent contrived by the staccato mark on the first low C in the accompaniment is therefore very important.) As well as accenting the word 'elfin', the original barring may have disguised the melody's obvious reference to 'Home, sweet home': home is where the heart is, after all.

*Sabbath Morning at Sea* opens with a chordal idea (Ex. 3) that originally concluded the October 1883 D major polka *Helcia* (one of Elgar's names for Helen Weaver: other polkas for Helen were *La Blonde* of October 1882 and *Blumine* of May 1884).<sup>9</sup>

9 I am indebted to Andrew Lyle for a sight of these pieces.

**Ex. 3 Helcia (Polka, 1883)**

In the song, the *Helcia* chords return at bar 17 to introduce ‘the new sight’, and at bar 62 nail down the return of the tonic (sea major, if we may indulge in an Elgarian pun), while a busy diminution screws the sequence up a third at bar 65. A final, fifth appearance at bar 82 shores up the singer’s top note. Elgar considered yet another *Helcia* appearance, underlining the words ‘deeper in your soul’ (Ex. 4):

**Ex. 4 Sabbath Morning at Sea (Op. 37 no.3, sketch)**

Eventually, however, he left that melody as we first find it at ‘Love me, sweet friends’, spanning the fourth with a fine balance of upward and downward movement (Ex. 5).

**Ex. 5 Sabbath Morning, bar 44**

A few bars earlier (Ex. 6 (a)) we heard a theme (marked *Broad* and *solenne* in sketches) that many have compared to Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* (Ex. 6 (b)):

**Ex. 6(a) Sabbath Morning (from bar 31/3, as sketched)**

*Broad, solenne, molto maestoso* ♩ = 66

**Ex 6(b) Wagner, Die Meistersinger, Vorspiel**

It is perhaps unnecessary to remind readers of the tale that Brahms, when someone pointed out that the tune in the Finale of his First Symphony resembled Beethoven’s Ninth, retorted, ‘Any fool can hear that’. Of course, Elgar’s ears were full of Wagner. The important thing here is that Elgar’s idea economically presents a falling fourth and a rising scale of a fourth – the sketch even includes the rising semitone – in such a way that the only possible continuation is sequential. Wagner’s more subtle use of sequence is discursive and so much less to the point. In view of the contrapuntal experiment with ‘deeper in your soul’, it may also be significant that most of the ‘Wagner’ tune can be harmonised by the *Helcia* chords (Ex. 7).

**Ex. 7 combining Ex. 6(a) with Helcia**

The climax, marked by Elgar in his sketch at bar 75, attempts to transform the accepting Amen and falling-fourth scale of the first song into a triumphant view of God – something Elgar was soon to try to deny himself in *Gerontius*, of course. The diminuendo and slipping bass lines (bar 87) suggest that whatever the goal is, it is not yet reached; I hear the loud final chord as a robust oath. Two points from the sketches are of interest:

Bars 23-24 show us the same side-slipping bass line (‘impassive – calm’). The D flat is a second thought; originally the D was a semibreve. I take this as a hint that Elgar was himself becoming aware of the significance of his semitone basses.

Elgar’s word-setting is often criticised. A typical example is: ‘The sea sings round me while ye roll Afar // the hymn unaltered’, with a quaver rest (/) before ‘the hymn’. Of course, this rest can be made a rhetorical nod of the head, as it were, while a breath is taken. But Elgar originally wrote (Ex. 8):

**Ex. 8 Sabbath Morning, from bar 37/3 (as sketched)**

The fourth song, *Where corals lie*, shows that Elgar cannot ‘forget the voices wild’. At the level of tonality it is a magical reworking of the stillness of *In Haven*. Technically, it does modulate, but Elgar’s mastery of modes means that accidentals are very few indeed. Besides this modulatory self-denial, another indicator of repose from *In Haven* also recurs, in the long vocal notes at bars 8–9, 11–12 and 13 (similarly in other verses). The last is approached by rising fourth. The similar verse-end long note in *In Haven* was quitted by falling fourth. A mirror-haven in a

world upside-down?

The mid-verse long note (bars 11-12) was originally one beat shorter, to its great advantage, in my view. Elgar contrived this by a number of experiments with 5/4 and 3/4, the ultimate inked effect of which was to make bar 11 a 3/4 bar, with 'lie' falling on the first beat of a 4/4 bar. Thus the bass note changed on the bar-line, as indeed one might still hear it. The change to a wholly 4/4 solution was hastily made in pencil. Perhaps Elgar mistrusted his capabilities as a conductor at this stage in his career, or perhaps he valued the sense of timelessness that the extended long note brings.

The key, D major, of the final song, *The Swimmer*, has occasioned a number of theories, including one that 'Elgar simply liked D major'. Since the sketches are all in E major, we may assume that Elgar intended the cycle's first and last songs to span the 'octave' of his initials E-E.<sup>10</sup> Reading between the lines of Clara Butt's slightly anxious request for orchestral flummery around her final top A, we may assume that the reason the song was transposed is because Butt had no top B.<sup>11</sup> It is pleasing to see Elgar pragmatically transposing, once his letter-symbolism has done its work, presumably secure in the knowledge that few of his listeners will have perfect pitch.<sup>12</sup> The slight discontinuity between the fourth and fifth songs (which of course originally ended and began on the same B – just as the second bar of this last song was exactly the same as bar 28 of the first song) is regrettable, even so.

The broad melody at bar 6 has come in for a good deal of armchair criticism. In performance it can be made to work very well. Its important attribute is that it transforms the falling fourth and a version of the turning figure in a single bar that, like the 'Wagner theme', demands the sequential repetition that will ram its message home. (Another turning figure is used to break the sequence at bar 8.) It too can be harmonised by the *Helcia* chords, with less license than Elgar was experimenting with at 'deeper in your soul' in the third song (Ex. 9). No such experiments survive here, however.

**Ex. 9 (not from the sketches; author's suggestion!)**



10 See Brian Trowell, 'Elgar's Use of Literature', 306–7, note 147.

11 Clara Butt's letter to Elgar, undated (?late October 1899). See Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 79. 'I should like you to be kind & alter the bars where I don't sing now in *The Swimmer*—put a lot of stuff into it & more if you can directly I come off the top A & last note—it will make a huge effect'.

12 Other Elgar songs were completed and published in lower keys than their original conception, including *The Shepherd's Song* and the Parker cycle Op. 59. Separate songs from *Sea Pictures* were published in various keys. The quotation in *The Music Makers* from the first and fourth songs is in F minor.

The plagal-minor *interruptus* of the recitative, preceded by emphatically harmonised and rhythmically 'stuck' semitone shifts in treble and bass, is an important part of the cycle's emotional journey (and not the error of judgment detected by many commentators.) At bar 23 the turning figure and the falling fourth combine once again to produce another urgent one-bar sequence.

At bar 31–32 the ascending semitones seem awkward at first blush. They derive from the aspiring semitones that fail to escape from Alice's Haven. Now they do escape, through sheer persistence, to 'Love' and the broad tune at bar 40. Thanks to 'Love', the recitative can be avoided, and at last we reach the land where corals lie – 'the heights and hollows of fern and heather' to the music of bars 29–36 of the *fourth* song (all based on the falling fourth from the very opening). Bar 55, the last melodic appearance of the diminished fourth, is the only time it is harmonised with 6-4/5-3. Other appearances (in the second and fourth songs) have been harmonised by the single dominant chord. In the transposed D major version of the last song, this emphatic cadence is in E minor, which may have consoled Elgar somewhat for the loss of his overall tonal symmetry. The Land, once achieved, turns out to be Home, sweet home (bar 58).

If we credit Patrick Little's suggestion (though the fact that Adam Lindsay Gordon shot himself does not necessarily mean that *The Swimmer* is committing suicide), it must be at bar 117 that Elgar plunges the knife into his own heart. The rest is an operatic dying, the sea's lullaby rocking low in the tenor line, the main melody circling round and round, and the determined aspiring semitones ever more discordant, especially the turning figure repeated three times under the singer's top A, at the pitch we first heard the figure in the first song – yet another consolation for the necessary transposition. An important difference between piano and orchestral versions at bar 118 is that the piano is allowed an accent, the word *sonore*, and the peak of the crescendo before dying away. The orchestra is marked *piano* directly at the beginning of the bar. It may just be that the voice is low.

The endings of the songs are especially interesting in their wandering through the keys. The first uses the falling semitone in the bass to make it seem for a moment as if resigned acceptance is getting us somewhere – but we end up (plagally) in E minor after all. The ending of the third is discussed above. The fourth seems about to end in a major key – the relative major D, not the tonic B – when an almost Brahmsian mirror between treble and bass takes us to the tonic major after all. Oddly, the effect is magical rather than real – we needed the relative major after all for reality. (Yet another consolation for the final song's transposition to that key.) At the end of the last song bar 129 transforms the important semitone progression of bar 9, and also echoes the four chords at the end of *Where corals lie*, suggesting that this final reality is more stressful than Elgar imagined. The reader will note the kinship of the ending of *Twilight* (Ex. 1 above), which also re-worked the falling-fourth scale.

Some of the foregoing connexions between words and music may have reinforced the idea that Elgar is grappling with a lost desire from which he is separated by the sea; with a dichotomy of present adequacy and absent bliss; in short, with Alice and Helen. It may not be too fanciful to point out that the turning figure which twists so many of the melodies is itself a device in two minds about two sometimes discordant notes. According to his son, James Mottram (Elgar's host in Norwich)

described Elgar as he raised his baton to conduct the first performance of *Sea Pictures* as 'a hawk dreaming poetry in captivity'.<sup>13</sup> (Alice was there to support him, of course.) The pen-picture reinforces the idea that the story buried deep in most of Elgar's songs is simply Paradise Lost.

### Hidden Meanings

Who is it singing in *Sea Pictures*? The voice in the first song is of the Sea herself. Even the first five lines can be understood in the sea's voice, if she refers to herself in the third person, a device familiar from Alice Elgar's diary. The two songs of repose (Nos. 2 and 4) each have two characters in them, one addressing the other. In *Haven* I hear in Alice's voice, stoically offering advice to her mournful husband. It is, after all, her poem, and it's the sensible sort of advice we would never expect from Elgar. Patrick Little hears *Sabbath Morning* in Helen's voice, and certainly the *Helcia* tag could be understood almost as quotation marks. *Where corals lie* I hear in Elgar's voice, for it was he who was almost pathologically dissatisfied with his lot. This is his reply to his wife's offer of shelter in *In Haven*. He asks her help in closing his eyes to his desires, 'but far the rapid fancies fly'. And in the end, nothing helps. 'Thy lips ... thy smile ... Yet leave me, leave me, let me go'. *The Swimmer* must surely be Elgar himself once again.

The singer can by-pass such complex characterisations. The important thing about the third and the fifth songs are that they are long, even sprawling, widely modulating songs with recitative, and so take their place in a long tradition of *scenas* whose purpose is to present a character. The singer becomes simply an 'I', with whom the audience can identify. Anyone else in the song is distanced either by geography or time. (The former beloved in *The Swimmer* could be present, perhaps: but a swimmer in a wind-tossed sea is not very likely to be actually talking to anyone.) In the two songs with two characters present (the second and fourth) the muteness of one helps maintain the personification of the singer as a lonely (varying) 'I'. The shifting focus, from sea to swimmer *via* more nebulous but clearly different characters, keeps the audience listening, and at the same time cunningly distracts attention from any real narrative that may lie behind the music.

Concealment, even deception, was an important facet of Elgar's character. To the well-known examples, and the suggestion above about *Home, sweet home*, Amanda Pitt adds *Queen Mary's Song* where he hides, and then reveals, *Lilliburlero* in the vocal line (Ex. 10).

#### Ex. 10 Queen Mary's Song

Hap - less doom\_ of wo - man hap - py in be - tro - thing

Beau-ty passes like\_ abreathand love is lost in loa - thing

13 Ralph Hale Mottram, *Portrait of an Unknown Victorian* (London, 1936), p.253.

*Lilliburlero* (1688) was a song satirising the Catholic Irish, which 'sung a deluded Prince [James II] out of Three Kingdoms.' The Catholic Elgar will have seen the parallel with Mary Stuart.

Elgar often presents us with a plain meaning and a hidden meaning – what some might call denoted and connoted meanings. What sets him apart is that he is primarily interested in the hidden meaning, and more aware of it than most, as his epigraph to the Second Symphony makes plain. It was the power of this inner meaning of music that presented itself to the dreamer by the Severn, to the child who was so excited by his first hearing of an orchestra. Here lies his real difference from more academically trained composers. They and their teachers were aware that the key to deep meaning was Form. They studied Form in the hope that it would make them deep. Elgar was deep already, but found that the forms around him – in his early polkas, for example – failed to unlock what he knew was within. His life-long struggles with shape and order are no weakness: they are the strength that makes his music what it is.

This is why Parry was so critical of Elgar's 'mannerisms': Elgar was responding to obscure but deep stimuli that evoked what appear on the surface to be a relatively narrow range of responses. This is why a single bar of Elgar is recognisably his – I recall the composer Michael Zev Gordon starting to his feet with the exclamation 'Elgar!' at the very first bar of a 'blind' first hearing of *The Spirit of England*. This is why Parry and Stanford wrote more symphonies than Elgar – explains, in fact, why Elgar's mature output is comparatively small in every genre (except the March!). Parrys and Stanfords could be interested simply in varying their surfaces, as it were. Elgar's surfaces could be very brilliant too, but he needed to await the Spirit of Delight that would take him to a new Hidden Meaning – and we may assume that Hidden Meanings, perhaps to be considered as mythic archetypes, are fewer in number than Plain Meanings.

The mythic archetype communicates more directly with the listener than the Plain Meaning on the surface of the music. This is at the root of the fact, slightly disappointing to many who have learned to enjoy Parry or Stanford, or Ashton or Cowen, for that matter, that (of that group of composers) it's only Elgar that the public really *loves*, as Parry himself generously admitted. (This is perhaps the moment to observe that the only people who appear *not* to like Elgar's songs are the ones who write about them.)

Elgar's concern with the Hidden Meaning explains his somewhat cavalier attitude to texts. The text's job was to provoke him to expression – such deep expression that the listener is easily led below the surface. The details of the text could be abandoned once its work was done, just as the E major key of *The Swimmer* was abandoned.

On this argument, Elgar's word-changes are not very important. But they are worth defending. His perhaps unconscious illustration of the mutability of love in *Rondel* and his crafty shift of focus in *As I laye a-thynkyng* have been discussed. In *In the Dawn* he omits Benson's bracketed words '(he saith)', which would have spoiled the illusion that the singer was the actual feeler-of-the-emotion – the 'I'. In *Where corals lie* he changes 'all the lands where corals lie' to 'all the land where corals lie'. We have already heard the phrase 'the land where corals lie'. The change

achieves two ends – the listener is not confused, and Elgar can continue to conceive just the one land where his corals lie – presumably New Zealand.

Adam Lindsay Gordon's *Swimmer* is treated more roughly. His poetry is not so delicately wrought, you might think, that anyone would care. 'And' is omitted before 'the rocks receding' (bar 20): necessary for Elgar's emphatic rhythms, and surely a great improvement poetically as well. Before 'girt with tempest' (bar 77) Elgar has changed 'See!' to 'So'. 'See! [the tempest!]' would have chimed awkwardly with the picture of peace that we have just been contemplating. 'So' has the effect of advancing an argument that fits in well with the continuous form of the *scena*. The changed syntax may explain why Elgar went on to write 'swift waves under' instead of 'swift waves sunder', though the unpleasant hiss of the original may have been motive enough. The final change, substituting 'strifes' for 'straits' (bar 118) has been called 'nonsense', which is a little harsh. 'Gulfs' and 'strifes' have a fine final assonance, and 'strife' is where *Sea Pictures* ends up (see the last bar but four), for all its opening attempt at an Amen.<sup>14</sup>

Another constant of Elgar's character is his self-pity. His personality would have found some chip on his shoulder whatever his circumstances. His provincialism, his origins in trade, his religion, were useful spurs to this important part of him, but I do not think they were the cause of it, any more than the cause of his love of concealment was the fact that he may have needed to conceal past griefs from his wife. The competing claims of Helen and Alice stirred these twin pillars of his being into a creative conspiracy for which song-lovers can be grateful, however difficult it made Elgar's life. Of course, much of Elgar's music, not just the songs, provided him with a sphere where he could legitimately commune with a female muse other than his wife (latterly Alice Stuart Wortley, the 'Windflower'). When Alice Elgar died, he no longer needed that private space. This, rather than lack of grip, may be the explanation for the fact that he wrote so little music after her death; but doubtless this is a common speculation.

### **The Dome**

As a coda to this discussion, let me suggest a possible reason for Elgar's decision to base his Norwich commission on the sea, and why he should call his songs 'pictures'. No. IV of the quarterly magazine *The Dome* was published on New Year's Day, 1898 ('ready in December' it said in No. III). It included an engraving of Wotan's Farewell and an article calling for an English Bayreuth, a poem by Lawrence Binyon (whose words Elgar was later to set in *The Spirit of England*), and songs by Bronsart, Blackburn and Elgar – *Love alone will stay*, the Lute Song that became *In Haven*.

No. III of *The Dome* had included a piano piece by Hurlstone and a song by Coleridge-Taylor; No. II, a song by Liza Lehmann and a Minuet for piano by Elgar. Elgar must therefore have been familiar with the magazine, which indulged a mild obsession with the sea. No. II reproduced D.G. Rossetti's picture *A Sea-Spell* (of the usual luscious-lipped Pre-Raphaelite woman) with an accompanying article including the poem Rossetti wrote to accompany his picture.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon's original 'sunder', 'straits', and 'all the lands' have been restored in the current issue of the vocal score. Some other changes are noted as an appendix to this article.

Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,  
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell  
Between its chords; and as the wild notes swell,  
The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.  
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?  
What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,  
In answering echoes from what planisphere,  
Along the wind, along the estuary?  
She sinks into her spell: and when full soon  
Her lips move and she soars into her song,  
Her lips move and she soars into her song,  
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng  
In furrowed self-clouds to the summoning rune,  
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,  
And up her rock, bare breasted, comes to die?

Disappointingly, in the picture the lute is in fact a lyre.

### **H.A. Payne, *The Enchanted Sea***





No. III of *The Dome* promised that a remarkable new colour picture (*The Enchanted Sea* by H.A. Payne) would appear in No. IV. In the event, a colour plate of Hiroshige's [sic] *The Wave* appeared, and Payne's picture had to wait till No. V, published on May Day, 1898. (No. V also included poems by Binyon, Arthur Symons, Francis Thomson, and W.B. Yeats, a story by 'Fiona MacLeod', and music by Levi and by Elgar's later biographer Thomas Dunhill.) Payne's picture (see illustration) is extraordinary, contriving to combine characteristics of Japanese prints, Beardsley and the Pre-Raphaelites. The chief figure is a solitary maiden adrift in a wicker coracle, her cloak embroidered with hearts. In the foreground the heads of three drowned women rest amongst the waves. In the near distance, two pairs of swimmers and a solitary swimmer. Further back, two slave-galleys with ravens painted on their sails. The cliffs on the horizon are ablaze. *The Enchanted Sea* seems a handbook of the meanings concealed in *Sea Pictures*. I wonder if Elgar read the magazine even when he wasn't in it?

#### **Appendix: alterations in the current issue of the vocal score of *Sea Pictures***

*Sea Slumber Song*, bar 15; hairpins replace the original *cresc.* and *dim.*, as in the preceding bars; but to a performer, and on these significant words, there is a difference.

*In Haven*, penultimate bar; the pedal mark is corrected, but not from the sketch which gives it a beat later.

*Sabbath Morning at Sea*, bar 31, the *dim.*, which being in small type seems to me to apply only to the higher *ossia*, is rendered as a big hairpin.

*The Swimmer*: the new orchestral score adds the *accel.* at the end, taken from the piano version; but it's not necessarily appropriate for the orchestra.

*David Owen Norris leads an unusually varied life as one of this country's most versatile pianists. He is a soloist in concertos, a recitalist, and an accompanist who has worked with many of our leading singers; in addition he is well-known as a recording artist and broadcaster on radio and television. In 1991 he was appointed the first Gilmore Artist by an American foundation, an award made because of the originality of his work, including exploration of unusual repertoire. He was among the first Arts and Humanities Board Fellows in Creative and Performing Arts, holding the post at the University of Southampton. His recordings include songs by Bantock, Quilter and Finzi; the solo piano music of Elgar, Dyson and Quilter; and the first recording of Robert Walker's realisation of the sketches of Elgar's Piano Concerto. He is an Honorary Fellow of Keble College, Oxford, and Educational Fellow of the Worshipful Company of Musicians.*

## Touching Snow: The Story of the 'Dorabella Bequest' Part Two – The Riddle of The Shepherd's Song

Sylvia Bennett

*The story so far: Sylvia Bennett obtained access to what remains of the 'Dorabella Bequest' (DB) at the Royal College of Music. Intrigued by the autograph MS of The Shepherd's Song, she asks at closing time for a copy to be sent to her. Part One appeared in the November 2006 issue of the Journal.*

On Tuesday the 'early' post came at 12.20 p.m. ('early': again, I wondered what we have gained since Elgar's time). But it arrived: my very own photocopy of an original manuscript. That evening I took it with me to the Philharmonic Chorus rehearsal and asked a colleague if she could make anything of the dedication (see fig. 1). She could at least decipher a date – 'Aug: 22 1892' – but was unable to make anything of the rest of it. After being glared at by the Chorus Master, we continued with the rehearsal. But by now I had at least three clues: the initials MFB; the date of composition, 22 August 1892; and the place of composition, Forli, Malvern.

The next morning I took the copy along to my singing lesson with Margaret Duckworth. Margaret was intrigued: 'When I broadcast these for the BBC they pointed out a mistake, and they were right'. She pointed to bar 22 of the song (see fig. 2): 'Look, I marked it in your copy'. Indeed she had, along with the beats where I sing it wrongly (I should point out here that the mistake is perpetuated in the 1987 Thames edition).<sup>1</sup>

Back home, I try again to make out the rest of the dedication. The first word could well be 'For'; then an 'h' and 'e' or 'a'; possibly 'the' or 'la'... The final word could begin with 'M' and has an 'a' and 't' or 'tt' in it. Master? Mother? Maestro? All unlikely. I give up for a while and turn my attention to the initials 'MFB'. Here I turn up the answer in Jerrold Northrop Moore's index to *Edward Elgar. A Creative Life*: Baker, Mary Frances.<sup>2</sup> My apologies to Elgarians who have already cracked it, but, for me, it did take some time for the penny to drop (pun intended!). Mary

1 In the first bar of the MS illustrated, the fourth quaver in the right hand of the piano is natural. It should thus be flat in the printed edition, which presents the song up or down a semitone.

2 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984); I found her under B, but the entry ends: 'see Penny, Mrs Mary Frances'.

Fig. 1 Dedicatory title page of *The Shepherd's Song*



Frances (Minnie or Min) Baker was the sister of William Meath Baker (Variation IV, W.M.B.).

Alice Roberts had taken Elgar to meet her old friend Minnie Baker before they were married.<sup>3</sup> Alice and Minnie had studied geology together with the Rev. W.S. Symonds, Rector of Pendock in Worcestershire.<sup>4</sup> Elgar and Minnie became firm friends from then on. During the winter of 1891–2 Elgar suffered a great deal from throat trouble and, in February, when he felt a little better, Alice took him to stay for a week with Minnie at her home, Covertside, close to Hasfield Court (the home of 'W.M.B.'). It seemed that they were seeing so much of Minnie that Elgar dubbed her the 'Mascotte' after a comic opera by Audran.<sup>5</sup> I looked again at the dedication. It's easy once you know! 'For the (or 'la') Mascotte Aug: 22 1892'. Now, what was Elgar doing that summer? Moore provides the answer: soon after the February visit, Minnie asked the Elgars to accompany her on a summer holiday (at her expense, one assumes) to Bayreuth for the Wagner operas.<sup>6</sup> Anticipation of this holiday provided much needed stimulation and Elgar started composing again, writing the *Serenade for Strings* and going back to work on *The Black Knight*. By 23 July, Elgar had completed enough of the vocal score for him to leave it at Novello's London office as he and Alice passed through on the way to Margate to meet Minnie for the crossing from Dover to Ostend.<sup>7</sup> Pauline Collett gives details of their journey and a map.<sup>8</sup> This journey took them by train to Cologne, where they visited the cathedral, then on to Bonn, visiting Beethoven's birthplace, then through Mainz to Bayreuth where they arrived on 27 July. Here they heard *Tristan*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* (twice).

On the homeward journey Minnie took them to Nuremberg and Munich (where they heard *Cavalleria rusticana*), and then for an 'enchanted week in the Alps on the Bavarian border with Austria' at Oberstdorf.<sup>9</sup> Here they went for long walks and climbed mountains; and here, I believe, *The Shepherd's Song* was conceived. We know from Alice's diaries that Edward and Minnie walked and climbed alone together because, as Percy Young relates, Alice 'had no head for heights and was fearful of having to cross a mountain stream on a wooden footbridge without a handrail'.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it was that '... in the hot afternoon of 9 August high up at Einödsbach, E. & Min walked on to the Lavine & touched snow'.<sup>11</sup> Peter Greaves has given a full

3 Ibid., 131.

4 Percy M. Young, *Alice Elgar: Enigma of a Victorian Lady* (London: Dobson, 1978).

5 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 159. *La Mascotte* (by Edmond Audran, 1840–1901) was first performed at the Bouffes-Parisiens in 1880.

6 Ibid., 159.

7 Ibid., 164.

8 Pauline Collett, *An Elgar Travelogue* (London: Thames Publishing, 1983), 103.

9 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 164.

10 Young, *Alice Elgar*, 118.

11 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, p.164.

account of the 1892 holiday along with the others in Bavaria.<sup>12</sup> He also provides us with a probable explanation of the word 'Lavine': 'Here Alice probably intended to use the German word 'Lawine', meaning an avalanche or snowfall. Its use here refers to the snow-line of the Berge der Guten Hoffnung (the Mountains of Good Hope)'.<sup>13</sup> It is possible that Alice only heard the word spoken and mistook the German 'w' for a 'v'.

With the help of Peter Greaves's book we can reconstruct the scenario. That morning the party walked to a hamlet called Zwingsteg which took its name from a haunted gorge called Zwing. From there they walked on to the Walserschanze in Austria. Here it started to pour with rain, so they drove back to Oberstdorf for lunch.<sup>14</sup>

After lunch the sun breaks through and Edward suggests a walk; Minnie is game but Alice, still aching from the morning's exertions, suggests they drive instead. So they drive on to Birgsau and here get out and walk to Einödsbach, with its tiny chapel-cum-shrine.<sup>15</sup> With the sun at its height, the little chapel dreams in the heat; they enter its cool darkness and rest awhile. But Edward gets restive; the mountains are calling, their snow-capped peaks shimmering in the heat. And surely that's snow, only just above the tree-line? Minnie explains that it's probably what they call a 'Lawine', a miniature avalanche or snow-fall that must have come down in the night. Edward suggests they go up and touch the snow for luck (after all, these are the Mountains of Good Hope). But Alice has had enough and decides to stay in the chapel while Edward and Minnie go up to the snow-line.

Together they walk through the flower-strewn meadow with bright red poppies blowing in the wind. A shepherd passes, whistling a jaunty tune as he leads his flock to lower pastures; their little bells go 'tonky tonk' as they follow. The going gets rougher as they climb; Minnie tucks up her skirts and Edward helps her along the rock-strewn path. Pausing as they reach the tree-line, Edward breathes the pine-scented air and is reminded of his childhood. Then they race each other up the mountain and, laughing, touch the melting snow for luck. On the way down, Edward is 'fired with songs' and notes down tunes on a scrap of paper. They reach the valley and call back to the mountain and hear its echoing reply ...

The next day they left Oberstdorf for Lindau, en route for Heidelberg, from where, according to a letter to Dorabella, a further instalment of *The Black Knight* was posted by Minnie 'for luck'.

She did give us a splendid time – I called her 'the Mascotte' – did you know that? I made her stamp and post the manuscript of *The Black Knight* when it went off to Novello's. We posted it at Heidelberg. I said she would bring me luck and so she did.<sup>16</sup>

12 Peter Greaves, *In the Bavarian Highlands: Elgar's German Holidays in the 1890s* (Elgar Editions, 2000).

13 Ibid., 42.

14 Ibid., 41.

15 Ibid., 42 (picture on p. 38).

16 Mrs Richard Powell, *Edward Elgar. Memories of a Variation*, 2nd edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1947, 2; 3rd, revised edition (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 11.

In November of that year, Novello's did indeed accept *The Black Knight*. Yet, as Peter Greaves points out, Minnie could not have posted the whole manuscript because Elgar had already left some of it at the London office on the outward journey. Did she in fact post any of it? Or was it just one of Elgar's 'stories'? At any rate it was a good excuse for dedicating *The Shepherd's Song* to his 'Mascotte'.

On 15 August they crossed to Dover and stayed the night in London. The next day Elgar called at the publishers Breitkopf & Härtel who agreed to publish *Serenade for Strings*, and then to Novello's to discuss *The Black Knight*. Their reply was that if he would finish it, they would give it their best attention.<sup>17</sup>

**Fig. 2** *The Shepherd's Song*, from bar 22; the A natural was missing (as A flat) from the printed edition



17 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 65.

Back at Forli, Elgar worked hard on *The Black Knight* and must also have searched his poetry books for suitable words to fit the tunes he had sketched in the mountains. After finding suitable words by Barry Pain, he set to work on *The Shepherd's Song*, probably gazing out at his own Malvern Hills for inspiration. He ended with a flourish of a high G sharp (in the key of the manuscript: G natural in the edition), and the descending echo of the mountain's reply.

And now, as Elgar puts the finishing touches to his song and writes the dedication, perhaps we are in a position to answer some of the riddles it poses:

1. *The Shepherd's Song* was written in 1892 but not published until 1895. Elgar had to get permission from the author of the poem, but this would hardly take three years. He may not have intended it for publication at all, but simply as a thank-you gift to Minnie Baker. Then, in 1895, perhaps being hard up (not for the first time), he looked out some old songs and presented them to the publisher Tuckwood as Op. 16. The other two songs were *Through the Long Days* and *Rondel*.<sup>18</sup>

2. The song is dedicated to Mary Frances Baker (later Penny) and the crossed out part in brackets probably reads: 'For la [or the] Mascotte. Aug: 22 1892'.

We are left with the following questions (and possible answers).

3. How did the manuscript come to be in Dorabella's possession?

In 1895 Minnie Baker married the Rev. Alfred Penny (Dorabella's father), thus becoming Dora Penny's stepmother; and the two women became firm friends.

4. Why was the dedication obliterated?

We know from descriptions of the Rev. Alfred Penny that his opinions of Catholics in general, and Elgar in particular, were low, and very low.<sup>19</sup> It will be remembered that in 1904 Dora was picked to sing in the semi-chorus for *Gerontius* but was not allowed to take part because it was Lent, and *Gerontius* was seen by her father as 'entertainment' and not 'proper' religious music.<sup>20</sup> Minnie would have been unwise, to say the least, if she allowed her husband to find out about her dalliance in the mountains (at her expense) with a married, penniless, jobbing musician! There was, however, no way she would have destroyed the MS, but would probably have kept the treasure locked away somewhere.

18 Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), vol. 1, 29 and note 5.

19 Powell, *Edward Elgar. Memories of a Variation*, 2.

20 Ibid., 77.

5. Who crossed out the dedication?

There are really only two candidates: Minnie and Dorabella. Dorabella could have been responsible when she sent it to Sheffield, seeing the dedication as too personal for general viewing. By far the most likely explanation, however, is that Minnie did not want her husband to see it and, reluctantly but heavily, obliterated it. It is possible that even Dorabella did not know what was written or the story behind it.

What secrets, one wonders, did the cover of *Rondel* hold? And where is it now? Perhaps we shall never know, but that will not stop us trying to find out; for, as Michael Kennedy has said: 'Enigma solving is a game Elgarians will play to the end of time'.<sup>21</sup>

As for me, I'm off to my music lesson to sing *The Shepherd's Song* and you may be sure I shall linger on the top G to touch the snow with Minnie; and as I descend in the answering echo, I shall think of her little indiscretion in the mountains with Edward Elgar!

### Acknowledgements

I should like to thank Wendy Hillary for setting me off on the trail. Without Wendy and her talks, I would never have known that the DB existed. I am also grateful to Dennis Clark for his encouragement and for keeping me on the trail when I might have given up, and to Bernard Hill for sharing some of the experience with me.

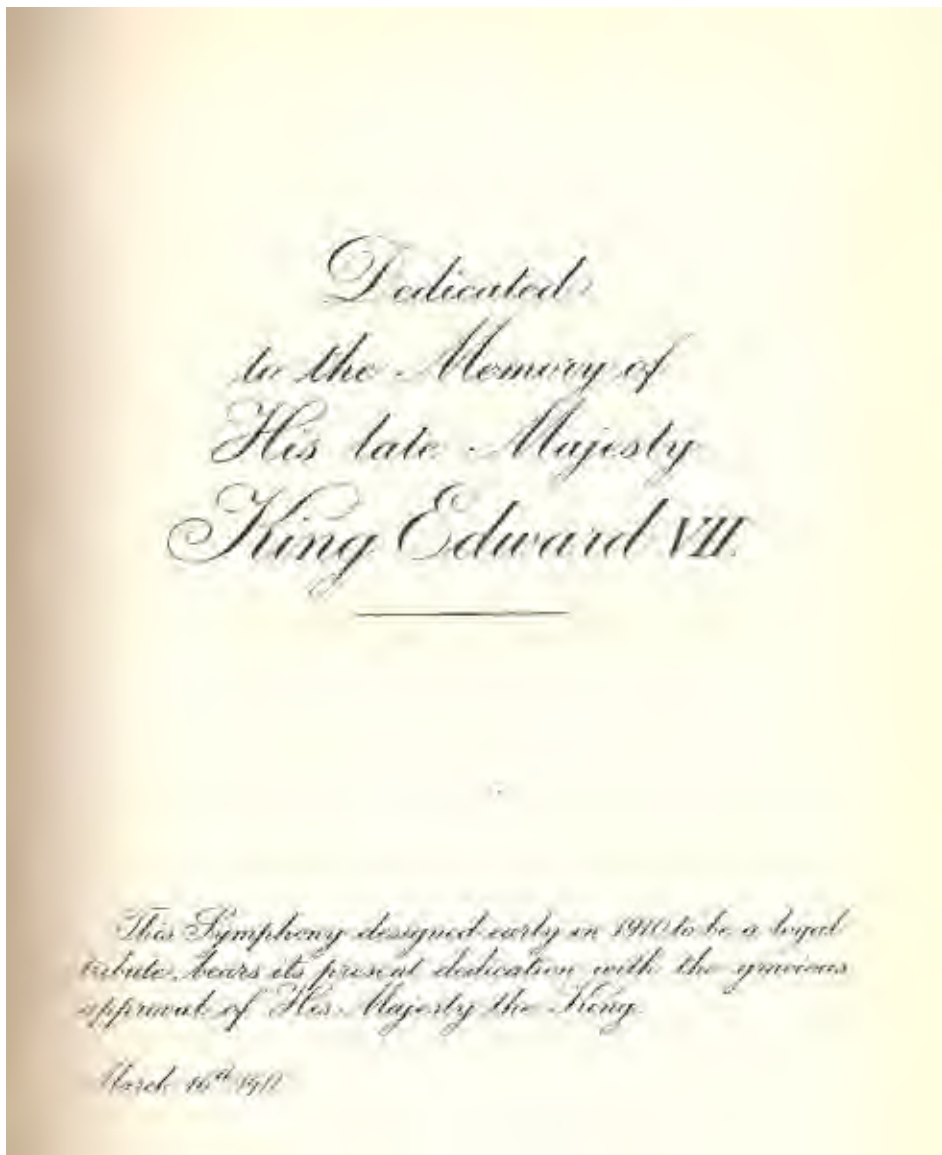
I am deeply indebted to staff of the Royal College of Music for permission to reproduce parts of *The Shepherd's Song* MS, particularly the librarians Pam Thompson and Peter Horton for their help and guidance and for advice on matters of copyright. Thanks are also due to my singing teacher, Margaret Duckworth, for pointing out the discrepancy between the MS and published copy. Without Margaret, I would never have discovered the joys of singing Elgar's songs for myself.

Thanks are also due to the authors of the books which are my constant companions: particularly the biographers Michael Kennedy and Jerrold Northrop Moore. I am also deeply indebted to Pauline Collett who generously provided me with one of her own copies of *Elgar Lived Here* and kindly followed it up with *An Elgar Travelogue*. These little books are surely long overdue for a reprint. A more recent addition to the literature which proved invaluable is Peter Greaves's *In the Bavarian Highlands* which enabled me to retrace Elgar's and Minnie's footsteps up the mountain.

Last but not least, I extend grateful thanks to Ann Vernau for her encouragement to write all this down, and even more for typing it from my manuscript. Any mistakes or omissions are mine and mine alone!

*The author's biographical details were included with Part One of her article on the 'Dorabella Bequest', this Journal, Vol. 14 No. 6 (November 2006), 27-32.*

21 Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 86.



Dedication of Elgar's Second Symphony, from the first edition of the miniature score

## From the desk of a cellist: Symphony No. 2

Patrick Jones

From the midst of the orchestra's cello section I can give an account of how this wonderful music is experienced in rehearsals.

Bearing in mind that not all amateur orchestras would take on this considerable challenge, the committee and conductor of the Manchester Beethoven Orchestra had considered the task carefully. Not only are there, for the amateur player, some great technical difficulties, but also the ensemble is testing; and the management of time-changes – of which, I calculate, there are over a hundred to be negotiated – is challenging for conductor and orchestra. As most readers of the Journal will know, the audience at its first performance in 1911 was not immediately roused to enthusiasm. They sat slightly puzzled ('like stuffed pigs' Elgar said) after the final bars had quietly concluded. After our first rehearsal of the first movement the reaction of many players was a similar bemusement. I leant over to the back rank to ask 'How was it for you?' and the young cellist unhesitatingly described it as 'Tosh!'.

*Rehearsal 1.* As usual, we began with a play-through of the whole symphony. It certainly is a complex piece. The part-writing is often densely textured and there are moments when the musical language moves swiftly between the more familiar warm Elgarian melody and some strange, unearthly passages, and others that are frenetic and violent. The particularly interesting feature of the cello part that began to emerge is the fact that we are frequently split between doubling the bass part and either doubling the main melody or taking a counter-melody (or even, in the opening chords, both). Being on the inside of the desk, it was my job to march along with the basses and occasionally to jump up to play with my outside desk partner. He was at the time frantically negotiating the brisk 'Humpty Dumpty' playful triple rhythms of the opening theme. Then I was distracted by the 'sun bursts' on the horns (bars 7 and 8) heroically breaking through the texture and twice running up to dangerously high notes. They did manage them on the first play-through – it augured well!

For me, this music was far from being an easy read. But even after struggling to find the notes, the final page of the last movement was a wonderful way to finish a rehearsal, and approving murmurs around me suggested that many coffee-break expressions of distaste had shifted to cautious admiration by the end of the evening.

*Rehearsal 2.* We are beginning to work at the first movement in earnest now. What had just floated by on reading through must now be taken apart, and we have to look at some of the tricky passages in detail. 'Cellists, can we hear that second

subject?' We leap with desperation and panic (fig. 12) into the realms of the violins' top string. Not only is the music unearthly but it demands some lengthy homework. However, we are carried along by the sheer energy of the piece. The *impetuoso* section (fig. 16), with an Elgarian stress on the last quaver of each set of three, is taken over *fortissimo* by the full orchestra, and we storm away with great gusto straight into the wild development section. I may be having a few problems with my own part, but I still find myself wondering what the trumpet is doing playing that machine-gun phrase (fig. 17), and then what are we *all* doing leaping about like maniacs? The music is reassuringly marked *Tempo Primo*, but actually we are far from home. What was the man thinking of here?

Before any supernatural answer is manifested we are suddenly quietened down into that underworld passage which develops the second subject, based on the devil's own interval, the tritone (fig. 24). It should be no great surprise that the movement is so full of contrasts when a little research reveals that some of the musical ideas originated many years earlier. The spectral music just referred to was salvaged from an early sketch for *The Kingdom*, and the creeping shadowy scales are from an unrealised project for an overture ('*Cockaigne No. 2*') to be called *The City of Dreadful Night*. The movement is not only full of these great contrasts but also of intriguing ideas, such as the way in which it returns to Tempo One in the recapitulation. This appears not at the start of the main theme, but half way through it (third bar of fig. 42). This is one of those games that Elgar liked to play, such as when the initial phrase of the main theme of the 'Enigma' Variations becomes the concluding phrase at the end of 'Nimrod'. But for now the movement had to end. Alongside the whole string section we 'shimmer' with frantic concentration and then collapse with exhaustion, ready for a coffee break.

*Rehearsal 3*. The second movement is simply one long spine-tingling song or stirring bass line for the cellos. There is a sense of the tragic, and of great events. Despite the force of the main themes it starts and finishes delicately, and I usually want us to play even more quietly; but tonight we do make quite a good sound. Those lucky first cellos have a chance to play a little of the funeral march melody (7 bars after fig.68), but I do play those delicious double stopped chords (fig. 67), and we all lead triumphantly into the second part of the march. Then our conductor pauses for us to collect ourselves for the 'magical moment' as the cellos lead from the bass into the second theme marked a tempo [fig.71] 'Now, as a team, can we look at the lead up to *Nobilmente semplice* – whatever happens before, we must all make it together at this point'. I am very conscious of meeting climactically with the horns at this point, following them for a while and then meeting with trombones as the music subsides.

These powerful climaxes may saturate us for a moment with their emotional force, but I always have some attention left to listen to the wonderful orchestration. The forlorn but exacting oboe solo is heard above the funeral march when it returns in the recapitulation (fig. 79). Most striking of all, at the end of the movement, the final chord is heard first on strings with harp, then on the woodwind with deep brass, and finally a high *fp* chord for the violas and cellos.

*Rehearsal 4*. In the third movement we return to the high energy and triple rhythm of the first movement. Overheard in the cello ranks after the first play-

through: 'That movement takes no prisoners!' We play the opening in parallel fifths, something that occurs in other Elgar bass lines, as in *The Apostles*, and in melody lines in *Falstaff*. Do we assume that he is picking up some of the contemporary sounds, particularly from Vaughan Williams?<sup>1</sup> Or is he cocking a snook at harmony textbooks? We are instructed to divide the two notes between us, but I rather like double-stopping the two bass strings and sliding my first finger up chord by chord. Interestingly, I gather, the opening theme was sketched from music played by itinerant musicians in St Mark's Square, Venice, when the Elgars were there on holiday. Elgar referred to the 'broken accents' of the first four bars which break the regularity of the marching bass lines heard elsewhere (like a motto idea for this symphony). Then, as was noted in the first movement, we are locked into a long passage of offbeat chords (*pizzicato*, fig. 95). I wonder how many players have experienced the desperate difficulty of trying to keep regularly off the beat over more than a few bars. It is clear that there is serious work to do in this section.

However we move on to the middle section where we hear the rather complex rattling wind passage which becomes more and more edgy and whole-tone sounding, so that the music slides quite logically into the return of the 'spectral' theme from the first movement. We don't have the percussion tonight. However, I still prepare myself for the spine-tingling effect and extraordinary violence of this passage. The first, third and fourth movements all have their moments of madness, but the craziest must be the end of this movement, which is only just held back from seeming chaos by the final repeated C major chords.

*Rehearsal 5*. Final movement. Our conductor is taking this at quite a gentle pace which is quite a relief technically because of the fireworks in the development section. At this speed, we cellists can really enjoy our moment of glory, playing the principal melody at the opening. However, when you are playing the music you can't help becoming physically aware of the way Elgar does sometimes repeat a rhythm obsessively.<sup>2</sup> Even Rosa Burley who, surprisingly, first heard the main subject being tried out by Elgar on the piano while on an Italian holiday in Alassio in 1903, remarked that it 'did not strike me as being particularly good, a two-bar phrase that was repeated *ad nauseam*'. Incidentally this anecdote does provide evidence of the long gestation of the symphony. We develop a picture of a composer who did not evolve his music in a logical way but compiled it by literally laying out the various scraps of manuscript around him, some from many years before, and shuffling them until they all fitted together. Nonetheless the three wonderfully genial themes in the exposition of this movement do all seem to belong together.

It was the attractive and atmospheric music in this final movement that finally reconciled our orchestra to the symphony. The cellos, although often needing to plod away on the bass, also have a share in these excellent melodies. Despite the wild, almost insane, antics in the development section, the piece settles into a glowing and quite outstanding coda. At the end Elgar is wonderfully generous to the cellos. We play those upward winding phrases and then find ourselves doubling the upper

1 Or Puccini. See *La Bohème*, Act III.

2 Brian Newbould made this point in the *Journal*, November 2006, p. 43, quoting this theme [Ed.].

strings on the Wagnerian descending melody which has been borrowed from the opening theme of the symphony (3 bars after fig. 168). Even as we struggle with intonation, we may imagine the evening sun setting over a still lake. Our conductor says we will play just the last 30 bars again. Why? Need you ask? we just want to enjoy it one more time.

Written at the end of the manuscript – but later transferred to the opening of the symphony – is a quotation from Shelley:

Rarely, rarely comest thou,  
Spirit of Delight.

Maybe the moments are rare, but this music is certainly one of them.

*Patrick Jones is a cellist in the (amateur) Manchester Beethoven Orchestra*

## In search of Fritz Kreisler

### Michael Plant

Friedrich Kreisler (always known as 'Fritz') was born in 1875 and died in 1962, and the wonder is that a man who was an international celebrity before the First World War could have lived so long. His career is of particular interest to Elgarians, as he was the dedicatee of the violin concerto; but unfortunately he left no recording of it. Indeed, he did not record any of Elgar's music – not even *La Capricieuse*, which has tempted many a famous virtuoso – despite making a great many recordings of lighter fare. Perhaps we may forgive him 'Poor Butterfly', 'Nobody knows de trouble I've seen', and 'Indian Love Call', since he and Efrem Zimbalist gave us the first ever recording of Bach's double concerto (1915), in a performance which *The Record Guide* was still recommending in 1951.<sup>1</sup>

Kreisler showed early promise. He trained in Vienna and Paris and was blessed with hands that retained their strength and suppleness to an advanced age. He found the Franco-Belgian school of violin-playing much to his taste, and developed a synthesis of its chief quality, a pure and tasteful vibrato, with the more robust Viennese style he had learned in the city of his birth. This vibrato, which he applied to every note, is something we now take for granted, but it came as a revelation to audiences and other players alike and, once they became accustomed to it, string-playing was changed for ever.<sup>2</sup> Small wonder that Elgar, himself a virtuoso *manqué*, was impressed and, like many other composers, contemplated a concerto once he had heard Kreisler performing in a concert.

Having completed his training, Kreisler undertook military service and even began a medical career, following in his father's footsteps. However, he had already toured America as a child prodigy, and in 1896 he embarked on the life of a travelling virtuoso, making his concerto debut in 1898 in Vienna with Max Bruch's first concerto. He first appeared in London in 1902 and he married an American, Harriet Lies, that year; she proved a great support to him. In private life, he was a conservative man of an easy-going disposition who preferred to communicate through playing. Back in Britain in 1904, Kreisler and Elgar (with *In the South*) were 'on the same bill' at Leeds. Kreisler, then 29, played the concerto by Brahms, whom he had known in Vienna. From then on acquaintance ripened: Kreisler admired Elgar's music, he said, and asked for a concerto.

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1 Now available on Naxos 8.110922.

2 Or at least until the development of the movement for historically informed performance; performances with less continuous vibrato, using it for expression and emphasis, are becoming more frequent nowadays [Ed.].

The story of Elgar's violin concerto has been well told elsewhere. Kreisler gave the premiere in 1910 and continued to play it when asked to do so, until his career was interrupted by the First World War. He returned to the Austro-Hungarian army, and was wounded and invalidated out. He settled in the United States, but he had barely begun a new career there when his adopted country entered the war and, as an enemy alien, he was compelled to retire from public life until 1919. He had already written several of the short pieces ('encores' such as *Liebesleid*, *Liebesfreud*) for which he is still known today and which, not caring for fame as a composer, he attributed rather vaguely to little-known figures of previous centuries (it caused quite a stir when he was 'unmasked' in 1935).<sup>3</sup> Now he took the opportunity to compose under his own name, and wrote a string quartet – a serious and attractive work which he subsequently recorded, leading a quartet of distinguished colleagues. There followed a 'Viennese' operetta, *Apple Blossoms*, and in 1932 another one (*Sissy*). In 1936 the Hollywood soprano Grace Moore starred in *The King Steps Out*, a cheerful Ruritanian romance based on *Sissy* and drawing in other Kreisler melodies. It is a splendid film which still turns up on daytime television now and then.

Kreisler returned to Europe in 1924 and lived in Berlin. He ceased to give concerts in Germany after 1933, after the Nazis came to power, and settled permanently in America in 1939, taking US citizenship four years later. A serious road accident in 1941 left him unconscious for four weeks; he recovered, but his best playing days were over. His popularity never faded; the likes of Heifetz did not bother him – he was, quite simply in a class of his own – but he ceased to play in public after the 1949–50 concert season. He died in New York, aged not quite 87.

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We may mourn the absence from Elgar's discography of the recording of the violin concerto that Kreisler never made; but how good would it have been? In all probability, such a recording would have taken place in Berlin in the late 1920s, when Kreisler was well into his fifties and somewhat set in his ways. Elgar, who had limited German, would have faced his only overseas recording session in front of the overworked Berlin State Opera Orchestra, playing a work they did not know. The Elgar concerto is a long, arduous work; and, while it is full of passages ideally suited to Kreisler's rich tone and elegant phrasing, there is also plenty of fast passage-work. The work drags if the soloist is not on top of his part and cannot push the argument on as it needs, which is why some recordings have been (in my view) unsuccessful. Was Kreisler such a technician? In his younger days, certainly; but consider his own sumptuous, if unnecessary, recomposition of the first movement of Paganini's first concerto. His excellent recording from 1936 has many points of interest, but is somewhat deficient in thrills. The conductor, Eugene Ormandy, is an attentive accompanist, whereas Elgar as a conductor was not known for his consideration towards his soloists. If there is one thing on which all string soloists agree, it is that the orchestra (or even the poor pianist) is always too loud. What Kreisler the youthful virtuoso could have coped with in 1910 might not have appealed to the mature player 15–20 years later. Finally, it must be admitted that Kreisler was famously disinclined to practice. By 1929 or 1930,

3 Such 'forgeries' belong to a considerable tradition, nevertheless, causing Stravinsky to include a charming 19<sup>th</sup>-century song among the 'Pergolesi' numbers in *Pulcinella* [Ed.].

he was travelling the world as a distinguished soloist with quite a small and familiar repertoire of concerted works and, of course, *Caprice Viennois* and the rest of his matchless collection of 'encores'. He continued to play Elgar's concerto – sometimes in a cut version – but he does not seem to have defied promoters and taken the work where it was not wanted. In this he was unlike Heifetz, for example, who programmed Elgar's concerto in 1938 in the teeth of unsympathetic, not to say vicious, criticism from the likes of Olin Downes, and subsequently (1949) made a breathtaking recording. Could Kreisler have recorded it to a satisfactory standard – let alone surpass the uniquely beautiful recording the young Menuhin has left us which, of course, would never have been made had Kreisler thrown his hat into the ring?

Kreisler's recorded legacy is large, and it has all been reissued at one time or another. By selecting wisely, we can acquaint ourselves with the work of a master musician and perhaps conjure up an imagined recording of the Elgar concerto. He made records over about forty years (up to 1946) and there are also radio transcriptions of variable quality from the end of his career, when he finally consented to broadcast. Throughout his life he was a 'celebrity' artist and his recordings were always in the red-label lists (i.e. top price). With a few exceptions, we can overlook most of his acoustically recorded titles (pre-1926). Although they include a series of songs with the tenor John McCormack (Kreisler supplies an obbligato), and even some records with his cellist brother, Hugo (Kreisler playing the piano!), there are also many very ephemeral pieces, designed to appeal to less sophisticated audiences and consolidate his success in America. Such pieces often sold well and were re-recorded several times. By contrast, Kreisler was not often heard in chamber music. I have mentioned his string quartet, and he was commissioned to record all Beethoven's violin sonatas, but that set is somewhat spoiled by the reticence of the pianist, Franz Rupp, more an accompanist than a true sonata partner. Rather more successful were three sonatas he recorded in 1928 with Rakhmaninov, who also made and recorded dazzling piano transcriptions of *Liebesleid* and *Liebesfreud*. Together they play Beethoven, Schubert, and Grieg, and can be heard doing so in fine transfers by Mark Obert-Thorn.<sup>4</sup> I recommend Grieg's third sonata, in which the six published 78 r.p.m. sides are the best of 31 takes!

There are, of course, many CDs offering selections of Kreisler's own famous compositions and encores, but I recommend one from Sanctuary Classics.<sup>5</sup> A rather miscellaneous selection of titles from a 20-year period, it nevertheless offers good transfers by David Lennick – with one glaring exception – and many favourites alongside some rarities. Poldini's charming *Poupée valsante* is a miniature from 1895 with as Elgarian a tune as anyone could wish for at its centre, while Lehár's *Frasquita* Serenade is an utterly disarming and very welcome trifle. It is hard to think of two more delightful examples of Kreisler's salon style, complete with some insouciant double-stopping that is much harder to bring off than it sounds. The last track is Kreisler's own ludicrous (but quite irresistible) *Marche miniature Viennoise*. It features some outrageous portamento from the distinguished soloist, who was by then old enough (70) to have known better. In such pieces Kreisler joins hands with Elgar in his *Wand of Youth* mood.

4 Naxos, 8.110968.

5 Living Era AJC85614.



## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### Joint Conference of the Elgar Society and the RVW Society: 'The best of me...? Religion in the Life and Music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams', 24–26 November 2006

Kreisler's concerto recordings reflect his limited repertoire. He liked to play the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Mozart (the fourth), and recorded each of them twice. The critical consensus is that the recordings of Beethoven, Brahms, and Mendelssohn, from 1926 and 1927, with the Berlin State Opera Orchestra under Leo Blech, represent his art at its peak. They have all been reissued in Obert-Thorn transfers, and with bonuses of Mozart, Mendelssohn, unaccompanied Bach, and Schumann's Romance in A, another piece not so far from Elgar's style.<sup>6</sup> In the Brahms concerto Kreisler has much to say, though his playing is a little sketchy in the finale. He plays his own cadenza, a pleasant change from Joachim's, and he does the same for the Beethoven. In all three works he is naturally balanced with the orchestra; his phrasing, his serenity and beautiful tone rise above the limitations of start-stop recording and very early electric techniques. Here, if anywhere, we can listen to Kreisler in concert and imagine him playing Elgar.

There is one other of Kreisler's recordings which claims our attention. Bruch's first violin concerto was always popular – too popular, the composer sometimes said. It has similarities with the Elgar and Brahms concertos but preceded both. Along with Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* it used to be a favourite (with piano accompaniment) for well brought-up young violinists making their debuts at the Wigmore Hall. Elgar owned the first internationally available recording, made by the young Menuhin in 1931. Mysteriously, he also owned a unique set of test pressings from 1924–5, in which Kreisler is the soloist with a studio orchestra conducted by Eugene Goossens. We do not know how he acquired this set; we may speculate that he lamented to one of his friends at His Master's Voice that the work was unavailable, and his friend found him these tests, passed for publication but withheld because electric recording was superseding the acoustic process. At any rate, it was Menuhin, not Kreisler, who first recorded the work electrically, and no other pressings for Kreisler's performance are known.

There was a mild stir in the collecting world when Pearl issued an LP transfer, and Radio 3, probably for the first and last time, broadcast a long work in an acoustic recording. I myself was keen to hear it, but it made little impression. Kreisler just played it through in the expected manner and that was that. There were no surprises, no interpretative revelations. But judge for yourselves; there have been several CD versions.<sup>7</sup> We must look elsewhere for clues to show how a Kreisler recording of Elgar's concerto might have sounded. Or perhaps such a recording, for reasons I have suggested above, might have been similarly an anticlimax and not have met our expectations; at any rate, with superlative performances from Sammons, Menuhin, and their successors, we have much to enjoy.

Meanwhile I cordially recommend the civilized art of Fritz Kreisler. Others may copy his methods, but his genius remains inimitable. There is a wonderful story of him rehearsing with Sargent. The question arose of the difference a fine instrument could make to a player's tone. One after another, the rank-and-file violinists presented their instruments to Kreisler and from each he drew samples of his own unequalled sound that dumbfounded their owners and rivalled anything he could produce on his own priceless Guarnerius. So long as fine violin playing is valued, his name will not be forgotten.

6 Naxos, 8.110909 and 8.1106921.

7 This writer's is Symposium 1282.

'The best of me...? Religion in the life and music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams' was a weekend symposium organised by Arts in Residence on behalf of the Elgar Society and the RVW Society. It was divided between two hotels in the charming Sussex town of Midhurst.

It is not ultimately possible to know what Elgar or Vaughan Williams believed about God. Both were very private men and it is not always possible to take what they said at face value.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, whatever his beliefs, Elgar throughout his working life was plainly fascinated by theology – eschatology, even – and any balanced consideration of his output has to assign a large place to his religious works. Vaughan Williams was not an enthusiast of those works. Of *The Apostles* he observed:

I always feel that [Elgar] was oppressed by the fact that he was writing for the Church of England and could not get rid of the bombazine and bonnets of the Anglican morning service.<sup>2</sup>

No-one at the Symposium suggested that Vaughan Williams had an interest matching Elgar's in eschatology; but he, too, wrote much with a religious theme or background.

Both Elgar and Vaughan Williams may be said to have had a religious start in life – Elgar because of his mother's earnest piety and Vaughan Williams because he was a son of the vicarage. But, as far as we can tell, their spiritual journeys thereafter diverged markedly. Elgar continued as an apparently orthodox Roman Catholic, and in *The Dream of Gerontius* became to some extent a propagandist for that particular branch of the Christian faith. It was only in his later years that, perhaps, his faith ebbed

1 Famously, after the first performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*, Elgar wrote to Jaeger 'I always said God was against art & I still believe it'. Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers. Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 244. Vaughan Williams witnessed the debacle of that performance, of which, in the year before his death, he was able to give a detailed account.

2 See Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 388.

away. Vaughan Williams became an atheist at Charterhouse after confirmation and was agnostic thereafter; in 1899 he resigned as organist of St Barnabas, Southwark rather than accept a requirement that he receive communion. But in 1904 he agreed to become musical editor of the English Hymnal. And in his later years he might be seen in Dorking Parish Church listening to the organ after Evensong. Was this a sign of a renewal of faith or was he, as Michael Kennedy suggested, simply sizing the place up for his next performance of the *St Matthew Passion*?<sup>3</sup>

At the symposium, the starting point for a consideration of the wider issues of the faith of the composers and their attitude to faith was detailed examination of some of the works. The Rev. John Calvert, Vicar of Down Ampney (and thus a successor to Vaughan Williams's father) spoke on the *English Hymnal*; Diana McVeagh discussed *The Dream of Gerontius*, with particular attention to sketches; James Day spoke on the *Mass in G Minor* and *Sancta Civitas*; Geoffrey Hodgkins chose to talk on *The Light of Life* and *Te Deum & Benedictus*; Terry Barfoot, the organiser of the event, tackled *Job: a Masque for Dancing* and *The Apostles*; and Andrew Neill considered *The Kingdom* and *The Last Judgment*. Michael Kennedy provided lucid and perceptive comments drawn from his deep knowledge of the life and work of both men, and from his friendship with Vaughan Williams.

Eric Seddon's paper on *The Pilgrim's Progress* provided an interesting note of controversy. He sees *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a specifically Christian work in which Vaughan Williams deliberately introduced a sacramental element not contained in Bunyan's original text.<sup>4</sup> Not everybody was convinced, but everybody did enjoy the discussion that followed; and indeed which followed the discussion of all the papers. The *Angel* and the *Spread Eagle* hotels provided excellent hospitality and an agreeable setting for debate.

Philip Petchey

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3 There were two performances in the year of his death. See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *RVW. A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 389.

4 He emphasised that the articulation of a Christian point of view did not mean that Vaughan Williams necessarily was a Christian.

### The Second Biennial Conference of the North American British Music Studies Association, 3-5 August 2006

Until quite recently, American musicology has shown little interest in British music written in the 250 years between the death of Purcell and the premiere of Britten's *Peter Grimes* in 1945. This is greatly to be regretted, not least since it has led to the relative neglect of this repertoire in British universities; when American academia sneezes, British academia generally catches a cold. Recently, however, the situation has been changing in both countries. The biennial summer conferences on nineteenth-century British music, which have taken place in several leading British universities since 1997, regularly attract as many American (or American-based) delegates as British-based ones. British music sessions now feature regularly in American musicology conferences, including the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society.<sup>1</sup>

Most encouragingly, since 2003 there has been a specialist musicological organization devoted to furthering professional academic study of British music in North America: the North American British Music Studies Association (NABMSA; [www.nabmsa.org](http://www.nabmsa.org)). Following the successful inaugural conference at Oberlin College, Ohio (2004), a second conference was held in August 2006 at St Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British music, and Elgar especially, formed an important part of this conference. Of the 37 papers given in Colchester nearly half (sixteen) were concerned with the period 1880–1945, and four were concerned explicitly with Elgar. Three of these papers took place in a session entitled 'New Light on Elgar'; the fourth formed part of a session provocatively titled 'Catholics Under Pressure'.

The Elgar session began with a paper from Deborah Heckert entitled "'God bless the Music Halls": Elgar at the Coliseum and the Negotiations of Edwardian Popular Culture'. Heckert's concern was with *The Crown of India*, though less from the perspective of how far Elgar's imperialism is writ large in the score than from what the composition of the piece might tell us about the composer's relationship with popular culture. This relationship was partly a personal one but it was also closely bound up with issues of national identity and modernity. Written for Oswald Stoll's London Coliseum, Elgar's masque was a successful example of Stoll's attempts to entice 'high' artists to participate in 'lower' cultural space, thereby improving the status of his venue (very much in the way that, at the

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1 For instance at Los Angeles, November 2006, where there were fine papers on Elgar (Nalini Ghuman Gwynne, 'Elephants and Moghuls, Contraltos and G-strings: how Elgar got his Englishness') and Vaughan Williams (Alain Frogley on the 'London' symphony). (Ed.)

end of the nineteenth century, working-class Victorian music hall underwent a process of gentrification). For Heckert, Elgar adopted the pose of the 'public poet' (one whose praises to the nation were designed primarily to affirm and reaffirm that nation's greatness to the masses); moreover, it was appropriate that he should do so in a masque, a genre traditionally associated with national identity formation. But, as Heckert pointed out, the changing nature of Coliseum audiences meant that these masses were essentially middle-class, not working-class. And it was perhaps this bourgeois mass culture, rather than traditional working-class culture, that Edward J. Dent and others had in mind in the 1920s when they accused Elgar of 'vulgarity' (a quality which Elgar, of course, consciously defended in his Birmingham lectures of 1905).

The second paper, intriguingly entitled 'Elgar's War Requiem', was given by Rachel Cowgill, a new name in Elgar scholarship, but – as co-editor with Julian Rushton of the recent volume *Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) – a familiar one in nineteenth-century British musicology. The 'Requiem' in question was *The Spirit of England*, a work which has often been dismissed as unpalatably imperialistic for modern tastes. Cowgill's paper asserted that, at many levels, such thinking is flawed, and that the key to the piece is, in fact, Elgar's Catholicism. Binyon's poetry was replete with religious imagery (as one might expect from the son of an Anglican clergyman); war is frequently seen as a battle between good and evil, rather than between nations. Elgar's response to this, Cowgill observed, was to quote or allude to particular motifs from *The Dream of Gerontius*; the setting of 'Endure, O Earth!' in the first poem, 'The Fourth of August', for instance, echoes 'Novissima hora est' in *Gerontius*, thereby connecting not only the fate of dying soldiers but the eponymous spirit of England itself with the (distinctively Catholic) process of purgation that unfolds from the 'Novissima' motif. Cowgill also drew attention to the extent to which *Spirit of England* provided an outlet for collective national mourning in a period when such activity would have been seen as unpatriotic; in that sense, Elgar realised Sidney Colvin's suggestion of a 'wonderful Requiem for the slain' more completely than one might think.

The final speaker in the session was Byron Adams, whose paper was entitled "'Our Souls with High Music Ringing': Elgar, Pauer and The Elements of the Beautiful in Music'. Adams's starting point was Elgar's autodidacticism, and specifically the music books that Elgar read in his youth: how might they have formed his opinions on theory and aesthetics, and how might these views have manifested themselves in some of his compositional choices? Adams focused on Ernest Pauer's *The Elements of the Beautiful in Music* (1877), a volume that was concerned, *inter*

*alia*, with correspondences between particular keys and particular emotional states. Adams noted in particular the significance of E-flat major in Elgar's work, a key that Pauer described variously as 'serious and solemn', 'the exponent of courage and determination', 'brilliant', 'firm', 'dignified', and 'masculine'. The last of these adjectives was especially apt, for in a number of Elgar's scores, Adams observed, E-flat major is used to evoke particular male friends of the composer. The best-known example of this, of course, is the portrayal of August Jaeger in the 'Nimrod' variation, but Adams showed how E-flat was also closely related to Frank Schuster, whose favourite key it was, in both *In the South* (which was dedicated to him) and the Second Symphony (whose coda he inspired). Thus the central stanza of *The Music Makers* was not only Elgar's moving tribute to Jaeger (as signified by the quotation of 'Nimrod' in its original key), but, in light of the quotation from the Second Symphony, might also be viewed as a reference to Schuster.

Elgar's religious sensibilities formed the discursive terrain for the fourth Elgar paper of the conference, given by Charles Edward McGuire. Entitled "'More Acceptable Views": The Evolving Catholicism of Edward Elgar', it challenged the conventional narrative of Elgar's faith: that it provoked resentment in late-Victorian Protestant Britain, and that it collapsed when Elgar eventually questioned it in the early 1900s. Victorian Catholicism, McGuire explained, existed in different guises: 'Old English Catholics' who had maintained their creed through centuries of oppression, and who were characterized by their reserve and their 'yielding diplomatically to the Protestant majority in most things'; Ultramontanists, many of whom were converts; and Irish immigrants. The brand of Catholicism Elgar would have experienced during his childhood would have been predominantly Ultramontanist, notably in the form of the militantly anti-Anglican priest of St George's, Worcester, Fr William Waterworth, S.J.. Ultramontanism also characterized what McGuire described as Elgar's 'publicly faithful avatar' up to 1905; during this period the composer was widely recognized as a specifically Catholic composer, and apt to attract criticism from some quarters as a result. McGuire noted Elgar's apparent renunciation of faith after 1905 – the amateur science hobbies that might be viewed as a 'countermove against religion'; his criticisms of the church in private; his identification with nature – but argued that this might be seen rather as a metamorphosis from Ultramontanism to 'Old English Catholicism'. Elgar did still attend church (including Carice's confirmation which, McGuire noted, took place in 1907, not 1903 as Jerrold Northrop Moore states), but his beliefs were 'more reserved than mystical'; and his 'pan-Christian' compositions for the Three Choirs Festival, suitable for Catholics and Anglicans alike, might be

seen as a musical equivalent of appeasing the Protestant majority.

While these were the only papers explicitly on Elgar, several other sessions included presentations by scholars who have worked on Elgar, or who touched on Elgar-related issues in passing. Limitations of space prevent me from mentioning all of them, but readers of this journal may be interested to know that Edward Green, whose article on Elgar's rhythm appeared in the March 2006 issue, gave a paper on the influence of British composers on the film music of Bernard Herrmann (who admired Elgar), noting especially the connections in both music and scenario between Herrmann's score for the film *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947) and the recently completed *Peter Grimes*. Two other contributors to *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (besides Adams and McGuire) also gave papers. The undersigned spoke on the relationship between Bax and Sibelius, and the extent to which Bax's conception of the 'Celtic North', which inspired some of his mature symphonic works, might be construed as a view of nature that was diametrically opposed to (and thereby a critique of) the view of nature implicit in English pastoralism. And Jenny Doctor spoke on concert programming at the Proms between 1927 (the year that the BBC took over the running of the festival) and 1944. Doctor is a most distinguished historian of how the BBC, in its early decades, acted as a musical patron; and her paper explored, among other things, how the Corporation balanced the need to promote leading British composers alongside established continental repertoire, and how their adoption of the latest transmission techniques to broadcast this music reflected the aesthetic and economic values of inter-war modernism.

As was the case two years before in Oberlin, the conference was most successful both academically and socially; for this much thanks must go to Nathaniel Lew for his indefatigability in organizing the event, and to his institution, St Michael's College, for hosting it. The state of American research into British music has never been healthier: British music, particularly that written in the twentieth century, has become a popular area of specialty for postgraduates, while established scholars enjoyed the chance to exchange new ideas on even the most familiar of subjects. And, unlike at some conferences, that exchange was always conducted in a cooperative and friendly manner, whether in the sessions themselves, or over cups of coffee afterwards. Long may this state of affairs continue!

Aidan Thomson

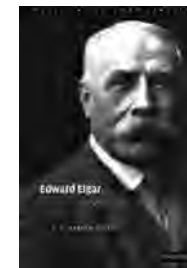
## BOOK REVIEWS

### Edward Elgar, Modernist

by J.P.E. Harper-Scott

Since at least 1962, when Ken Russell's Elgar film appeared, there has been a tendency to dwell more on the composer's life than on his works. Six years later came Michael Kennedy's beautifully crafted *Portrait of Elgar*, which again focused on the man himself and left musical analysis to others. Both film and book were, and remain, hugely influential, and one suspects that Elgar would have had no quarrel with either. In his letter to Ernest Newman of 4 November 1908, he wrote that 'all music ... must be ... a reflex, or picture, or elucidation of his [i.e., the composer's] own life, or, at the least, the music is necessarily coloured by the life'. But one result of the attitude exemplified by the Russell film is that, in J.P.E. Harper-Scott's words, 'in place of rigorous musicological discussion of Elgar's music is a vast and ever-increasing biographical literature which, with a few worthy exceptions, has been the favoured way to write a lengthy study of him'. He readily concedes that some of this literature, including the Kennedy *Portrait*, is of 'outstanding quality' but makes clear that his aim is not to add to it.

Whether the composer would have been unduly bothered by the absence of 'rigorous musicological discussion' is a moot point. He was uncomfortable in the role of Professor of Music, and his letters contain little technical discussion: writers cannot be blamed for regarding a 'poetic' approach more appropriate than a 'technical' one in the case of a self-taught artist who claimed that music is in the air and written on the skies. As Harper-Scott says, though, and the italics are his, music is *itself*. On the whole, one does not leave a concert feeling that the music could usefully have been bolstered by visual images, or that knowing about the composers' lives would have made the experience more stimulating. Music is *itself*. It does what music does, and – if we want to – we can talk and write about it in its own terms. We are not obliged to discuss a modulation, say, by reference to what lies outside music, a point neatly made by Harper-Scott in reference to *Falstaff*, when he observes that although 'the paragraph from figures 114 to 127 might comfortably be viewed as the new king's processional' that is only one interpretation. 'It is also', he continues, 'an incremental unfolding of a progression from C minor to E flat: a specifically musical event ...'



Cambridge  
University Press,  
2006  
xiv + 255 pages

But technical discussion is hard. Technical terms tend to be unambiguous, and flaws in one's thinking are mercilessly revealed by their use. On the other hand, commentaries by reference to landscape inhabit a world of relative freedom in which to a large extent the writer is rendered immune from criticism. Moreover, technical terms are not always adequate for the task in hand: an analytical approach that 'fits' a work by Beethoven (d. 1827) may be unsuited to one by Mahler (d. 1911) or Elgar (d. 1934), and much of this fine book is taken up with the creation of a tool-kit appropriate for the analysis of Elgar's music, Harper-Scott adverting to Schenker, Heidegger and James Hepokoski as he goes about his task. The relevant parts of the text assume a grasp of Schenker, philosophy and recent trends in analysis which not all may have, but assistance through this thicket is provided by a glossary, and the chapters in which Harper-Scott takes his newly fashioned tools and strips down his chosen works, the First Symphony and *Falstaff*, should hold no terrors for those acquainted with the scores. The analyses are unprecedentedly detailed and penetrating, and Elgarians of earlier generations are bound to regret that such things were not available years ago. Elgarians of all generations will welcome the way in which phrases familiar from the letters, e.g., 'ideal call' and 'sub-acid', are woven into the discussion.

It is part of Harper-Scott's thesis that Elgar's music 'carries meanings that can be discovered by analysis', and his penultimate chapter ('The annihilation of hope and the unpicking of identity: Elgarian hermeneutics'), in which he attempts to answer the question 'What are these works about?', is in many ways the most fascinating. The narrative of the First Symphony is not, he argues, the same as the darkness-to-light narrative of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (and Brahms's First). Elgar's narrative is a twentieth-century one and therefore pessimistic: the declared tonality, A flat major, 'immures' the D major of the slow movement, whose ending, in the words of Jaeger, brings us 'near Heaven'. The affirmation of A flat in the finale is not so much the triumph of the 'immuring' tonic as the defeat of the 'immured' D major. It was here that I wondered whether, for all its ingenuity, the Harper-Scott thesis takes enough account of the evidence of one's ears, for it has always seemed to me that the finale strikes an unequivocally triumphant note, a reading invariably confirmed by the rapturous outburst that is the customary response of an audience (and was the response in December 1908, as Jaeger's account of the first London performance reminds us). 'There is no victory', claims Harper-Scott, but only 'a massive hope'. For Kennedy, however, 'The end is victory' (*Portrait*, third edition, p.245), and I imagine that few would disagree. Could it be that dynamics, pace and instrumentation should somehow be taken into account, particularly

the last of these? Elgar said that ideas came to him clothed in instrumental colour: are not the qualities of the slow movement and finale, and therefore their meaning, to some extent a function of sonority, thinking of the use of strings in the one and of brass in the other? Is there not a 'style and substance' argument here?

At any rate, Harper-Scott argues convincingly for the symphony's 'duotonicity', i.e., the idea that there are two keys, both of which achieve a kind of goal, and it is partly in this that Elgar's modernism resides. It is the same in *Falstaff*, where a species of sonata-form exposition juxtaposes C minor (*Falstaff*) and its noble kinsman E flat major (*Hal*); but there will be no Beethovenian recapitulation of 'Hal', no happy nexus on a common tonal centre. The music associated with *Hal* and the King keeps its distance, in E flat major and its Neapolitan familiars E major and E minor. The King's denunciation is underlined by the recapitulation of 'Hal' in E flat major, *Grandioso, fortississimo*, but Elgar concludes his 'Symphonic Study in C minor' as Beethoven and Brahms concluded theirs, with a chord of C major, and not (as he could have done) in E flat major or one of its regal cognates. Nor is the work entirely about the disintegration of a relationship: the Dream Interlude's diatonicism expresses not only regret for Sir John's distant past but also the composer's nostalgia for the pre-modern scheme of things.

Elgarians are likely to find this a disturbing volume, not least because its fearfully articulate, erudite author does not appear to be a member of the Elgar establishment. He acknowledges the influence of certain canonical texts, and he belongs to the Elgar Society, but much of what he says goes against the grain of highly respected commentaries. For Kennedy (*Portrait*, third edition, p.334) the message of Elgar's music 'transcends mere crotchets and quavers', i.e., is above the level of technical discussion, which is quite the opposite of the Harper-Scott stance. There is little here in common with earlier books on the composer and nothing about little Edward's first faltering footsteps: one searches the index in vain even for 'Malvern' and 'Worcester'.

Although this is not an easy book, it is not as difficult as cursory examination might suggest. It is possible that much of what it says could have been expressed as well, perhaps better, within the vocabulary of Tovey (who is quoted with approval on the first page), but its importance cannot be doubted. There is a very real sense in which this is the first book about Elgar's music: the days of the 'Malvern Hills' kind of commentary would appear to be numbered. A most auspicious debut.

Relf Clark



Woodbridge: The  
Boydell Press,  
2006  
xx + 488 pages

## Edvard Grieg in England

by Lionel Carley

We wait years for a distinguished book on Grieg, and then two come along together, from the same publisher, and nicely timed for the centenary of his death. Neither is a conventional biography, or a 'life-and-works'. In the work under review, Lionel Carley has chosen to focus his attention on a topic, Grieg in England, that may seem specialized for such a substantial study. It comes from an author known for his invaluable work on Delius, and seems a natural development from his studies of that composer's connections in Norway and Denmark.

The default location for Grieg is the coastal region of Norway where he lived and had his famous composing hut, now 'among the most successful of composer museums anywhere'.<sup>1</sup> But he was no stay-at-home. He travelled widely, being well known in Germany, for Germans were not all dyed-in-the-wool Wagnerites and Brahmins. And his visits to England did provide him with many opportunities to display his art and, not least, to earn money, as well as make and renew friendships (some of the close ones with people, like Brodsky, not of English origins). Had his health been more robust he might have been able to respond to several more invitations; Lionel Carley's chapter headings sometimes convey the essential matter: 'Staying in touch with England'; 'Your music is so universal a favourite in England'; 'The Queen is sweet'; 'My health says no ...'; finally, rather sadly, 'The trip to England seems to me more than doubtful'. That was only a few months before his death, aged only 64.

Edvard Grieg got his name from male ancestors indubitably Scotch (originally Greig), but Carley's 'England' rather than Britain in the title is justified. Grieg spent little time north of the border. In any case, ancestry should not be treated as if all that mattered was the paternal line that carried the surname through the generations; and even the Grieg ancestors had resided in Norway for decades before his father's birth, never mind his own. His great-grandfather (at that level, one ancestor of eight) took Norwegian citizenship, whatever that meant in 1779. The king (p. 16) who declined Grieg's petition for support was presumably the king of Sweden; Norway regained independence only in 1905, surely an important point, as with Sibelius, and indeed Smetana, for a composer who, unlike Elgar, developed a musical language that was consciously representative of his nation, and

1 Julie Ann Sadie and Stanley Sadie, *Calling on the Composer. A Guide to European Composer Houses and Museums* (Yale University Press, 2005), 186 (the Sadies also rate the Elgar birthplace highly).

modelled in large part on its traditional music. The importance of Norway, its landscape and culture, is not, of course, the subject of this book, and those interested are directed to Daniel M. Grimley's admirably focused study, which is concentrated intensely upon Grieg's musical language and its sources.<sup>2</sup>

The standard view of Grieg today is rooted in his piano music: the concerto and numerous smaller pieces, many exquisite, not by any means all 'miniatures', and often daring in harmony and in representation of material of folk origins. We hear too little of his chamber works, and much less of larger projects that were esteemed in his lifetime, and which partly account for his immense popularity. It was professional concerns, rather than seeking his roots, that brought Grieg to England as a pianist and conductor, as well as a composer. He had already been impressed by some of the British musicians he met as a student in Leipzig; his contemporaries there included Sullivan, the Barnett family, and Liszt's champion Walter Bache, as well as Edward Dannreuther, originally from Strasbourg, but soon established in London. The tradition went on, with Smyth for one; and who knows what the outcome would have been had Elgar fulfilled his ambition and studied there as well? At least it would have increased the chances of the two composers getting to know each other. Later Grieg was honoured and performed in London and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> The engagement finally scotched by his declining health in 1907 was to conduct his scenes from *Olav Trygvason* at the Leeds festival; he was looking forward to hearing the work with the large forces typical of Leeds at that time. Years earlier, Elgar had fortunately overcome the obstacle of the existence of Grieg's *King Olaf*, when Hanley was urged by Swinnerton Heap, with prophetic vision, that Elgar's was the *Olaf* with a future.

This I learn not from Carley, but from Jerrold Northrop Moore.<sup>4</sup> Moore's *Elgar* has four index entries for Grieg; Carley has fourteen for Elgar, and naturally dozens more for Delius. Grieg and Elgar had mutual friends and supporters, and some names familiar from Elgar biographies – Parry, Sullivan, Stanford, Vert, Wood – crop up here. Grieg's last visits to England were well within Elgar's period of greatest glory. Most of Carley's mentions of Elgar are *en passant*, and they had little or no contact. Did Grieg

2 Daniel M. Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006).

3 For a concise account of Grieg's visits to London see Lewis Foreman and Susan Foreman, *London: a Musical Gazetteer* (Yale University Press, 2005), 244–6.

4 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: a Creative Life* (Oxford: University Press, 1984), 200.

know that Elgar in 1886 had rated him 'one of the 'lesser men', in company with Gade and, astonishingly, Dvořák – already known in England, including Birmingham, not only by Slavonic Dances but by a *Stabat Mater*?<sup>5</sup> Probably not; Grieg was unlikely to have read *The Malvern Advertiser*. Percy Young includes Grieg among the chamber-music composers that Elgar 'was plunged into' by the Fittons; Moore reminds us that Elgar conducted Grieg's piano concerto at Leeds in 1904.<sup>6</sup> Clearly Elgar knew the music of his older contemporary, and Carley's last paragraph includes him in a list of English composers influenced by Grieg, though not in a longer list of those who 'have sung Grieg's praises'; one would like to hear more about the alleged influence, and not just on Elgar, but that would be an entirely different project.

Carley's book is packed with information, and well illustrated with programme details, facsimiles, letters, and music, caricatures, and photographs; I particularly like the snapshot at the Oxford honorary degree ceremony (1906), where the two moustaches are evenly matched, but Parry must yield to Grieg's flowing mane; as a result, the English composer looks like the don he partly was. It is not surprising, nor a matter for regret, that Carley's book offers nothing new about Elgar, for why should it? But those interested in the musical life of the period in Britain, and elsewhere, not to mention Grieg himself, will find it informative and entertaining.

Julian Rushton



Aldershot:  
Ashgate, 2006  
vii + 178 pages

**Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction**  
by Stephen Benson

Marshall McLuhan's advice to the bookshop browser who wishes to assess an unfamiliar book is to go directly to page 69. If the prose appeals, read it; if it doesn't, don't. Page 69 of Stephen Benson's *Literary Music* is the first page of chapter 3, 'Quasi Parlando I: Polyphony and Musical Value in Bakhtin and Kundera'. (This is a book about music and literature, written by a scholar in an English Literature department.) It is probable that McLuhan's method, which makes a virtue of serendipity, cannot be successfully applied to the first page of a chapter, so let us flick on to p. 81, where we find, in a passage where the author is discussing the evolution of phrase structure in Classical music, declarations like this, cited from p. 81:

5 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 117.

6 Percy M. Young, *Elgar O.M.* (Book Club Edition, 1973), 67; Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 376.

The parallels here [in Charles Rosen's *The Classical Style*] with the literary conception of polyphony are striking ... As we've seen, what both Bakhtin and Kundera find in, so as to take from, polyphony is the idea of simultaneously independent musical terms, melodic (horizontal) voices moving independently against one another, giving rise, in the events [sic] of their meeting, to (vertical) harmonies which make the voices anew.

Readers who understand the sense of 'harmonies which make the voices anew' are doing better than this reviewer. In fact, I'm sorry to say, whenever this book discusses music in a 'theoretical' way, the results are, for a trained musicologist, either nettlingly banal or (as here) so stupefyingly complex that one cannot be certain that, behind the miasma of turgidity, the formulations mean anything at all.

Welcome to literary theory. The jacket blurb claims for *Literary Music* 'an informed interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature and music that participates in the lively theoretical debate on the status of meaning in music'. The word 'theory' here is used in its literary, not musical sense (cf. 'polyphony', above: literary theorists like to misappropriate musical terms, because they are resonant; and literary theory is nothing if not resonant). The 'debate on ... meaning in music' has been a feature of musicology since the early 1990s, often, but not always, characterized by the stiff peppering of names like Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes (all in the present book's index).

The book fails in the same way that many 'interdisciplinary' studies fail: it only demonstrates intelligent critical knowledge of one discipline, in this case literary studies. Partly this is a kind of positive failure, resulting from a misguided choice of reading matter in the 'other' discipline. The author aligns himself with the 'new musicology', which he says with fine *parti pris* 'concerned the need for music, that music corroborated by the academy in particular, to be wrested from the dominating grasp of formalist analysis and conventional historiography. Music needed to be put back into the world in which it is made, performed, received and evaluated; a world of conflicting ideologies, of manifest differences and, indeed, of increasing indifference to the self-justifying claims of music history' (p. 3). A result of this alignment is Benson's policy decision not to read widely or with any engagement among writers of music analysis or history. Instead he dwells on the current middle ground between disciplines, in a manner all too familiar in 'interdisciplinary' work.

Here, as elsewhere in the tradition he situates himself in, and to the severe disabling of his project, there is no genuine dialogue between disciplines, but only a cant-strangled gossip between

nigglers in the no-man's-land between disciplinary cracks. Such writers bulk out their work not by reading deeply and well in the secondary literature within the disciplines they are ostensibly conjoining, but by narrowing their bibliography as tightly as possible to the splurgings of their fellow between-worlders. Like students who read only each other's work, they risk propagating their own limited or distorted understandings by paying too little attention to the views of professional scholars who have devoted more time to the riddles of the originals. One cannot attempt a synthesis of bodies of knowledge if one engages with an unfamiliar tradition only through tendentious summaries. This approach murders scholarship. It is depressing to see its influence spread, and one sympathises with those scientists who feel that humanities scholars do nothing but prattle.

A case in point is chapter 1: "Something Familiar": Reading Elgar'. These 26 pages contains references to only around a dozen sources on the composer, most published before 1989, none published since 2001, and among the biographical or cultural studies, only one analytical piece, from 1993.<sup>7</sup> There is no mention of the most influential academic study of the last ten years, James Hepokoski's richly interpretative chapter on the two completed symphonies in *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony*, or of articles by Byron Adams, Charles McGuire, and Matthew Riley in the musicology journal *19th-Century Music*, or Julian Rushton's handbook on the Variations—or, most pressingly for a book which claims to concern itself with narrative and music, on the major contributions to precisely this area in Elgar studies: Charles McGuire's book on the oratorios, Brian Trowell's book-sized essay 'Elgar's Use of Literature', or, on a smaller scale, either of Michael Allis's recent essays.<sup>8</sup> One might charitably assume that

7 The analytical piece is Robert Meikle, "The True Foundation": The Symphonies', in Raymond Monk (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1993), 45–71; the main source is overwhelmingly Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), and aside from 1980s rethinkings of Elgar by Jeremy Crump and Meirion Hughes, nothing goes beyond straight biography.

8 James A. Hepokoski, 'Elgar', in D. Kern Holoman (ed.), *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 327–44; Byron Adams, 'The "Dark Saying" of the Enigma: Homoeroticism and the Elgarian Paradox', *19th-Century Music*, 23 (2000), 218–35; Charles Edward McGuire, 'Elgar, Judas, and the Theology of Betrayal', *19th-Century Music*, 23 (2000), 236–72; Matthew Riley, 'Rustling Reeds and Lofty Pines: Elgar and the Music of Nature', *19th-Century Music*, 16 (2000), 155–77; Julian Rushton, *Elgar: 'Enigma' Variations* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Charles Edward McGuire, *Elgar's Oratorios: The Creation of an Epic*

the *Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, published in 2004, came too late for the author, but given his distressing failure of research already published material, one wonders whether his failure during the latter stages of composition to consider that book, which could have radically reshaped his reductive view of the First Symphony, is symptomatic of a general scholarly lack—one which makes his comment on 'the Elgar literature, slight as it is' sound more like an unintended pointer to his own poor research than to any lack of critical writing on Elgar. The problem with the extra bibliography I've suggested is no doubt that it discusses *the music*. Who cares about that when there's 'voice', 'melocentrism', 'thematics', and 'historiographic metafiction' to consider?

There is no space here to assess the contribution of literary theory to a study of music and literature, nor do I make any judgements about this book's worth for students of literature. But readers of this journal will be interested to know what new insights Benson has to offer on Elgar—the subject of the first chapter, and the tone-setter for the book. He begins well by bemoaning the normal approach to music of historians and literary scholars, in which 'music is permitted to function as nothing more than adjectival icing ... [or] appropriate[ed] as the corroborating sound of the previously identified reading or the established *zeitgeist*' (p. 14).

His unexpected move into a discussion of James Hamilton-Paterson's novel *Gerontius*, a fictional account of Elgar's surprising cruise up the Amazon in 1923, is an interesting attempt to offer an alternative literary vision of music.<sup>9</sup> He quotes Hamilton-Paterson's acknowledgement that his 'greatest debt ... is to the music', and adds that 'in order to engage with this aspiration, and to attempt a reading of Elgar in which music is more than ambient corroboration, I want to propose an imaginary audiobook of *Gerontius* in which the text is interspersed with, or read against a backdrop of, a melody composed by Elgar'—the opening A-flat tune of the First Symphony.

'*Gerontius* is much preoccupied with lateness', Benson tells us, and 'again, late and rather self-conscious would serve to describe Elgar's First Symphony' (pp. 21, 22). The novel's means of indicating the passing of time, and acts of reminiscence, is

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*Narrative* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Brian Trowell, 'Elgar's Use of Literature', in Monk (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, 182–326; Michael Allis, 'Elgar and the Art of Retrospective Narrative', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 19 (2000), 298–328; Michael Allis, 'Elgar, Lytton, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 84', *Music & Letters*, 85 (2004), 198–238.

9 He has already cited Proust, Mann, and Forster as novelists who comment on music, but Hamilton-Paterson is more specifically Elgarian.



its repeating return to the musical note C, the siren on Elgar's ship the *Hildebrand*, but also, as the narrator notes, the Shofar note from *The Apostles*, and, Benson adds significantly, the first melodic note of the First Symphony (pp. 24–5). He draws heavily on Moore's reading of Elgar's music as a commentary on its own past, and in this, he follows Hamilton-Paterson, who is similarly reliant on Moore's very personal readings. So self-reflective does the fictional Elgar become during the course of the novel, in fact, that by the end he 'no longer recognizes himself', writing in his on-board journal that 'I'm not at all certain who the "I" is writing this Journal nor whether he inhabits that body' (p. 26). The composer has become so much of a fractured modern self, Benson suggests, that even his own identity seems a memory of the past.

There is little to baulk at in this account of the fictionalisation of Elgar himself, but at this point Benson starts to bring the music in earnestly, and we encounter difficulties. 'The sonata[-]form first movement is relatively traditional in its statement and deployment of themes', he says (p. 28), and if sonata form were only concerned with themes, that might be a fair comment (though it would still be debatable). But themes are not the heart of the sonata principle, and this movement is one of the most weird and complex Elgar ever wrote, so the assertion is doubly undermined. As if to defend himself immediately from the suggestion that his readings of music lack any informed weight, he claims that as Elgar was popular in his lifetime and is now a member of the canon, 'we should pay attention to a common listener ... unversed in structural listening', listening to melody, not form (p. 28).

Etiquette forbids one to snap: 'Fine. Let's pay attention, when discussing novels, only to a common reader unversed in subtleties of language or characterization, and who can appreciate nothing but the crude story-line or plot'. What would not be tolerated in studies of literature we are here asked to accept as a suitable approach to music. In another context, where the author is using music merely to illustrate a broader historical or literary point (as in his comments about 'adjectival icing', above), failure – *refusal* – to engage with the intellectual tools of music criticism could be forgiven. It is difficult to do so in the case of a book so heavily freighted with theory of other kinds. Why, one might ask, should a musicologist bother to read up on literary theory if a literary theorist will not bother with music theory? Where is the compromise here, the commingling of the spirit and knowledge of different disciplines?

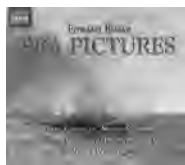
But even more important than such relatively trivial questions, Benson's drastic simplification of Elgar's symphonic argument more or less invalidates the broader argument he wishes to make by referring to it. He repeats familiar vague remarks about diatonic/chromatic tensions in the symphony, and concludes,

unobjectionably but without having added much to our understanding of Elgar's music. 'The Symphony is thus constituted out of retrospection, which is why the generic moment of the final statement ... is both a foregone conclusion and yet strangely out of place: a looking back on something that is looking elsewhere. If the *Grandioso* restatement of the motto can be said to be in the past tense, the present tense statement to which it alludes is itself already historicized. It lives the present like a memory' (p. 38).

I have no doubt that this is a well-meant study, although its limited reading in Elgar studies, and (non-'new') musicology in general, prevents me from also calling it diligent. I cannot recommend it.

J.P.E. Harper-Scott

## CD REVIEWS



### **The Music Makers, Op. 69** **Sea Pictures, Op. 37**

Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano)  
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Chorus  
conducted by Simon Wright

Naxos 8.557710

The coupling of *Sea Pictures* (1899) and *The Music Makers* (1912) is rarer than one might expect; as far as I am aware, there has been no such pairing since Linda Finnie and Bryden Thomson recorded the works for Chandos fifteen years ago. Yet the combination is a logical one: both pieces feature a solo contralto (though since not all contraltos possess the astonishing range of Clara Butt, a mezzo-soprano is more common nowadays); the first of the *Sea Pictures* is one of several earlier works that Elgar quotes in *The Music Makers*; and, of course, the sea is used in both works as a means of depicting an alternative vision of reality (and, in the case of *The Music Makers*, a place from which artistic renewal might come). Consequently, this new recording from Naxos, featuring the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Simon Wright, with British mezzo Sarah Connolly, is most welcome.

*The Music Makers* is perhaps the hardest of Elgar's mature works for a conductor to interpret convincingly. On the one hand, it is a setting of a lyric poem, by turns reflective and dramatic; on the other, its length, scoring and structure suggest a discursive, quasi-symphonic idiom that transcends the immediacy of mere word-painting. Most conductors tend to lay greater store on this immediacy, and Wright is no exception. But this is not to imply that his reading lacks shape, for there is no shortage of direction within each stanza. Wright is effective in generating not only long-range crescendos but also equally gradual diminuendos, notably in stanzas 4 ('till our dream shall become their present, and their work in the world be done') and 7 ('The glory about us clinging'). There is thus time for the energy of Elgar's climaxes to disperse without any loss of tension. Wright's care for Elgar's dynamic markings is also apparent in unaccompanied choral passages. One is conscious, always, of the difference between *p* and *pp*, and this can lead to some quite magical moments, notably the *subito pianissimo* at the opening of stanza 8.

Wright is fortunate to have a soloist of the calibre of Connolly, whose singing is seldom other than magnificent. Her tone may occasionally lack the extra radiance of Janet Baker's, but her rendition of the fifth stanza possesses a warmth and intimacy that is sometimes missing in Baker, and it certainly does not want for intensity (above

all at the words 'Wrought flame in another man's heart'). She also excels in the well-paced final stanza, where she is well supported by the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus at its most unworldly.

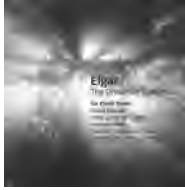
The result is a very good recording, but not an outstanding one. While some of Wright's tempi are excellent, this cannot be said of the introduction, which latterly feels somewhat laboured. There are problems with balance throughout: in particular, the sopranos are frequently not powerful enough (e.g. the end of the penultimate stanza), while the heavy brass occasionally drowns out everything else. And there are corners, particularly those that involve tempo changes, where the chorus can be slightly untidy (though it should be noted that O'Shaughnessy's sibilant-suffused text is notoriously hard to sing). Generally, however, this is an enjoyable and often moving account of one of Elgar's most underrated works.

For the most part, Connolly also stands as a worthy successor to Baker in *Sea Pictures*. The one exception is *Sea Slumber-Song*, where the tempi are so slow and the central C-major section ('Isles in elfin light') so replete with *rubato* that the music loses any sense of shape, becoming merely a series of beautiful sounds. But the remaining songs are much more successful. *In Haven* charms in its simplicity, while *Sabbath Morning at Sea* combines musical direction with an energy and pious zeal that, latterly, almost equal the ecstatic quality of Baker's famous recording. Also well shaped is *Where Corals Lie*, Connolly's rendition of the third stanza ('Yes, press my eyelids close') conjuring up just the right amount of otherworldliness. This is less the case when the same passage is quoted in *The Swimmer*, but Connolly makes up for this with some wonderfully dramatic, spat consonants in the recitatives, and generates plenty of momentum elsewhere.

I would make only two general criticisms about this performance. Firstly, Connolly's voice, for all its beauty, sometimes needs more dynamic variety, especially in softer passages. Secondly, as with *The Music Makers*, there are some problems with balance between singer and orchestra: we come close to losing the solo viola and cello lines in *In Haven* and solo woodwind lines in *Where Corals Lie*. This is a pity, because elsewhere Wright brings out some of the more distinctive orchestral colours most effectively – listen, for instance, to the string *ponticelli* in the second recitative of 'The Swimmer' – and one wonders how far he is to blame, rather than the Naxos sound engineer.

Overall, this is a worthy addition to the recorded Elgar canon. For preference I would still turn first to Baker for *Sea Pictures*, and to Andrew Davis or Boult for *The Music Makers*, but as a recording at budget price this CD is undeniably a bargain, particularly for listeners who are unfamiliar with the later work.

Aidan Thomson



### The Dream of Gerontius, Op. 36

David Rendall, tenor

Anne Sofie von Otter, mezzo-soprano

Alastair Miles, bass

London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus

conducted Sir Colin Davis

LSO Live:  
LSO0583

Sadly, and with great reluctance, I cannot recommend this recording although its qualities are obvious. It is a recording that largely masters the acoustic of the Barbican Hall. Anne Sofie von Otter (a singer I have not found that sympathetic in the past) is a warm intelligent Angel, Alastair Miles is imposing and impressive, and the Orchestra and Chorus are outstanding. Above all, Sir Colin Davis's broad (at times very broad) conception of *Gerontius* is convincing and compelling, and draws one into his conception of the work.

In December 2005 I attended the first of the two Barbican performances that formed the basis of this recording. I remember it as the highlight of my Elgar performances in the year. In particular the balance between orchestra and chorus was managed beautifully, and Davis drew out the final Amen into a spine-tingling eternity. Nevertheless, the reader will have observed that I made no mention above of David Rendall; and it is his part in this recording that lets the performance down. Indeed, without a satisfactory tenor as *Gerontius* a recording will fail any test. My judgement has not been helped by the fact that I have been listening to the great singing of Heddle Nash in the role from broadcasts he made in 1935 and 1936.

Generously, Rendall stood in at the last moment for the nominated tenor, and as the management of an orchestra knows all too well, finding a replacement at short notice for a role such as this poses a great challenge. Nevertheless, gratitude and sympathy cannot interfere with our appraisal of the performance overall. My disappointment is all the greater in that I heard and saw Rendall in *Otello* earlier in the year, and found his performance well acted and musically satisfying.

There is a throbbing in Rendall's voice which is acute at such moments as '*Novissima hora est*', a point when the voice should be floating in a mixture of relief and anticipation; and this problem continues to the moment of death. It all sounds rather undramatic, as if Rendall is barely engaged with the extraordinary events in which he is the central figure. I would have expected Rendall to have been more in tune with the operatic nature of the work. When it comes to the release of 'Take me away', I just do not get the impression that Rendall has experienced something so powerful that he is over-awed to the extent that speech is

barely possible. An uncle of mine who sang in the chorus of many a *Gerontius* performance once told me he felt the tenor should cover his face with his forearm at this point. One can see what he means, even if not countenancing such an idea!

I could go on, but this climactic moment is one of those by which any performance will stand or fall. Buy it by all means; the rest offers the listener much, and at £10 this set is good value, but I remain disappointed for the reasons I have disclosed.

Andrew Neill

### Variations Op. 36 and other piano music

Ashley Wass (Piano)

Having listened to this CD a number of times, I have come to the conclusion that, good though it is, it is one I shall probably not listen to more than occasionally. The playing is beautiful, scrupulously accurate, and wonderfully voiced (an advantage when you are playing piano versions of pieces better known in their orchestral version, as are the Variations, Op. 36). But I feel that Wass's minute attention to detail often leads him into holding up the overall flow of the music. It has all been carefully thought out; but in the end it has not been thought through. The refreshing air of improvisation which pervades much of the music often leaves me thinking that Wass does not know where he (or Elgar) is going. There are many beautiful things, and Wass is really good in the faster passages where the crisp articulation of technically demanding rhythms is required. But in the end I am left feeling rather uninvolved; and the performances generally are not ones I expect to return to.

We begin with the Sonatina in G major, given a beautifully scrupulous performance. The wistful first movement is rather milked by Wass, but not unbearably so. The second movement is very Schumannesque and its falling sevenths, such a characteristic Elgarian finger print, remind me of *Kind in Einschlummern* from *Kinderscenen*. *Dream Children* follows and is beautifully played at an apt tempo; it is all neat and tidy. *Une Idylle*, originally a piece for violin and piano, also receives beautiful treatment. It is a fascinating arrangement and a piece well worth studying by anyone interested in arrangements and transcriptions. It is no mere re-writing of a piece for a different instrument: the introduction of the violin version is omitted, and the accompaniment to the main melody is altered. The next piece, *Carissima*, also exists in a violin version. Here too



NAXOS 8570166

much attention to detail interrupts the flow of the music. *May Song*, again originally for violin, is another brilliant exercise in arrangement/transcription. Among other things, quite a few bars which appear in the violin version are omitted. It is prettily played.

*Douce Pensée* (*Rosemary*) is taken too briskly for my money: written in compound duple time, it is done at a nifty two in a bar instead of the six which I would prefer. The opening is a rhetorical gesture rather than an impassioned outburst and a world of emotion has been lost. Of course, I may be wrong in my view of the piece, but I see in it rather more sentiment than Wass does. *Echo's Dance*, adapted and transcribed from *The Sanguine Fan*, is a mischievous piece, as befits its eponymous character in the ballet. It is well played and is followed by a wistful performance of the *Sérénade Mauresque* (from *Three Characteristic Pieces*).

The second half of the CD is given over to a performance of the Variations, Op. 36 (which I refuse to call the 'Enigma' since only the theme is so described – in any case, I am particularly averse to wasting time on puzzles when, even if you get the answer, you won't know whether it's right or not). After a rather fussy and hesitant performance of the theme, Variation I is nicely done. Variation II sparkles, at a good speed, with its semiquavers lyrically played. The next three variations are also well done, with crisp playing in Variation IV and some delicate finger-work, always clear, in the scalar runs. Variation VI is nicely played, and I particularly like Variation VII, very clear, with judicious use of pedal. The rhythms again are crisp and the last run superbly executed. I also like the performance of Variation VIII. Variation IX ('Nimrod') moves well and is taken at almost exactly the 52 crotchets per minute which Elgar asks for; no shades of Bernstein here. The approach to and achievement of the final climax is finely done, as is the rapid descent from it. Variation X (Intermezzo, 'Dorabella') begins with a beautifully articulated demisemiquaver figure; indeed, the articulation is generally excellent throughout all the different figures in this variation. Variation XI is admirably played, with the runs brilliantly clear. This is a good, energetic performance which contrasts well with the fine cantabile of Variation XII, its final climax well conceived and its last few bars very intense. The different thematic strands of Variation XIII are all nicely differentiated, with the Mendelssohn quotation initially played with a bloom surrounding it. This is obtained by Wass's liberal and apt use of the sustaining pedal and leads to a sonorous climax before the reprise of the opening. Variation XIV begins with nice crisp rhythms but the music loses impetus just before and at the reprise of 'Nimrod'. The reprise of Variation I, however, is beautifully played, and there is a well judged crescendo from here on. The last few pages are majestic

and the loud passages played completely without bombast.

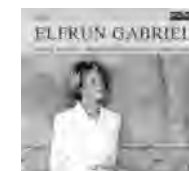
The CD has a good track index, some good notes about each of the pieces, and a brief biography of Elgar and of the pianist. There is much to commend this CD and I know that it will find a welcome in many Elgarian homes. The playing is often beautiful and frequently technically excellent (though most of the pieces do not call for a virtuoso technique). I am well aware that Wass's clean, crisp, clear playing will appeal to many listeners, and no doubt I who am losing out. I just feel that often I cannot see the wood for the trees but maybe I should remember that Elgar said 'The trees are singing my music ... or am I singing theirs?'

Paul Adrian Rooke

### **Variations Op. 36 ('Enigma')**

with de Falla, *Fantasia Baetica*; Shostakovich *Puppentanz* (Doll's Dances).

Elfrun Gabriel (piano)



MDR: VKJK 0625

Frankly, I'm amazed that anyone wants to listen to a performance of the 'Enigma' Variations on the piano, and I feel sure that Elgar would have been equally astonished. Certain slighter works (*Salut d'Amour*, or the two *Chansons*, for example) appeared as piano solos or for violin and piano, or for small orchestra, more or less simultaneously, and are equally effective in any of these versions. But the Variations remain essentially orchestral, and Elgar's own arrangement for piano was surely for domestic use. In the days before broadcasting and recording it wasn't unusual for composers to make arrangements of their big orchestral works for piano or piano duet (or indeed both); it was the only way for most people to get to know them. But in this case, however skilful the pianist, the monochrome piano can be no substitute for Elgar's magical orchestration.

Yet there have been four CD recordings of the work on piano: Anthony Goldstone on Elgar's own Broadwood piano (MRCD 94001); a recent Naxos version with Ashley Wass (8570166, reviewed by Paul Adrian Rooke in this issue); the Spanish pianist Maria Garzon (ASV DCA1065); and now from Germany comes this CD by the Czech-German pianist Elfrun Gabriel. It is very good to see foreign pianists taking up Elgar's music, and, despite my opening paragraph, I have to say that I quite enjoyed comparing the recordings by Garzon and Gabriel. An occasional hearing of the piano version does make one aware of Elgar's pianistic skills, and hearing just the bare bones of the work heightens one's awareness of its structure. Both pianists are similar in tempo, the new recording taking just forty seconds longer than the Garzon

version. Elfrun Gabriel's piano is given a brighter sound, more appropriate perhaps for the Falla and Shostakovich than the Elgar. Variations IV ('W.M.B.') and VII ('Troyte') seem to me too slow, the latter being nowhere near Presto, but I preferred her to Garzon in the linked variations V and VI ('R.P.A.' and 'Ysobel'), where the Spanish pianist lingers too long at times. The latter's 'Nimrod' is better at a more flowing speed, but Gabriel manages the sudden pianissimo ending of that variation more naturally. The palm must go again to Gabriel in the delicate right-hand figuration of 'Dorabella', and she manages the finale better; here there is some smudged fingerwork from Garzon, who also makes heavy weather of all the tremolando at the end. If I had to choose, I would opt for Elfrun Gabriel's performance: her CD is attractively packaged with an interview of her in English and German. But Maria Garzon's CD is devoted entirely to Elgar, and that may sway the balance for some Elgarians. Incidentally, both CDs manage to get Elgar's dates wrong (Garzon has 1854-1934, Gabriel 1857-1937)!

Barry Collett



**Violin Sonata Op. 82; music for violin and piano**  
 Simone Lamsma (violin), Yurie Miura (piano)

This is the third CD recording of Elgar's Violin Sonata that I have reviewed for the Journal. In November 2004, despite my position as International Co-ordinator of The Elgar Society and thus my keenness to promote performances of Elgar's music abroad and by foreign musicians, I was rather critical of the recording by Tuncay Yilmaz, the Turkish violinist, and his accompanist, Robert Markham. The liberties which Yilmaz took with Elgar's musical text, allied to his 'gratuitous portamenti, excessive vibrato and a poor intonation', found no favour with me; and I concluded that 'If you like your Elgar covered in meringue and with stops *en route* for all the fascinating little places along the roadside, then you might enjoy it. Regrettably, I haven't'. In July 2006 I was much with Lorraine McAslan's recording with the pianist John Blakely. I found the playing of both performers 'aristocratic and passionate' and their account of the second movement 'the best I have heard'. I had minor reservations, but on the whole 'I really enjoyed listening to this CD'.

This third recording is by the Dutch violinist Simone Lamsma, with the Japanese pianist Yurie Miura. They are a fine team and this is a fine performance. It is very passionate and committed and Lamsma plays beautifully throughout. She has the measure of the work both technically and musically and I like very much the refined manner of her playing. Tempi are well judged, as

are the changes of tempo which Elgar frequently calls for (and which Yilmaz misjudges). Particularly good in this recording is the balance between the violin and the piano: the passages in which themes are passed to and fro between the two instruments benefit greatly. The performance of the first movement is very fine indeed. It is highly polished and cultured with hardly a blemish (apart from the strange lengthening by a crotchet of the tied note in bars 21-22). It lacks the gradations of tone which McAslan obtains and has a less carefully scaled range of dynamics. McAslan can change from a very gutsy sound to the most delicate of *dolcissimi* and she absolutely captivates with her *pianissimo* playing. However, though Lamsma is less varied with regard to tone and to dynamics, at least she is more secure in her grasp of speeds. On balance, I prefer her account of the first movement.

Having rated McAslan's performance of the second movement as 'the best I have heard', I was eager to compare Lamsma's with it. It is a very good performance and compares well. Unfortunately, at least for me, she has an odd way of playing the figure which first appears at bar 10: a thrice repeated quaver-semiquaver-semiquaver rest pattern, marked 'a tempo'. To my ears she takes it twice as fast as the prevailing tempo (which, after the initial four bars of introduction, is established at figure 22). It is strange, therefore, that each time it recurs this 'a tempo' passage is treated as if it were to be played 'più mosso'. I don't find it convincing; in fact I think it upsets the equilibrium of the movement. Having been spoilt by McAslan's wonderful *pp dolcissimo* at fig. 28, I was also a little disappointed by Lamsma, who was not *pp dolcissimo* enough. But her approach to and attainment of the climax at fig. 32 is totally convincing. McAslan is matchless in her last six bars. It is to do with her playing of the tied E sharp at bars 127-8. Initially without vibrato, it increases in volume (as marked) to the downbeat of the next bar, where the vibrato is added. She then takes the 'Molto lento' bar slower than Lamsma and with a much more ghostly tone. At figure 38 she also avoids the pitfall of Lamsma's wayward 'a tempo = più mosso' figure. As I said before, 'This is completely absorbing playing' from McAslan and I would buy the CD just for her performance of this movement. Lamsma is very good, but in the end not a match.

As far as last movements go, the two performances are very even. Lamsma is just slightly faster in her basic tempo and thus has a more energetic thrust to her playing. In particular, her climaxes are very well judged and the passages between figs 48 and 50 and between 54 and 55 are very fine indeed. McAslan's performance is also excellent.

Of course, your decision to get one or other of these CDs may depend on the rest of the programme. In Lamsma's case, she

may have the edge with members of the Elgar Society, since all of her programme is of music by Elgar. After the Sonata come the *Romance*, *Bizarrerie*, *Pastourelle*, *La Capricieuse*, *Virelai*, *Mazurka*, *Idylle*, the two *Chansons*, *Salut d'amour* and *Offertoire*.

*Romance*, Elgar's opus 1, is a piece which begins charmingly enough but its central section is too intensely passionate for the reprise to be charming. In fact it is quite melancholy. McAslan has the measure of the piece and the middle and end are finely played. *Bizarrerie* makes a good contrast. It is a skittish piece and receives all the right bravura treatment from McAslan. The rhythms are crisp and her technique firm. *Pastourelle* is a little rural idyll which elicits a fine lyrical tone. The next piece, *La Capricieuse* displays all of these qualities, firm technique and crisp rhythms in the outer sections and lyrical tone in the middle. *Virelai* is an emotionally uncluttered piece, fresh and blithe, whilst, again making a good contrast, the *Mazurka* is more like the Elgar we know and love: there is a touch of wistfulness – and plenty of fire in the belly. Lamsma's playing is a match for both pieces. She performs *Idylle* in the revised version of 1910. Again, the tone is lovely and the playing suitably energetic. The pace of *Chanson de Nuit* is on the mournful side in its interpretation of *Andante* but the piece can stand up to it and the central climax is certainly very nobly achieved. On the other hand, *Chanson de Matin* is on the faster side of the 84 crotchets per minute Elgar asked for. It is deliciously played, however, as is *Salut d'amour*. The latter, of course, as one of Elgar's most popular pieces (I bet he's still kicking himself about selling it outright and so cheaply) could have been expected to end the CD; but Lamsma shows her judicious programme planning by leaving us with the lesser-played *Offertoire*. Marked *Andante religioso*, it is, according to the CD booklet 'a little piece of solemn religious intensity'. In this context, however, it is a valediction and a blessing.

It is an excellently judged programme, with the substantial Sonata of 1918 first, then the early salon pieces. We move backwards and forwards through the first years of Elgar's career in the two decades or so before his national and international fame, but the juxtaposition of pieces works tremendously well. I was particularly taken with the linking of *Idylle* and *Chanson de Nuit*, with the last note and harmony of the one being identical with the first note and harmony of the next. This is subtle and intelligent programme planning.

I cannot recommend the CD by Yilmaz and Markham, though to be fair to both of them, I gave my recording to a prominent Elgarian who stated that I had been rather hard on it. So it is a choice between Lorraine McAslan and John Blakely and Simone Lamsma and Yurie Miura. The CD by Lamsma/Miura is certainly one to be treasured and I can recommend it heartily. The pieces are all by our favoured composer and thus well worth the asking

price. On the other hand, the CD by McAslan/Blakely has the Walton Violin Sonata which will appeal to those who like his music as well as Elgar's. And I certainly would not wish to be without McAslan's performance of the slow movement of the Elgar Sonata, which is still 'the best I have heard'. Fortunately, I have both. Now, there's an idea!

Paul Adrian Rooke

### Falstaff, Op. 68

with Berlioz: Overture, *Béatrice et Bénédict* and Dvořák: Overture, *Othello* Op. 93  
Münchener Rundfunkorchester conducted by John Fiore

It has long been my desire to see the major Elgar works performed, and recorded, by the great Continental orchestras. It is slowly happening, and I was delighted to receive and review this recording, on a German CD by the Munich Radio Orchestra, conducted by an American. The disc is devoted to music inspired by Shakespeare, and as well as Elgar's *Falstaff* there are Berlioz's brilliant comedy overture *Béatrice et Bénédict*, and Dvořák's tragic concert overture *Othello*. *Falstaff* is the major work, however, and Elgar's most complex orchestral score here receives an excellent performance. The overall tempi are steady, but despite this the overall timing for the performance is within seconds of the recordings by Simon Rattle and Mark Elder. The spacious and clean acoustic is a help here, and numerous splashes of colour from harps or soft percussion are well integrated into the orchestral fabric. Other details of Elgar's teeming scoring emerge naturally – listen to the low tuba notes as Falstaff falls asleep (from fig. 73), accompanied by timpani played with wooden sticks, or the delicacy of the playing in the following 'Dream Interlude'. The sinister shiver of *sul ponticello* double basses at Falstaff's death also makes its effect. There is virtuosity too when needed – note the accuracy of the rapid string triplets at fig. 122.

*Falstaff* is a notoriously difficult score to bring off effectively; its the myriad changes of mood and tempi have defeated many a performer. But not this time. Tempi are well integrated into an overall conception of the work, and if certain episodes here and there are more vivid in recorded performances by Solti, Barbirolli and Barenboim, it seems to me that this is a truly musical performance, obviously well prepared, and performed by musicians who love the work. Dashing performances of the Berlioz and Dvořák works complete the disc, which comes bound with a complete Orfeo catalogue. At £4.99 it is more than a bargain – it's a gift!

Barry Collett



Orfeo C 645 061 A

**From Michael Plant**

As the Editor delicately pointed out, I was not first in the field with my thoughts on J.B. Priestley, but much credit to him for printing them anyway in the Journal, ingeniously adapted to remove some repetition and superfluous material. My predecessor was Frank Beck with 'A North Country Elgarian' (July 1995), and I gladly refer members to that number (Vol. IX, No. 2), where they will find a well-research centenary tribute to a great man of letters who was also a genuine music-lover and knowledgeable Elgarian.

My own intention was to direct members to Priestley's *The Edwardians*, where Elgar is placed in his period by one who was there himself and could recount at first hand 'what it was like'. Frank Beck draws more widely on Priestley's works and in particular reminds us that Elgar's Cello Concerto is practically a character in his play *The Linden Tree*. On re-reading both articles – yes, I had the July 1995 Journal on my shelves all the time – I hope that others may also find the two articles to be complementary.

Although I cannot claim credit for rediscovering Priestley as an Elgarian, there is no harm in putting a new shine on an old pair of boots, and if all this brings his works to greater attention among us, it is not such a bad outcome. Plenty of new members since 1995 will not in any case have seen earlier issues of the Journal, which has maintained a high standard for many years. Scope for an anthology one day?

*The Editor responds:*

I thank Michael Plant for his excellent justification, and apologise for missing the repetition until the November Journal was well under way. In fact, however, when writing my editorial, I was thinking of the March 2002 issue, in which a section entitled 'Elgar and Englishness', put together, I assume, by the then editor (whose name doesn't appear, but was surely Geoffrey Hodgkins!), included Priestley's remarks *in extenso*, together with fine pieces of writing by Samuel Langford (a predecessor of Neville Cardus on the *Manchester Guardian*) and Alex Cohen.

**From Andrew Neill**

I refer to my review of the Dutton (CDLX 7172) release of music from the Great War including *The Spirit of England* which you included in the November 2006 edition. Unfortunately I stated that Agnes Nicholls and John Coates sang 'To Women' and 'For the Fallen' in May 1916. It was not John Coates but John Booth who sang in Leeds on 3 May and in London on 8 May 1916. Full details of these early performances can be found in John Norris's chapter in the Society's *Oh My Horses!* (pages 246-247).

The Elgars' voyage on the *Orontes* was largely uneventful, although the weather was rough at times. After Gibraltar and Marseilles, the ship docked at Naples on 6 January. The Elgars stayed at Parker's Hotel, and Canon Gorton came over from Capri (where he was acting as Anglican chaplain) to show them round. They were 'much impressed' by Pompeii, but Alice became 'tired of the dirty streets & ugly buildings'. On 13 January they moved on to Capri, staying at the Hotel Quisisana (which Elgar transmuted to 'Quasi-Insana'). Although the weather was generally unfavourable, the stay was enjoyable, for they managed a number of walks with Gorton (and later his wife), and met interesting people including the artist James Talmage White, whose son owned a *pensione*.

The Elgars left Capri for Rome on 12 February. They found the hotel unacceptable and spent the rest of their stay with their friends the Slingsby Bethells, who owned the guest house at Garmisch where they had stayed a decade before. They met Perosi, the music director of the Sistine Chapel; and Sgambati, a Liszt pupil and internationally-known pianist. It was Elgar's first visit to Rome and he loved it: Alice told Mrs Stuart Wortley that he was 'utterly blissful' there. On 23 February they set off home by train, via Turin and Paris, reaching London two days later.

On 2 March Elgar left for America. He and his valet, John Cousins, sailed from Liverpool on the *Carmania* (Alice did not go this time), arriving in New York on 11 March. On 19 March Elgar conducted *The Apostles* at Carnegie Hall with Frank Damrosch's Oratorio Society, and *The Kingdom* – its American premiere – on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Both works were favourably received, but there were reservations from one or two critics about the quality of some of the music. Meanwhile, Alice had gone to Birmingham on 21<sup>st</sup> to hear *The Kingdom*.

On 3 April Elgar took the train to Chicago, where on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> he conducted *In the South*, the Variations, and *Pomp and Circumstance* No. 1, as the second half of a programme that also included works by Strauss, d'Indy, Rimsky-Korsakov, and the American composer, Frederick Converse. He was pleased with the orchestra; as he wrote to Jaeger, 'A fine orchestra (100) & they knew...*everything* of mine backwards: I shed a tear over it'. Leaving Chicago on 8 April, he stopped over at Cincinnati, reaching Pittsburgh on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The opening ceremony of the newly-enlarged Carnegie Institute took place on the afternoon of the next day, and Elgar conducted the 'Enigma' Variations at the evening concert, the programme also comprising music by Tchaikovsky, Wagner and Liszt. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, along with twenty others, Elgar received an honorary degree from the University of Western Pennsylvania, and the concert programme of two days earlier was repeated. The grim setting of a large industrial town, plus Carnegie's failure to pay the promised fee, made Elgar glad that his visit was coming to an end. He sent a card to Alice Stuart Wortley's daughter Clare: 'My love to you all from an unlovely place'. He took the overnight train to New York, where he stayed with Julia Worthington, and writing to Ella Gorton: 'After our sweet & delightful time in Capri it is a hideous change to be in Western America' His journey home on the *Campania* began on 20 April. It was not a good voyage – the weather was stormy and he could not sleep due to the vibrations caused by the engine. A week later Alice wrote in her diary: 'Heard E. had arrived at Liverpool & at 4.30 had the joy of seeing him arrive safe & well... In good spirits & loving being home – Inexpressible joy & thankfulness'.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

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