

The Elgar Society

Journal



November 2009 Vol. 16, No. 3

The Elgar Society

Founded 1951

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

Front Cover: Statue of Edward Elgar in the garden of his birthplace at Lower Broadheath.

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Presentation of written text:

Subheadings: longer articles benefit from judicious use of these.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Editorial

The passion for centenaries and half-centenaries inexorably gains strength, at least within our musical culture. For 2009, Purcell, Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn were selected by the BBC to the detriment of others (such as Spohr) who probably merit more exposure than they normally receive. Next year we shall experience the bicentenaries of the births of Chopin and Schumann, with Liszt (1811), Wagner and Verdi (1813) hard on their heels. Such anniversaries may consolidate a reputation, or revive one in need of resuscitation (as with Elgar in 1957 and Berlioz in 1969). Like ourselves, the *Berlioz Society Bulletin* used to publish a feature '100 years ago', just as we presumably shall until 2034. We have also commemorated the centenaries of several of Elgar's greatest works. One of the best-loved, the Violin Concerto, was completed in 1910; the time is perhaps ripe for a new view of a work to which there is attached a kind of enigma – those five dots.

I suppose we shall never actually *know* whose soul was enshrined within the concerto; quite a few people associated with the composer had names of five letters, and we are left with a balance of probabilities that favours the 'Windflower': the Alice to whom Elgar was not married. The other and older enigma has provoked still more purported new and revised 'solutions', without producing even a balance of probabilities. In my short book on the Variations, published ten years ago, I proposed five criteria for a convincing solution (these have now been upped to seven by Clive McClelland).¹ I rather hoped these criteria would act as a deterrent; instead they have served a number of would-be solvers to structure their arguments. Perhaps that constitutes a modest benefit.

Were I preparing a revised edition of the book, besides updating information on proposed 'solutions' I should wish to qualify what I meant in proposing criteria. I did *not* mean to say that I believe the true solution, if we could discover it, would necessarily satisfy them all. What I meant was that *if* a 'solution' is presented to us today, it needs to meet certain criteria for us to be interested, let alone impressed, even if we are not convinced. Many valiant efforts have been made in that direction. Those who have gone public usually claim that the criteria have been met, or that some may be dismissed as less essential – a perfectly reasonable contention given that the basis for the criteria is a set of more or less casual 'clues' dropped by the composer, some of which are probably not even meant that way. For instance, 'clues' that point to features of the music itself – Elgar's reference to falling sevenths, or the remark attributed to him that the connection of the variations to the theme is 'of the

¹ *Elgar: Enigma Variations* (Cambridge, 1999), 64–78; the criteria are on 66–7. Clive McClelland, 'Shadows of the evening: New light on Elgar's 'dark saying'', *Musical Times* 148 (No. 1901, Winter 2007), 43-48.

slightest texture' – could simply be intended to help listeners understand the music. Other 'clues' may be intentional mystification. Elgar's willingness to lead us up the garden path 'should be observed', as he said of my criterion 5, the falling sevenths.

If I have yet to be convinced that anything so far proposed is 'the solution' (the two words that form a courageous subtitle to several articles and even a book), it is because I suspect that the real answer (if there is one) amounts to nothing much, and would disappoint us if we knew it. Absolute certainty must await a new archival discovery, or of course time travel, at which point we could go back and somehow persuade Elgar to make a clear statement of what to him, apparently, seemed obvious – unless, of course, his suggestion that the answer was obvious was itself intentionally misleading.

However, ungrateful sceptic as I am, I am only ready to be impressed when a proposed solution is not only interesting, perhaps revealing of something – about Elgar, perhaps, about his life and thoughts, but more importantly about the music and how it was made – but is also musically plausible. Proposed solutions that approach these objectives are worth thinking about, and their ingenuity in some cases makes them at least entertaining.

My criteria did not include the combination of a melody in counterpoint to Elgar's theme.² The evidence that Elgar intended us to understand the enigma that way is at best inconclusive. The early 'clues' are reports of what Elgar said, which may have been distorted in transmission (and it would not be surprising if Elgar was unwilling to correct them, or indifferent).³ The statement that "through and over the whole set another and larger theme "goes", but is not played" cannot refer to a musical theme since none is long enough to cover a whole set of variations; in any case, the set was not composed in the order of performance (as is clear from the sketches). Hence many 'solutions' interpret this theme as an abstraction, such as friendship or patriotism. Elgar is also reported as saying that a familiar 'phrase' can be added 'above' the theme. This could be interpreted as counterpoint, like 'Auld lang syne', but also as something that for a few notes (not necessarily the whole) coincides with the theme, like all too many phrases in earlier music, including parts of Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony and 'Rule Britannia'.

The latter idea is one I perhaps too firmly rejected by suggesting that we should not be looking to contradict the title 'variations on an *original* theme' – a point thoughtfully discussed by McClelland. The MS score in any case is simply entitled 'Variations for Orchestra', making no claim for originality although, of course, and whatever its derivation, the theme is indeed strikingly original. The counterpoint school of thought faces a delightful challenge, despite the obvious difficulty of reconciling any such trick with Elgar's account of the improvisatory germination of the piece. But to form the basis of an impressive 'solution', the fit between two distinct melodies must be remarkably good, like Elgar's own japes of that type.

2 Clive McClelland, who understands and teaches counterpoint better than most, ingeniously embeds the theme into a well-known hymn, a procedure closer to what Elgar may have suggested, and one that avoids contrapuntal clangers.

3 The familiar phrases alluded to are from C.A. Barry's programme note (1899) and from F.G. Edwards in *The Musical Times* (1900).

Various efforts have come to my attention since my book appeared, with more or less desperate attempts to reconcile the chosen melody not only with Elgar's theme, but with other criteria such as the 'dark saying', all too often a feeble shade of grey. As counterpoint, one and all are worse than those I presented, complete with the equivalent of the teacher's blue pencil, in a slightly mischievous appendix. And when really dark sayings are extrapolated we move into conspiracy territory; I await without trepidation (since I wouldn't read it) the Dan Brown treatment.

Who wielded the scissors?

We may count ourselves lucky that Elgar left so many traces of his activity: autograph scores of most works, letters, and sketches. Perhaps I am not the only scholar who while peering at the latter – sometimes at the actual paper, but with more danger of eye-strain at a microfilm – has wondered why Elgar kept so much superseded material. Many sketches were on loose leaves, and could so easily have been jettisoned. But he also used made-up sketchbooks, filling pages in a manner that may have made sense to him, but appears haphazard to anyone else. Even if a leaf was crossed through with the heavily marked 'K' (for 'Koppid') on both sides, he couldn't rip it out without spoiling the entire book. Moreover pages not 'Koppid' contained jottings that came in useful years later.

The extravagant outlay on these handsome sketchbooks (in one of which Elgar noted 'Old Daddy Jaeger had these Books made for me – (I paid for them) Alas!') contrasts with an interesting case of economy (let us not call it parsimony) in his use of regular manuscript paper, at least in the music for string orchestra that I have examined. The full scores of both Introduction and Allegro and Sospiri were written on paper requiring twice as many staves as were needed. Rather than wastefully positioning the music in the middle, leaving empty staves top and bottom, Elgar wrote on the bottom staves; then at the right time he turned the paper over and continued using the remaining staves. After that it was necessary to cut the paper in half, so that in the end all the music appears the right way up and the pages could be arranged in the right order. This procedure, which must have required careful planning, is clear from the uneven edges of the cut pages and from an occasional detail that has ended up as a meaningless mark at the extremity of a different page. Thus if one unbound the manuscript with care (which heaven or the British Library forbid) – one could reconstruct the original paper.

But who wielded the scissors? Alice Elgar was much involved in preparing music paper for Elgar to use for his 'fair copies'. When I mentioned the cut-page phenomenon to Andrew Lyle, he suggested that Alice might have used her pinking sheers. More likely, as the young Carice was unlikely to have been entrusted with so delicate a task, it was the composer himself who mutilated the occasional note-stem – knowing, as he did, that the score he was preparing was not really a 'fair copy' but the basis for final revisions before he submitted the work to the publisher. The very fine printed scores of Novello and Breitkopf, in that period, are the true 'fair copies'.

We have a fine crop of letters, some following up Stuart Freed's article on Birmingham; perhaps Martin Bird's major contribution on Worcester will inspire similar useful comments. My thanks to him for supplying colour pictures of the present state of the city's lost landmarks, as well as attractive monochrome of its past. The colour in this issue is in honour of the new statue of Elgar; my thanks to Cathy Sloan at the Birthplace for supplying these to go with a short article that complements material in the July News.

Among the other letters, Mike Smith's article in the July issue inspires a reminder from Professor Ian Parrott of his earlier 'solution' (see Letters). I can't quite believe that Elgar invented the whole story of the bulldog; Professor Parrott calls it a jape, but surely a true jape need not require an outright falsehood. (Neither Sinclair nor Dan, of course, were around to corroborate.) But then – to adopt Professor Parrott's phrasing – as I've said before: like W.H. Reed, I don't see that the dog paddling and the organist pedalling are mutually exclusive.⁴

None of our book reviews is of a work specifically about Elgar, though all shed light on the period in which he lived and worked. The CD reviews also suggest an admirable willingness on the part of lovers of Elgar (our reviewers) to appreciate the often neglected music of his contemporaries. After 2007, it was to be expected that the supply of new publications (paper and digital) directly concerned with Elgar might slow down. But light is shed on him and his world by consideration of his contemporaries; and new writing on Elgar has by no means ground to a halt. Substantial reviews of recent Elgar publications have appeared in major musicological journals, notably *Journal of the American Musicological Society* and *Music & Letters*. As I write, the proceedings of the 2008 British Library Symposium on Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and Literature, entitled *Let Beauty Awake*, are in an advanced state of preparation. The book includes new essays on Parry, Whitman, Housman, and Tudor England; Vaughan Williams's literary connections; an aspect of his harmony; Elgar's transformation of mediocre poetry into fine vocal music; and the piano transcription of *Falstaff*.⁵

My thanks to authors, reviewers, and correspondents, to Martin Bird for dealing with the CDs, and to Mike Byde for setting the pages.

4 See my *Elgar: Enigma Variations*, 49; W.H. Reed, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1939), 155.

5 *Let Beauty Awake* is published by Elgar Editions with the support of the Vaughan Williams Society, as a companion volume to *A Special Flame*, published in 2004.

Summer Repose: The Elgar Birthplace Statue

Ted Maidment

Sculptors of great public figures have often captured their subjects in triumphant old age. Not so Jemma Pearson in her recent commissions. Her magnificent 'Darwin' at Shrewsbury sees the man in youthful middle age, well after the voyage of the *Beagle* but before the drama of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. Similarly the statue of Edward Elgar in the garden of his birthplace at Lower Broadheath finds the composer aged about 40, with a good deal achieved but still much to do. I sense that the commissioning committee required the sculptor to depict Elgar in a moment of summer repose sitting in the garden of a place which was deep in his affection, his childhood memory and his imagination.

The journey from commission to final result will have been long. I can only guess at some of the critical stages along the way. The sculptor had to convert the committee's brief to a piece of inspiring and memorable art – a great test of her powers of imagination and interpretation. Once her ideas were discussed and approved – via the presentation of a preliminary model (the maquette) – she was free to get on with the job. Alone? Yes, in terms of concept and sculpture; but the whole process, involving a variety of materials – clay, silicone rubber, wax and finally bronze – and a variety of skills, was bound to have involved a team. The Foundry (in this case Castle Fine Arts at Llanrhaeadr) will therefore have played a crucial part in the success of the statue.

So, after much thought and skill (and, no doubt, a few tense moments), Elgar has arrived at the bottom of that small garden. He sits gazing out at his beloved Malvern Hills. Sculpture out of doors, in a garden, seems to me particularly entrancing. Much as I admire what is inside the house at the Musée Rodin in Paris, it is in the garden that I become spellbound. And with the Elgar statue there is an element of surprise, even of mystery. Looking down from the cottage, the sculpture is partially obscured (see colour plate 1). For a couple of seconds it might seem to be a real person down there. A few steps down the path and you will quickly appreciate that it is a remarkably fine piece of art. The face shows a man who is content with the moment. It is a strong face, a determined face; but you will look in vain for any signs of the anxiety or the edginess of that much discussed 'outsider'. The body, crucial to the success of this sort of sculptural expression, is relaxed to suit the occasion, but everything is beautifully balanced. As always in Jemma Pearson's work, the detail – the shoes, the waistcoat, the pipe and the hat – is fascinating (see colour plate 2).

Elgar's right hand is draped over the back of the garden seat (made in bronze though it appears to be wood: see colour plate 3). There is plenty of room on this

seat for us to sit down and it almost looks as though Elgar is inviting us to do so. Perhaps it is time for conversation. Some visitors will discuss the view, others the details of composition, and others will reassure their host that his time is about to come – ‘Enigma’, Richter, London and *Gerontius*, Butts, Düsseldorf are on the horizon. Of course I am being fanciful but good art stimulates the imagination and this sculpture with its intimacy and humanity certainly does that. It also does full justice to its subject and its setting.

Ted Maidment, formerly Headmaster of Shrewsbury School, now divides his time between lecturing in the Arts and working for a Kenyan Educational Charity.

Music in Worcester 1860-1890

Martin Bird

Reading Donald Hunt's recent article in the *Journal*, my eyes were drawn to a particular sentence:

Perhaps we should start by looking at how the young Elgar would have viewed the Festival from his home in the High Street, Worcester, which would appear to have been a dreary place in the mid-1880s, its cultural life minimal and largely confined to the homes of the wealthy or the local hostelries.¹

Having lived in Worcester for a number of years while undertaking background research for my work on the Elgar dairies, it was a description that I felt would be more suited to the 21st-century city I had found outside the confines of the Cathedral. Here was a county town with no music shop, no classical record shop, no concert hall, and with relatively few offerings of live classical music, either professional or amateur. Certainly, as I trawled through a century of local papers, I formed an impression of Worcester in the second half of the 19th century as a place with a far greater depth of cultural activity than is to be found today. So what would the ‘young Elgar’ – and, indeed, the not so young Elgar of the mid-1880s – have found locally to stimulate his musical mind?

In the late 1850s the majority of larger-scale concerts took place in the Music Hall in Cornmarket. Built in 1849 as a corn exchange, it had been superseded by the new exchange in Angel Street, and was now run by the Worcester Corn-market and Music-hall Company, Ltd. as a general-purpose public venue for concerts and other events. Smaller concerts were held in the Natural History Room in Foregate Street, the home of the Worcestershire Natural History Society. The Theatre Royal, ‘our new, extensive and elegant theatre in Angel Street’, was opened ‘for the reception of the nobility, gentry and others’ in 1781, and provided a venue for opera as well as plays.² In addition, the local hostelries, and in particular the Crown Hotel in Broad Street, hosted the various Glee Clubs, of which the longest established was approaching its Diamond Jubilee season (see colour plate 4).

Then, as now, the city relied heavily on the efforts of a relatively few individuals

1 Donald Hunt, ‘Elgar and the Thee Choirs Festival’, in this *Journal*, 16/1 (March 2009), 15.

2 For a comprehensive history of the Theatre Royal, see Suz Winspear, *Worcester's Lost Theatre* (Hallow: Parkbarn, 1996).

to stimulate cultural activity. Where now it looks to the likes of Donald Hunt and Adrian Lucas, 150 years ago it was William Done, the Elgar brothers, Elgar's violin teacher Frederick Spray, the composer Alfred Caldicott, and the d'Egville (whom Elgar called 'the celebrated musical family, some of whom were settled in Worcester'), who had their hand in most of the city's musical pies. The following is typical of the offerings of the day.

A very pleasing concert of the Worcester Philharmonic Society was given last night (Thursday) at the Music Hall. The principal vocalist was Miss Gilbert, whose singing was, as we have noticed, characterised by purity of intonation, charming taste, and great expression. We thought her voice had become more powerful, but certainly without any of that sweetness of tone being distracted which is so peculiar a feature of it. She was rapturously encored in the lovely "Qui la voce" ("I Puritani"), and received great applause in everything which she sang. Messrs. Topham, J. Jones, Berkeley and Brookes, also rendered very well what they undertook, particularly Webbe's glee, "Discord, dire sister" which was substituted for Küche's "Hark? the lark". A pleasing variety was given in a harp solo by Mr Davis, of Birmingham. He is an accomplished player, and we hope to hear him again. His solo was enthusiastically recalled, which compliment was also deservedly paid to the "Miserere" scene from "Il Trovatore", which was excellently managed; Miss Gilbert and Mr Topham taking the duet, and the accompaniments being played on the piano-forte (Mr J. Jones), the harp (Mr Davis), and the organ (Mr Elgar). A part of Mozart's Symphony in C, and an instrumental selection from "Lucia di Lammermoor" were creditably given by a very complete orchestra, under the leading of Mr D'Egville, and the whole concert was conducted with his usual ability by Mr J. Jones.³

Musical Worcester in the 1860s

By the 1860s Worcester was a hive of musical activity. Large-scale choral works, though with much-reduced accompaniments, were given by various Choral Societies. The Worcester Harmonic Society, for example, performed *Israel in Egypt* on 27 January 1860, and followed it two months later with *Judas Maccabeus*, both conducted by Jabez Jones. The Festival Choral Society commenced at the very end of 1861, and citizens were assured that 'the selection of members has been made with a view to respectability, and many of the upper classes will take part in its proceedings'. Its first concert, of Parts 1 and 2 of Haydn's *Creation*, was given in the Music Hall on 12 June 1862, and a large audience was both anticipated and achieved.

In order to prevent confusion, it is requested that Carriages approaching the Hall will be driven down Mealecheapen-street, and retire by way of Silver-street, or New-street; and after the Concert, fall in line along Silver-street. A body of Policemen will be in attendance to enforce these regulations.⁴

³ Worcester Herald, 19 December 1857.

⁴ Worcester Herald, 7 June 1862.

Mr Turbutt presided at the piano, with Mr A. J. Caldicott at the harmonium, 'and each performed his part with great care and judgement. Mr Done officiated as conductor on the occasion, with his well-known ability'.

It would be wrong to imagine that Worcester's Glee Clubs were merely the 19th-century equivalents of today's night-clubs. In the days before easy access to music through recordings and radio, they provided a means of musical education in addition to their many charms of a more social nature. Weekly meetings were held, with one a month including instrumental as well as vocal items. The performers were professional or semi-professional musicians, such as the lay clerks from the Cathedral, and the Elgars. At the annual dinner in 1862

... the company was numerous and highly respectable. The musical members of the club, including the gentlemen of the Cathedral choir, lent their services to grace the festival, and render it, if not exclusively a feast of reason, certainly a most reasonable and charming feast ... It is impossible in England, we should say, to enjoy an hour's relaxation after the cares of the day more pleasantly than in this club – providing always one can smoke, or, at least, relish smoking in others. We were glad also to observe that Mr Fuggle, the respected landlord of the Crown, sedulously attends in person to the comfort of the club.⁵

A typical programme for an instrumental night would include a couple of overtures, a movement from a Haydn symphony, solo songs with instrumental accompaniment, and traditional glees and part-songs. The band would comprise a small string section, flute, cornet, harmonium and piano.

Worcester was very much a part of the provincial tour circuit, both for solo performers and for opera companies. Jenny Lind and Sims Reeves, for example, gave a recital in 1861 at which 'the audience were clearly of the opinion that they had received their money's worth, although the tickets ranged from a guinea to five shillings'. And so they might, for the equivalent in vocal prowess and celebrity today might be the appearance of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Placido Domingo. The following year Giovanni Bottesini was on hand to perform his *Duo Concertante* for piano and bass, and his *Fantasia on Lucia di Lammermoor*, provoking the comment: 'the contra-bass is indeed a charming instrument with such handling ... we are surprised that the Music-hall was but two-thirds full on the occasion'.

Comments on the paucity of the audience were, sadly, not unusual. Other events, it must be said, were more appealing to the Worcester public: less than three months later 5,000 turned out at the Infirmary gardens to witness the hanging of William Ockold, aged 70, for the murder of his wife. It was the last public execution in the city.

By the end of the decade the Elgars themselves were involved in concert promotion, and in the papers of October 1869 'Messrs. Elgar have the pleasure to announce the engagement of Mr Charles Hallé, the very eminent Pianist, and Madame Norman-Neruda, the extraordinary Lady Violinist, to give one Grand Violin and Piano-forte Recital'. The highest priced seats were 6/-, and the lowest 1/-. To those whose eyebrows arched at the audacity of Hallé daring to appear with a female

⁵ Worcester Herald, 10 May 1862.

violinist, albeit his wife, the *Worcester Herald* tried to be reassuring:

To those who, like ourselves, have a slight touch of prejudice against 'female fiddlers' we say that we have it upon the best authority that the lady's tone is pure and liquid in quality, and sufficiently resonant to fill even the large space of St James's Hall, her bowing unites power with flexibility and lightness; while her command of the finger-board is complete in all the intricacies of staccato, double stops, &c; added to which, her intonation is always accurate; and her self-command and repose, even in the midst of the most difficult bravura passages, is perfect.⁶

To the paper's, and no doubt the Elgars', disappointment, 'we saw around us many members of our leading county and city families; we saw also the familiar faces of "the few" who patronise the public entertainments of the city, and we noticed a small number of "distinguished amateurs", but we looked in vain for the music-loving public of this music-loving city.' Such a comment has as much resonance today, and not only in Worcester!

Elgar told Robert Buckley that 'As a boy he had gloried in the casual visits to the provinces of the Haigh-Dyer Opera Company, which gave "Norma", "La Traviata", "LElisir d'Amore", and other well-known operas'. Thirty years later he told Basil Maine much the same:

Elgar himself has mockingly recounted incidents in some of the performances he saw of 'Faust'. One is especially clear in the writer's mind because of the composer's admirable portrayal of a Siebel who, in order to make an original point of interpretation, lapsed into speech, combining archness with a cockney accent, for the delivery of the line

6 *Worcester Herald*, 16 October 1869.

Table 1

Operas performed in Worcester in the 1860s
(Language of titles as quoted in the local papers)

Balfe:	<i>The Bohemian Girl</i>	Macfarren	<i>Robin Hood</i>
	<i>The Rose of Castille</i>	Mozart	<i>Don Giovanni</i>
	<i>Satanella</i>	Smetana	<i>The Bartered Bride</i>
Bellini	<i>Norma</i>	Suppé	<i>The Crown Diamonds</i>
	<i>La Sonnambula</i>	Verdi	<i>Un Ballo in Maschera</i>
Donizetti	<i>LElisir d'amore</i>		<i>Ernani</i>
	<i>La Fille du Régiment</i>		<i>Il trovatore</i>
	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>		<i>Rigoletto</i>
	<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>		<i>La traviata</i>
Flotow	<i>Martha</i>	Wallace	<i>Lurline</i>
Gounod	<i>Faust</i>		<i>Maritana</i>
Handel	<i>Acis and Galatea</i>	Weber	<i>Der Freischütz</i>

'Suppose I dip my hand in holy water'.⁷

But it was not only the Haigh-Dyer company that ensured that Vigornians 'are not to be left in the gloomy weather and long nights of November with no means of amusement'. Among a host of other companies to appear at the Theatre Royal in the 1860s were Bowler's English Opera Company, the English Grand Opera Company, Mr H. Melville's Grand English Opera Company of six singers and a Principal Comedian, and the English Opera Group from Covent Garden Theatre. While I was in Worcester, I can remember only one professional production of an opera, Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*; and that was at the 2005 Three Choirs Festival. A list of operas performed in Worcester in the 1860s is given at Table 1.

Interlude – The Music Hall

In December 1863 a disturbing report appeared in the *Worcester Herald*.

The Music Hall. – We understand that this public building will in all probability share the fate of the Arboretum grounds, and from a similar cause – want of support. The lovers of music in both the city and county will, should the hall be sold, suffer an irreparable loss. The organ, which is very much out of repair, and in its present state cannot be used, is a very serious loss to the shareholders, as it and the orchestra occupy nearly one-fourth of the entire room. We believe the directors seriously contemplate winding-up the company unless the organ is repaired and a more extended measure of public support accorded to them.⁸

At an extraordinary general meeting in December 1864 it was indeed resolved to wind up the company, and sell the building. Steps were taken immediately to save it, as 'for musical purposes it is no doubt the best building we have', and by the end of January 1865 a certain sauce manufacturer was able to report a successful outcome.

The Music-hall. – We are glad to find that, notwithstanding this building was to have been offered for sale by auction on Monday next, it has been disposed of by private contract, and there is every probability of its being retrieved for the same purpose for which it has been used for many years past. The Mayor (J.D. Perrins, Esq.) has, on inquiry, found that to preserve it would require about £1,500, and many wealthy and influential citizens have concurred in his opinion that a strenuous endeavour should be made to retain the hall. Accordingly an appeal has been made to the inhabitants, and already about £1,000 has been raised towards the requisite £1,500, and so satisfied is the Mayor of the propriety of securing the building for the city in its proper capacity that he will undertake the purchase, and trust to the good faith of the citizens relieving him ultimately from personal responsibility. The public spirit and liberality of the Mayor will, we doubt not, evoke what Iago called 'a answerable sequestration' from the citizens; and it is proposed, in the event of the above scheme being successful, to form a new company, with limited liability, to purchase the property and maintain it as the principal musical edifice of Worcester. Various alterations and improvements

7 Basil Maine, *Elgar, His Life and Works* (London: Bell & Sons, 1933), 30.

8 *Worcester Herald*, 10 December 1863.

tending to the increased comfort and accommodation of the building would then be made, which it is believed will considerably conduce towards making the hall self-supporting, if not a paying property.⁹

Various steps were taken to improve the acoustics of the hall: its capacity was increased by the installation of a gallery, and the general facilities were improved. It reopened on 4 April 1866 with a concert conducted by William Done. The performers included the Elgars and, intriguingly for me, a Mr and Mrs Bird. Unfortunately the hall did not prove to be self-supporting, and in March 1869 the directors had to decide whether to wind up the company, or 'struggle on for another year'. The hall was, once again, brought back from the brink by an offer 'of a guarantee fund of upwards of £100 for the purpose of indemnifying the directors against any loss in the management of the hall for the current twelve months'. However, at the end of that period closure became inevitable, and the directors 'notified the Mayor that they will be prepared to sell the Music Hall buildings if the Council will give £8,000 for them. This is £2,000 more than the Council determine to offer, and we believe they will not be disposed to give more than they originally proposed'.

The building was offered at auction, but only one bid, of £1,200, was made, less than half the reserve. 'Mr Burch, who was the bidder of £1,200, thereupon observed that he supposed that it was no use offering £1,800. A reply was given in the negative, but a general invitation was given to open negotiations with the solicitor (Mr Southall) or the auctioneer, with a view to a purchase'. The hall was eventually acquired by William Laslett, the Member of Parliament for Worcester, and a local solicitor, to whom Thomas Southall had once been articulated.

Once again thanks to a local benefactor the Hall continued to serve the people of Worcester until, in 1875, there were rumours of a more formal civic intervention.

Sir, - It is a source of astonishment to many citizens to find the subject of the purchase of the Music Hall seriously entertained by the Town Council. There are some persons who seem to be never so happy as when they are devising new burdens for their neighbours, and the most distinct feature of the case is that these parties usually denounce all opponents to the scheme as being parsimonious and illiberal. The truth is, that nothing can be easier than to be liberal with other people's money; and when we consider that a large number of ratepayers are but one remove above the very poor, the addition of a 1d. or 2d. in the £ (whether for an extravagant School Board, for the purchase of a Music Hall, or for providing the luxuries of a reading-room, newspapers, and a library, for the use of those who would cultivate their intellectual amusements at the expense of persons much poorer than themselves) - such an addition, I say, is a far more serious matter for the poorer ratepayers than certain members of the Council imagine.¹⁰

Caldicott wrote to say that 'the Music hall in its present condition is unsuitable for musical purposes ... the room is lighted by a central ring of gas jets, which oppresses with the heat those who sit under it ... The orchestra itself is badly arranged and inconvenient, while the accommodation for the performers underneath consists of

9 *Worcester Herald*, 28 January 1865.

10 Letter from John Noake, *Worcester Herald*, 9 January 1875.



Fig. 1: The Music Hall, Worcester, late 19th century

an underground kitchen'. Such fighting talk could not go unchallenged:

Sir, I have sat often immediately under the gaslight, and, although I have not much hair on my head, have never felt the heat.

I am, Sir, yours respectfully,

A Large Ratepayer¹¹

It was left to William Done to observe that it was 'the best room we have in Worcester for musical performances, and we should do well to keep it until we have secured a better'. Laslett informed the Mayor that 'he would accept £2,000', and 'the Council agreed, on the motion of Alderman E. Webb, to take the requisite steps to obtain the consent of the Lords of the Treasury to the investment of enfranchisement money in the purchase of the Music Hall'.

Elgar's brother-in-law, Charles Pipe, recalled that in 1881 'On coming down to breakfast on the morning of February 8 Mrs Brown greeted me with: "Well, I believe if the whole town was burnt you would go on with your sleeping"'. It seemed our Music Hall was gutted from some unknown cause'.

The fire was not observed until about 4 o'clock, when the alarm was quickly spread, and with all possibly speed, Head-Constable Power and a body of policemen, hastened to the Hall. The fire-hose from the reel was fixed to a hydrant, and soon commenced to play on the building. It was, however, evident from the first that the fire had raged so long that all attempts to extinguish it would be useless ... During the progress of the fire the Coffee Tavern opposite the Music Hall and other places of refreshment were opened, and a considerable trade was done.¹²

A Music Hall Restoration Committee was quickly formed, and it was resolved to rebuild the Hall, and to extend its footprint by some 22 feet, thus increasing its

11 *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 16 January 1875.

12 *Worcester Herald*, 12 February 1881.

capacity from 600 to 850. Now called the Public Hall, it was opened on 25 August 1882, when 'Mr E. Elgar gave a capital solo on the violin', a *Polonaise*, by the Belgian violinist Hubert Léonard (see fig. 1).

The Hall's eventual demise brought no credit on the citizens of Worcester or their Council. In December 1958 it was agreed by 21 votes to 19 to let it for dancing and roller skating. The City Chamberlain, Councillor H.H. Exall, pointed out that during the past year there had been only 24 bookings of the Public Hall, of which just nine were for concerts. In his speech to the annual dinner of the Worcester Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor, Councillor R.H. Glover, defended the city council's recent controversial decision to let the Public Hall for dancing and roller skating. He said the council had decided that the citizens were no longer prepared to subsidise the hall for use by just a very few individuals and bodies. Other local institutions and bodies had long forsaken the use of the Public Hall, even though it was admirably fitted for many purposes. They therefore had no one to blame but themselves that the council had taken the decision it had.¹³

To Worcester's eternal shame, the Public Hall was demolished in 1966. More than forty years later the only building on the site is a public toilet (see colour plate 5).

The 1870s – concerts by solo artists

The 1870s saw major developments both in the range of artists that visited Worcester and the overall quality of performance. If the latter owed something to the coming of age of 'Mr Elgar, jnr.', then the former owed a considerable debt of gratitude to Mr E.J. Spark.

Edward John Spark was born in Devon in 1830. The family moved to Leeds, where his brothers William and Frederick became well known: the former as City Organist and the latter as proprietor of the *Leeds Express* and Secretary of the Leeds Festival. William came to Worcester, where he set up a music and musical instrument business at 54 High Street, not far from the Elgars' shop. He lived into his eighties.

Spark's gift to Worcester music making was through the promotion of an annual series of concerts by a range of first-rate artists. He first dipped a toe in the water in 1871.

Grand Concert.- Our musical friends will be delighted to hear that Madame Norman-Neruda, the lady violinist par excellence, and Mr Charles Hallé, the prince of legitimate pianistes, will give a concert here on Monday, March 13th. These artistes will be assisted by Miss Kate Poylitz, a vocalist of whom rumour speaks very favourably. When Madame Neruda and Mr Charles Hallé appeared before a Worcester audience last year we observed that the front seats were well filled, and the back seats comparatively empty. We invite all who can appreciate music of the higher class to attend this concert, so that all seats may be filled. Such concerts as these educate musical taste. The arrangements are under the control of Mr W.J. Spark.¹⁴

13 *Worcester News*, 20 December 1958.

14 *Worcester Herald*, 25 February 1871.

The concert was a success, despite the daring inclusion of a Beethoven Piano and Violin Sonata in the programme.

It is with very much satisfaction that we record the fact that Mr Spark's first venture in concert giving has turned out a great success. That with such performers we might have looked for a great musical success we had not the shadow of a doubt. We confess, however, that we had fears of Mr Spark's venture on account of its extreme boldness. A concert of a more popular character would have carried with it a more pecuniary return, but Mr Spark was not satisfied with the prospect of an easy victory. He therefore drew largely upon his faith in the musical public of Worcester and challenged them to accept or reject a concert of the very highest class. The result is known, and we have to congratulate Mr Spark and his patrons upon a success creditable to all concerned.¹⁵

And with that endorsement from the Worcester public, Spark took the plunge, although always riding that thin line between artistic success and financial failure. In October, Richard Blagrove, 'the finest concertina player in the world', appeared, although the concert in the Natural History Rooms 'was not so well attended as we could have wished'. In November, when four singers had been booked, 'the room was full in every part with an audience of the higher class of our musical people. The risk taken in getting up concerts of this high class is greater than most people may imagine, and when public spirit so marked as that exhibited by Mr Spark is met by scanty support, it becomes doubly disheartening'. In January 1872, 'yielding to many urgent requests', Charles Hallé and Norma Neruda returned, and the Public Hall was full.

Year after year Spark promoted up to half a dozen concerts; fewer as time went on and the drain on his financial resources began to tell. One in 1873 included selections from *Der Freischütz*, which caused the *Worcester Herald* some bafflement: 'an incongruity we cannot well understand: that is giving Handel's duet from Israel in Egypt "The Lord is a man of war" in the midst of the "Der Freischütz" selection'. The following year the concerts included one by the London and Provincial Orchestral Union, 'composed exclusively of the principal London orchestras, with the addition of solo instrumentalists of high repute', who included 'Mozart's beautiful Quintette for strings and clarinet' in their programme. In 1875 he brought Thérèse Tietjens (1831-1877), one of the leading dramatic sopranos on the English stage over two decades, to Worcester, with the French contralto Zelia Trebelli-Bettini (1838-1892).

Sir,

In the interests of the musical public of Worcester and neighbourhood will you kindly grant me space to say that I had over 200 seats unlet on the night of my last concert, when I had the extreme gratification of bringing before my subscribers and patrons Mdlle. Tietjens, Madame Trebelli-Bettini, and other eminent artistes of her Majesty's opera. I was fully aware that even if every seat had been taken (and which, I think, with such artistes, I was justified in expecting) I could not possibly recoup myself the enormous expenses attending this concert, but it becomes a public as well as a private grievance when reports are circulated some days before the concert to the effect that there was not a seat to be had, and that it was useless to apply at my establishment for

15 *Worcester Herald*, 18 March 1871.

any admissions. Since the concert, which proved so eminently successful in a musical point of view, several persons have called upon me to express their regret that they were not present, owing, as they had heard, to the impossibility of obtaining tickets; and in one instance, a lady (who was at the concert) informed me that she had been offered a premium for hers from the same cause. I have written this letter in the hope that the musical public will on any similar future occasion kindly make the necessary enquiries direct from the right quarter, as they would thereby save themselves disappointment, and also give me proper encouragement in my efforts to provide high class concerts in Worcester.¹⁶

A feature of the arrangements for these concerts was the provision by the Great Western Railway of special trains to allow people from Malvern to attend: as on 7 December 1875 when 'a Special Train at Ordinary Fares, will leave Worcester (Foregate-street) at 11.0 p.m., and Henwick at 11.3, arriving at Bramsford-road 11.10, Malvern Link 11.20, and Great Malvern at 11.25 p.m.'

The tenor Edward Lloyd (the first *Gerontius*) was among the artists engaged for 1876, and William Shakespeare (the singer, not the playwright) appeared the following year. The concerts continued right through the 1880s. A final glimpse, then, with the return to Worcester of Bottesini, and 'the anticipation of a concert of rare excellence'.

The appearance of Signor Bottesini was heralded with ardent if not excessive praise ... It is at first a rather strange sight to see the performer bending over his 'big fiddle', playing with touch at once most delicate and firm, and with marvellous celerity, and power to produce tones the like of which, from such an instrument, no one has heard, or could hardly expect to hear ... But every other feeling is soon merged in one of rapt admiration, as it was last evening, when the facility of execution, the richness of melody and harmony, the wonderful clearness and sweetness, especially of the upper notes, excited the audience to such a pitch of enthusiasm as is seldom witnessed in a local concert room.¹⁷

And a last word from Charles Pipe:

It is a great pity that these concerts had to cease, but Spark was continually losing in order to give pleasure to the few who patronised them. He has had some of the finest artistes, and, naturally, the money they command forced high prices for seats, hence poor attendance. Worcester folk like cheap (or gratis) entertainments, and then they patronise them.¹⁸

The 1870s – the amateur scene

The fortunes of the larger-scale Worcester choral societies ebbed and flowed in the 1870s. The Festival Choral Society had folded with debts of around £60, and

16 Letter from Edward J. Spark, 17 February 1875, *Worcester Herald*, 20 February 1875.

17 *Worcester Daily Times*, 4 November 1884.

18 Charles Pipe's memoirs, *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 1976.

William Done had established a Festival Choral Class to ensure that the singers were still able to study choral works in some depth. In the early 1870s it gave the occasional public concert which, with the help of donations, covered the debts of its predecessor. Later it transformed itself into the Worcester Philharmonic Society (not to be confused with Elgar's later *Worcestershire* Philharmonic Society). The Bishop of Worcester agreed to become President. With a membership of around 100, it gave its first concert on 11 May 1875. William Elgar was among the second violins, and Henry Elgar among the violas.

... the members of the recently resuscitated Worcestershire Philharmonic Society may congratulate themselves upon having started on the right road; for their performance of Macfarren's new oratorio, 'St John the Baptist', last evening (Tuesday), is deserving of the highest praise. Whether as regards the instrumental portions of the work, or the choruses, it was patent to every listener that the oratorio had been well worked at before presentation to the public.¹⁹

In the autumn of 1870 the Worcester Musical Society was formed, with Edward Spark as Secretary and chorus-master, and Alfred Caldicott as conductor. They started by rehearsing Julius Benedict's cantata *St Cecilia* and Mendelssohn's *Hear my prayer*, and by the end of the year were able to give a performance, with band, of selections from *Messiah*. The *Worcester Herald* reported on its progress at the end of its first season.

We shall not be suspected of any unfriendly metric in venturing to indicate one or two points in which as we think improvement may be made. The voices are hardly balanced. The basses and trebles are prominent to the detriment of the middle parts. Again, taken en masse, the basses are unsympathetic, and deficient in resonance; the tenors are light and unequal; the altos timid and reluctant.

Mr Caldicott's Musical Society is capable of giving a real treat to the citizens. We heartily congratulate Mr Caldicott on the successful close of this the first year of his conductorship. It is manifest that the choir improves.²⁰

The Society continued to flourish throughout the 1870s, but the destruction of the Music Hall in 1881 necessarily caused a hiatus in its activities from which it never fully recovered.

Both the Philharmonic and Musical Societies helped with a new venture at the end of the decade, 'a series of cheap Saturday evening concerts for the working classes of the city', repeating major items from their recent concerts to piano accompaniment. The proceeds of the concerts were given to the Free Library Fund. A further large-scale choral society, the Worcester Musical Union, was formed in the 1870s, and conducted from 1879 by the Rev. Edward Vine Hall (1837-1909), Precentor of Worcester Cathedral from 1877 to 1890. To him went the honour of conducting the first performance of the music that may have been the original version of the *Serenade for Strings*, in 1888. Yet another group, the Worcester Vocal

19 *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 12 May 1875.

20 *Worcester Herald*, 6 May 1871.

and Instrumental Union, was formed to give concerts of a professional standard. With singers from the Cathedral and elsewhere, and the usual suspects in the band, their programmes were similar in style and content to those of the Glee Clubs.

The Worcester Amateur Vocal Union, formed by Edward Spark in 1873, made sure that the social side of music was not forgotten.

This newly-formed body of amateurs had an excursion by boat up the river on Thursday evening, for the purpose of singing some part-songs, and for a little social enjoyment. The stragglers on the banks evidently appreciated the doings of the water party, as they applauded them very warmly. The effect of the harmonized voices on the water was beautiful, and the members contemplate similar excursions during the summer season. The hon. musical director of the Vocal Union (Mr Edward J. Spark) was present, and under his direction the music was given.²¹

The 1870s – the impact of Mr Elgar, jnr.

Up until now the name of Edward Elgar has been conspicuous by its absence. In the summer of 1872, aged 15, he had started work in the office of William Allen, a local solicitor. According to Elgar, one year there was quite enough, although Carice said that 'he remained for nearly two years'.

He gave it up, to cope with the accounts at the shop. Here he was able to learn all about pianos and any other musical instruments which happened to be about, and all the music in stock; and he was close to the cathedral, where he could study the Church of England services. Meanwhile my grandfather had been appointed organist at the Roman Catholic church, so of course my father was expected to blow the organ.²²

He did more than 'blow' it, for Lucy Elgar's diary tells us that on 14 July 1872 'Ted played the organ at Church for Mass first time'. He was playing the violin, too, although it is not until November 1875 that he appears in any surviving orchestral list, in the second violins with his father for a Worcester Musical Society performance of Spohr's *The Last Judgement*. By May 1876 he had graduated to the first violins for Done's performance of *Elijah* with the Philharmonic Society.

With the aid of a single principal for each vocal part, and a really good instrumental orchestra – local performers supplemented by a few Birmingham professionals – Mendelssohn's grandest oratorio had full justice done to it ... The band mustered about 25 instruments, and the total of vocal and instrumental performers reached 120.

With this concert the winter musical season may be said to have been brought to a close. As we ventured to observe on a recent occasion, the Worcester public have good reason to thank our local musical amateurs and their conductors, who without hope of fee or of reward beyond that derivable from their love of the divine art, are at such pain and trouble to promote their gratification ... Only one thing is wanting to complete

21 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 28 June 1873.

22 Carice Elgar-Blake, *Memories of my Father*, in *Music and Musicians*, June 1957.

our local musical requirements – an organised band of instrumentalists. We have the nucleus of such an organisation extant, which might be augmented, and would render Worcester independent of foreign aid.²³

The final sentences of the review were not to be lost on the young Elgar.

On 8 March 1877 he attended a recital at the Music Hall by the violinist August Wilhelmj:

... he imitated Wilhelmj, whom he had heard play the *Air hongrois* by Ernst. From his account of this affair Wilhelmj must have had a colossal tone; and his attack on the opening tenth on the G string must have been hair-raising. It excited Elgar to such an extent that he never forgot it; and when he showed how it was done I felt thankful he was content to perform upon an imaginary violin and not on mine; for the movement he made would have cut any ordinary violin in half.²⁴

He kept the programme, which is now in the possession of Arthur Reynolds. Wilhelmj was intending to play a *Fantaisie* by Paganini, but substituted the *Air hongrois*, a fact duly noted by Elgar. On the back of the programme Elgar had been practising his signature:

I was then 20 – you will see some 'trial' signatures at the back – I was then just starting a bank account (which has been a disease, disaster & disappointment ever since!) & was evolving a distinctive autograph.²⁵

On 9 June 1877 an important announcement appeared in the local papers.

An Instrumental Society for the City. – Through the efforts of some well known local musical gentlemen there had been established in the city an 'Instrumental Society' for the cultivation of instrumental music, and the formation of a band capable of assisting at concerts, &c, the want of which has long been acknowledged. The society consists of a limited number of ordinary effective members, and of honorary members, who receive certain privileges; and as the subscriptions of the effective members are inadequate to meet the necessary expenses, the committee are anxious for the support of honorary subscribers and donors to aid them in the laudable task which they have undertaken. Several effective members have already been elected, and the list of honorary members include the names of many local gentlemen highly esteemed for their musical taste ... we trust that the new society will meet with general sympathy, and add to the musical reputation of the city.²⁶

The Society met in premises in Sansome Street. One of its rules was that each member should bring a lump of coal to rehearsals to ensure the collective warmth of the band! Letters were sent out to prospective members.

23 Worcester Herald, 16 May 1876.

24 W. H. Reed, *Elgar as I knew him* (London: Gollancz, 1936), 73.

25 Letter from Elgar to Edward Speyer, 30 September 1921, Arthur Reynolds collection.

26 Worcestershire Advertiser and Agricultural Gazette, 9 June 1877.

'The Worcester Instrumental Society' has been established for the cultivation of Instrumental Music, and the formation of a Band capable of assisting at Concerts, &c., the want of which has long been felt in the musical circles of the city.

The Society consists of a limited number of ordinary effective Members, and of Honorary Members who pay an annual subscription of £1. 1s. and receive certain privileges.

Fifteen effective members have already been elected, and an efficient Leader and Instructor has been engaged.²⁷

That Leader and Instructor was Edward Elgar. Within two years it had grown to include two sections – a junior and a senior.

There are two practice nights each week, those who are in the second division meeting at an earlier hour than the more efficient members. Both classes have an able leader in Mr E. W. Elgar, one of whose functions is to advance members from one division to the other.²⁸

At this time Elgar was also working as a pianist, both for the Glee Clubs and at local concerts.

Treacherous November weather did much to lessen the number of those who would gladly have taken the opportunity of attending the first vocal concert at the Skating Rink, which took place on Wednesday. The best vocal resources of the city had been drawn upon ... with Mr E. W. Elgar at the piano-forte. The programme was an exceedingly good one and, it is scarcely necessary to add, done full justice to. Those entrusted with the management of the rink are certainly doing much to render it permanently attractive.²⁹

He was arranging music for the Clubs, and also composing ...

Worcester Volunteer Artillery Minstrels. – This company of amateurs gave their second entertainment at the Music Hall, on Wednesday evening, and remarkable interest was taken in it. Every part of the hall was crowded, and many were unable to find accommodation. This measure of patronage, and the applause which the performers gained – as well deserved as it was heartily bestowed – must have been very gratifying and encouraging to them. ... The first part consisted entirely of music. An overture, written for the occasion by Mr E. W. Elgar, was well received, and it was followed by ballads and comic songs.³⁰

... although he may have felt a trifle upstaged:

... The fiddle extravaganza by Mr Cleveland, with which the second part opened, was decidedly ingenious, combining novelty of manipulation with a rather uncommon knowledge of what it is possible to get out of a fiddle. Perhaps it was natural that he should have been able to produce from his instrument sounds resembling the cries of a cat, but when those of far different beasts and birds were given forth, his audience

27 Letter from Dr William Woodward, June 1877, Elgar Birthplace letter 10726.

28 *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 15 February 1879.

29 *Berrow's*, 21 November 1877.

30 *Berrow's*, 15 June 1878.

expressed their astonishment and delight in unrestrained acclamation.³¹

On 23 November 1878 Frederick Spray died at the early age of 56. He had been the leading instrumentalist of the city for many years; a position which Elgar, just 21, took over in the minds of his fellow citizens.

The Amateur Instrumental Society gave its first public concert on 13 May 1879. The miscellaneous programme included a Beethoven Piano Concerto, in which the soloist was Arthur Quarterman; a Piano Trio by Karl Reissiger, played by Elgar, George d'Egville, and Caldicott; and a Haydn Symphony.

The composition of the band is as follow: – violins, 12; violas, 3; violoncelli, 6; double basses, 3; flute, 3; oboe, 1; clarinet, 2; bassoon, 1; drum, 1. The society's numerical strength is therefore fairly adequate to the efficient performance of march or overture. The concert opened with the overture to Boieldieu's 'Caliph of Bagdad'. Its rendering amply demonstrated that the members of the society have gone through a thorough course of practice before venturing, unaided by professional assistance, to make a public appearance. The overture is bright; and its rendering was animated and correct ... A solo on the flute by Mr Hadley was the next item. The orchestral accompaniments were written by Mr E.W. Elgar, to whom in various ways the society is under especial obligation ... The concluding piece of the first programme, a concerto, for piano and orchestra, scarcely seemed in Beethoven's happiest vein. Haydn's No. 9 Symphony opened the second part ... This particular symphony is full of tuneful melody; and its efficient rendering was not the least pleasing feature of the evening.³²

Interlude – The Theatre Royal

As we have seen, the Theatre Royal in Angel Street had hosted many an opera company throughout the 1860s; but by 1874 the building was in poor shape, and its lessee and manager, James Russell, pulled out. The freehold was owned by the then Mayor, Herbert Goldingham.

The condition of the Worcester theatre has long been a reproach to the city. The theatre is centrally situated, but its present appearance, internally and externally, is simply discreditable ... Some time since, the theatre became the property of Mr Goldingham, the Mayor, who has been most desirous that it should continue to be a place of public entertainment, and that such improvements should be effected as would render it worthy of the faithful city.³³

Goldingham sold the Theatre, which was valued at £2,200, to a new concern, the Worcester Theatre Royal Company, for £1,909. The company also acquired the warehouse behind the theatre, and plans were drawn up by the theatre architect Charles Phipps for an extended building to seat 1,600 people. It was reopened in January 1875; but ...

A sad certainty has befallen Worcester. The elegant modern Theatre which three years ago replaced the ugly old building which had so long done duty in that character has

31 *Worcestershire Advertiser and Agricultural Gazette*, 15 June 1878.

32 *Berrow's*, 17 May 1879.

33 *Berrow's*, 1 August 1874.



Fig. 2 (right): The Theatre Royal, Worcester, c. 1903.



Fig. 3 (above): The Theatre Royal, Worcester, in the 1920s

fallen victim to a fate not uncommon with such structures. On Friday night a classically-founded piece was produced on its boards, and few hours later the building, with its contents, was a complete wreck, and the city no possesses no local habitation for the representation of tragedy and comedy.

Next morning, at about twenty minutes to seven Mr Morris, the landlord of the Ewe and Lamb public-house, which is situate almost immediately opposite the Theatre, observed a sudden outburst of smoke from the building, upon which he and others at once conveyed the alarming information to the police and other proper quarters.

Almost as soon as the catastrophe was discovered massive tongues of flame shot high up into the air from the stage end of the theatre and across the street from the windows in the front ... As soon as the out-break of the flames took place it was at once discernible that any efforts on the part of the firemen to save the building would be unavailing, and they with the greatest promptitude directed their attention to saving the buildings which flanked the theatre and which stood in the rear.

In the space of about an hour and a half from the outbreak of the fire the whole building was completely gutted, with the exception of one of the rooms behind the stage known as the 'Star Room' which was left comparatively intact.³⁴

Within a year, however, it had been rebuilt: 'a more commodious and convenient building, which we trust may long survive its short-lived predecessor' (see figs. 2 and 3).

³⁴ Worcester Herald, 1 December 1877.

During the 1880s the theatre was again host to visiting companies, especially the d'Oyly Carte touring companies, who brought many of the Savoy operas to Worcester. A list of operas to be seen in Worcester in the 1880s is given in Table 2.

The ultimate fate of the theatre was similar to that of the Public Hall. The Malvern Theatre, and especially the success of its Festivals with George Bernard Shaw, ensured that in the 1920s and '30s the Theatre Royal was confined to a diet of revue and variety. After the Second World War its physical condition deteriorated dramatically, and when in 1954 the Gaumont Cinema in Foregate Street, a modern building with facilities to match, started to offer variety shows, the writing was on the wall. The theatre was sold for redevelopment in 1959, and demolished the following year. That triumph of 1960s concrete architecture, a supermarket, now occupies the site (see colour plate 6).

The 1880s

In the 1880s Worcester, far from being 'a dreary place' of minimal cultural life, reached ever greater heights in music. This was above all due above all to the enthusiasm and innate ability of Edward Elgar, who contrived to have a hand in most aspects of the city's musical activity. He continued to support the Glee Club, as pianist, violinist, conductor, and composer. In 1880 we read:

The meeting of this club on Tuesday evening last was an instrumental one, when, as upon former occasions, the room was filled to overflowing. The programme was attractive, and the rendering of it afforded much delight to all present. The instrumental music was never more attractive, and this in a great measure must be attributed to the excellent leading of Mr E. Elgar. The overture, 'Bohemian Girl' (Balfe), especially was

Table 2

Operas performed in Worcester in the 1880s
(Language of titles as quoted in the local papers)

Auber	<i>Fra Diavolo</i>	Offenbach	<i>La Fille du Tambour Major</i>
Balfe	<i>The Bohemian Girl</i>	Rossini	<i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i>
	<i>The Rose of Castille</i>	Sullivan	<i>HMS Pinafore</i>
Bellini	<i>La Sonnambula</i>		<i>Iolanthe</i>
Benedict	<i>Lily of Killarney</i>		<i>The Mikado</i>
Dibdin	<i>The Waterman</i>		<i>Patience</i>
Donizetti	<i>Don Pasquale</i>		<i>Pirates of Penzance</i>
	<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>		<i>Princess Ida</i>
Flotow	<i>Martha</i>		<i>Ruddigore</i>
Gounod	<i>Faust</i>		<i>The Sorcerer</i>
Lortzing	<i>Peter the shipwright</i>	Thomas	<i>Mignon</i>
Meyerbeer	<i>The Huguenots</i>	Verdi	<i>Il trovatore</i>
Mozart	<i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	Wallace	<i>Maritana</i>

a splendid performance, and the energetic encore with which the piece was received showed unmistakably how thoroughly it was appreciated.³⁵

In the following year the Club gave the first performances of Elgar's 'Why so pale and wan?' and the march *Pas Redouble*. We also find such comments as 'Mr Elgar contributed to the uniform excellence of the concert by his pianoforte accompaniments'. An instrumental night in 1882 shows the typical personnel of the band in the 1880s.

The instrumentalists were Messrs A.R. Quarterman, pianoforte; H. Elgar, harmonium; E.W. Elgar and W. Elgar, violins; W.C. Box, double bass; C.S. Groves, flute; F.G. Elgar, oboe; F.J. Griffiths, clarinet. The band, which does not lack young blood, well sustains its reputation, and the instrumental evenings are likely to be as popular as before. The fine 'Zampa' overture was splendidly played, and so warmly encored that the band was constrained to repeat it.³⁶

The Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society went from strength to strength. At the AGM in October 1880 'it was resolved that in the coming season the weekly practices should be held on Wednesdays for the junior members, and on Saturdays for the more efficient members, with a full rehearsal at the Guildhall once a month, at which the conductor promised to attend'. How nice of Mr Caldicott to show his face once a month ... but this shows just how much the Society relied on Elgar from week to week. It gave its second public concert on 17 May 1881.

It is two years since this society ... made its first appearance before a public audience in this city, after having worked with assiduity and success for a like period in private ... The band mustered on Tuesday between 30 and 40 instrumentalists, the junior members, under the leadership and supervision of their seniors, having made most satisfactory progress in the management of the various instruments of their adoption in the two years' interval, and presenting now an array of instrumental artistes of no mean pretension.

The concert, which included the first performance of Elgar's *Air de Ballet*, was conducted by Caldicott.

Mr Elgar's violin obbligato to Braga's sereneta was perhaps louder than the subject required, but this most touching piece was another success for vocalist and instrumentalist ... The violin solo (Mr E.W. Elgar) was played with exquisite tone and expression, and the accompaniment by the band was given with a taste and judgment which could not have been expected at the hands of so young and comparatively inexperienced a body of instrumentalists; and it was pleasing to observe that the first indications of gratification came from the bottom of the room: its beauties had touched the whole auditory, and the demand for a repetition was irresistible ... The two overtures went capitally: indeed the whole of the instrumental pieces were given with the crispness, finish, verve, and conscientiousness of orchestral veterans. Mr E. Elgar's

35 *Berrow's*, 7 February 1880.

36 *Worcester Daily Times*, 11 October 1882.

new 'Air de Ballet' is thoroughly characteristic, and is a composition of considerable merit.³⁷

The *Air de Ballet* was repeated at the orchestra's concert of 20 February 1882, which also included the *Pas Redouble*. It had another outing on 11 August, when the orchestra played at a soirée for the Jubilee Meeting of the British Medical Association. Charles Buck, a delegate at the meeting, played in the orchestra – the start of his lifelong friendship with Elgar.

... the fiftieth annual meeting retained throughout a character which will leave nothing but pleasant remembrances in the minds of those who were present. Worcester, it is true, as a cathedral city of but moderate size, does not possess all the advantages in the form of means of receiving and accommodating large bodies of visitors which the great industrial towns and cities enjoy; but any deficiency that might at first have been supposed to exist, was more than compensated by the hearty good will and energy with which the President and his professional colleagues in the city and district, supported cordially by the public of all classes, threw themselves into the work of giving their visitors a welcome which should be worthy of the occasion ... The *soirée* at the Shire Hall, given at the close of the last day's meeting, conjointly by the President and Mr G. W. Hastings, M.P., was very largely attended, and was a most pleasant termination to the proceedings.³⁸

Alfred Caldicott, who, in addition to his conducting duties in Worcester, had been organist of St Stephen's, Barbourne, on the outskirts of the city, accepted the post of organist and choir-master 'in a fashionable church near Torquay'. In November 1882 Elgar was elected conductor of the Amateur Instrumental Society in his stead. A couple of years later he was able to tell Buck that 'Our orchestra (in which you played once) has developed alarmingly under my disabled guidance & are blossoming into a grand Concert April 9'.

Amateur vocal societies have long done much to cherish the musical reputation of the city; and, so far as instrumental music is concerned, it speaks well that a body of two score amateurs engaged in almost as many different occupations in life, should have devoted their leisure to the cultivation of the art with sufficient persistency and appreciation to enable them to execute classical music as it was executed last night. A great part of this gratifying result is doubtless due to the ability of the conductor, who must give much labour and time to the necessary rehearsals, and when the critical moment of public achievement comes, keeps so firm a grip upon his little band that they have small temptation or opportunity to go astray.³⁹

A couple of years later Elgar told Buck: 'Jape! I have started a Ladies' orchestral Class & have sixteen fair fiddlers all in two rows & I direct their graceful movements; it is doing well'. In May 1889 its members wrote to 'beg your acceptance of the accompanying bookstand, on the occasion of your approaching marriage', and 'to

37 *Worcester Herald*, 21 May 1881.

38 *The British Medical Journal*, 19 August 1882, 331.

39 *Worcester Daily Times*, 10 April 1885.

thank you for the kindness & patience with which you have conducted the Class, & for the great pleasure which it has afforded us'. A list of members of the Class at that time is given in Table 3.

In the 1880s the Amateur Instrumental Society was able to fulfil its objective of providing local instrumentalists for the concerts of the Worcester choral societies. Of these, the Worcester Musical Society was going through a difficult time. At its concert in April 1880, 'a quartet by Mozart, in which Mr E.W. Elgar and Mr W.H. Elgar took the violins, Mr H. Elgar the viola, and Mr Watts the cello, opened the second part' – oh to have been able to attend that one! At a second concert that month the Society gave the Danish composer Niels Gade's cantata *The Erl King's Daughter*, and the first performance of F.A. Gore Ouseley's *Concert Overture*. But when Herbert Wareing took over from Caldicott as conductor the *Worcester Herald* commented: 'it would be flattering to deny that it has passed the zenith of success, and that for the present at least it must be content with more modest achievements than those by which it formerly signalised itself'. Attendance at rehearsals fell away; Wareing resigned, to be replaced by Arthur Quarterman, but it was too late to save the Society from extinction.

A similar fate threatened the Worcester Philharmonic Society. It distinguished itself in May 1884 by giving the first performance of Elgar's *Sevillana*, in a programme that also included Beethoven's Second Symphony, and *Spring* and *Autumn* from Haydn's *The Seasons*.

Another instrumental item deserving mention was a sketch for orchestra, entitled "Sevillana", which was composed by our talented young townsman, Mr Edward Elgar, expressly for this concert. It is a very unique and clever morceau of considerable intrinsic merit, somewhat of the Moresque type. This item was conducted by the composer himself. On relieving Mr Done of the baton, Mr Elgar received a very hearty ovation from a discerning and sympathetic audience. The manner in which the baton was wielded by the composer made it manifest that he is no novice in conducting a large orchestra. The piece was most enthusiastically received, and had time permitted the wish of the audience to have it repeated would doubtless have been complied with.⁴⁰

40 *Worcestershire Advertiser and Agricultural Gazette*, 3 May 1884.

Table 3

Member of the Ladies' Orchestral Class, 1889

Georgina Bramwell	Martina Hyde
Jessie Brown	Mary Lea
Margaret Dickins	Edith March
Barbara Dickins	Madeline Martin
Eleanor Dickins	Ada Stone
Irene Dickins	Alice Wagstaff
Isabel Fitton	Nellie Webb
Hilda Fitton	Edith Webb
Jessie Holloway	

In November 1884 William Done tendered his resignation, which was not accepted. 'Mr Done, however, wishes it to be clearly understood that, having held the position of conductor for about 35 years, he feels it is time some other musician should undertake the responsibilities and anxieties of the office'. The baton was shared a year later with Alfred Quarterman, who conducted Frederic Cowen's cantata *The Rose Maiden*. Done was responsible for Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto in G Minor, in which the soloist was Elgar's friend, the blind pianist William Wolstenholme.

Ill-feeling was also creeping into the Society, and at a *Messiah* at Christmas 1886:

For various reasons, a large number of the Philharmonic Society were absent; and it is said that the action of the Festival committee in requiring that all the voices of the society should be re-tested before the festival has given rise to a feeling which has induced several useful and prominent members to dissociate themselves, at least temporarily, from the performances of the society.⁴¹

This led to something of a hiatus in its activities, but in March 1888:

We hear with pleasure that steps have been taken for a revival of the Worcester Philharmonic Society ... It is proposed to make the society one which shall be available for special services at the Cathedral, as well as for the culture of music generally, and to furnish a nucleus of a chorus for the festival ... It was resolved that the resuscitated society should take the name of the Worcester Festival Choral Society ... It is proposed as a commencement to rehearse the "Passion Music" for the Holy Week services.⁴²

The most successful choral society during the 80s was the Worcester Musical Union. A concert in the Guildhall in 1882 contained 'the concerto by Hummel, for pianoforte and orchestra, which was played by Mrs Fitton with much brilliancy and fire, and which was accompanied by the orchestra with the utmost delicacy and refinement'. In April 1883 the Public Hall resounded to a 'very excellent performance of Professor Sterndale Bennett's exquisite pastoral "The May Queen", before a large audience'.

The second part of the concert contained a 'Intermezzo Moresque' (first time of performance), the composition of our talented fellow-townsman, Mr E. W. Elgar, who conducted his own composition. The work was very much admired by the audience and was loudly encored.⁴³

In May 1886 the name of Alice Roberts appears for the first time amongst the sopranos, and Elgar was playing on the first desk of violins. The programme included Beethoven's Mass in C and the *Italian* Symphony. The following year *Elijah* was performed:

41 *Worcester Herald*, 1 January 1887.

42 *Worcestershire Advertiser and Agricultural Gazette*, 3 March 1888.

43 *Worcester Daily Times*, 3 April 1883.

The choice of such a stupendous work as Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' for performance by an amateur musical society is certainly open to criticism. It may be asked - why choose a work with which the whole world is acquainted, and which is constantly being performed by our great festival choirs, while there is a large range of smaller and lighter works, very charming in their own way, which could be really well performed by our amateur societies; whereas there is no doubt such a work as the 'Elijah' is almost beyond their powers ... It would not be fair to follow the performance on Wednesday very critically. There were naturally some shortcomings in a work of such magnitude and difficulty, but the conductor, the Rev. E. Vine Hall, and members of the society may be congratulated on having given a performance of the 'Elijah', which afforded great pleasure and enjoyment to the audience as well as having been, we are sure, a source of immense gratification to themselves in feeling they were taking part in such inspiring music ... The conductor, the Rev. E. Vine Hall, must have bestowed great pains and trouble in the preparation of the choruses, and very great credit is due to him for the spirited way in which many of the choruses were taken.⁴⁴

Later the same year Mendelssohn's *St Paul* was performed.

On 7 May 1888 the main item was Schubert's Mass in G Major, but the concert was also notable for having Paul Victor Mendelssohn Benecke, then at Magdalen College, Oxford, playing 'with exquisite delicacy' his grandfather's Prelude and Fugue in E minor. Elgar had composed a work 'expressly for this concert': the Three Sketches for String Orchestra (*Spring Song - Allegro; Elegy - Adagio; Finale - Presto*), probably the original version of the *Serenade for Strings*.

Mr Elgar's new composition, written for an orchestra of strings, was well performed and well received. It is a light, sparkling, and original work, and shews plainly the hand and taste of a practised musician. Perhaps the feature of the concert was the marvellously refined playing of P.V. Mendelssohn Benecke, a grandson of the great composer. He quite took the audience by storm, and we know not what most to admire, the calmness of his manner or the mingled strength and delicacy of his execution. He held the audience spell-bound, and played with consummate skill and taste. We congratulate the society and its energetic conductor, the Rev. E. Vine Hall, on a most successful and a most enjoyable concert.⁴⁵

Charitable concerts

To conclude this brief survey of music life in Worcester during the time before Elgar's marriage, let us take a look at some of the many concerts which were given purely for the purpose of raising money for the good of local people. One or two took place most weeks: what follows is just a sample from those in which Elgar was involved during the 1880s.

11 May 1880: a concert of vocal and instrumental music for the inmates of the Worcester Workhouse. 'The whole of the inmates were present, including the children, and evidently appreciated very highly the entertainment which had been provided for them'.

44 *Worcester Herald*, 15 January 1887.

45 *Berrow's*, 12 May 1888.

7 June 1880: 'An amateur concert of no mean order ... the proceeds to be given to St John's Working Men's Club'. The programme included movements from Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet.

22 November 1882: a concert by the Choir of St John's, Worcester, 'in aid of the fund for defraying the cost of new surplices and cassocks and the purchase of a new harmonium'.

5 January 1883: a concert for the patients of the Worcester Infirmary. 'Aroused from the lethargy which is the usual accompaniment of sickness, the poor invalids were loud and hearty in their applause'.

26 February 1884: a 'largely attended' concert at the Guildhall, in aid of the recreation room of the Girls' Friendly Society. 'The selections given by the Amateur Instrumental Society were justly admired. Mr E. Elgar conducted and was also to have given a violin solo, but was prevented by an injury to one of his fingers'.

20 October 1885: a concert in the vaulted hall at the Deanery to raise funds 'to purchase a pianoforte for the Cathedral choristers' practice ... Master W.H. Dyson played as a violin solo a composition of Mr Edward Elgar (whose pupil he is), and in response to the well-merited applause which followed substituted a Spanish dance.' This was the first performance of the *Romance*, Op. 1.

5 May 1886: a concert at the Public Hall 'in aid of the Girls' Club-room, Compton Buildings'. The performers included Martina Hyde and Harriet Fitton. 'The violin solos by Mr Edward Elgar were well received, and in the gavotte he was enabled to show to advantage his talent and manipulation in the use of the bow'.

2 October 1886: a concert at the Public Hall in aid of the Worcestershire Vagrants' Relief Society. 'Mr Edward Elgar was re-called for one of his artistically-executed violin solos. The Rev. E. Capel-Cure's [cello solos] were also warmly received. Mrs Fitton acted as accompanist'.

Conclusion

Worcester undoubtedly had a thriving cultural life in the 1860s, 70s, and 80s. Those who wished to engage with it, whether as performers or listeners, would have found themselves spoiled for choice. Some years were undoubtedly better than others. Individual societies had their ups and downs; frequently the enthusiasm of those promoting concerts was not matched by that of their potential audience; and the destruction of the theatre and the Public Hall made life difficult. But it would have been an exciting time to live in the city, and Elgar would undoubtedly have appreciated his good fortune, if only in retrospect. I don't recall the range of music available in the early years of the present century being sufficient to justify an annual Musical Directory, such as was produced then by the indefatigable Edward Spark.

Mr Spark's Musical Circular. - Mr E.J. Spark has just issued his annual and local circular, which is quite unique, and possesses many interesting features. It contains a variety of local information, which will be particularly interesting, not only to persons in the musical profession, but also to amateurs and others. Amongst the contents will be found a complete list of churches and chapels in Worcester, together with the

names of the organists, the number of stops each organ contains, the names of the respective builders, &c. Then there is the musical societies in Worcester, and their officers, also the principal musical events that have taken place in Worcester from October 1876 to October 1877, which is an interesting record, showing the many high-class concerts that have been given and the eminent artists that have appeared in the city ... These and many other useful items render the 'circular' peculiarly valuable to musical people, and others who take an interest in such matters. The 'circular' is well got up in book form.⁴⁶

After a career with British Airways, Martin Bird now spends his time playing and teaching the double bass, and researching the life of Elgar. His dabblings in the backwaters of Victorian and Edwardian music history have resulted in a research database that has grown to some six million words, and includes transcriptions of all the letters to and from Elgar from the archives of the Elgar Birthplace. His main aim is to produce an annotated edition of the Elgar family diaries, 1899-1939, and he finds himself at present in the early months of 1924, having just welcomed the great man back from his trip up the Amazon. He also looks after the Elgar Society web site.

⁴⁶ Worcestershire Advertiser and Agricultural Gazette, 5 February 1878.



Plate 1: From upstairs, looking down the Birthplace garden

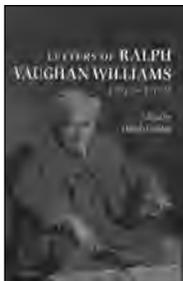


Plate 2: Mark the elegance and detail of the composer's clothing



Plate 3: The composer's right arm, extended as if in welcome

REVIEWS OF BOOKS



Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895–1958

Edited by Hugh Cobbe

In his foreword to this splendidly edited selection of some 750 letters, Hugh Cobbe warns that we shall not find 'the personal confessions and the insights into the creative processes that illuminate Elgar's correspondence'. In a direct sense that is true; but an image of Vaughan Williams emerges that is perhaps all the richer for the absence of overt confession. Vaughan Williams's self-deprecatory comments on his own music, and his reticence about technique and 'meaning', barely disguise a sense of self-worth, and of mission. At the age of 70, he still claims that he needs to learn how to compose, but unlike Haydn at the same age, who confessed that he was no longer able to compose although he had only just learned to write for wind instruments, Vaughan Williams went on to write four more symphonies (among other things), including a good many instruments he had never used before. Among the particularly moving World War II correspondence is a registration form for 'cultural national service'; to the question which of his musical works has been broadcast or recorded he writes 'Too many to enumerate'. Perhaps he knew with greater confidence than Elgar where he stood in British culture and society.

A certain bluntness – product of honesty – appears in rebukes to the BBC, and his determination never to be drawn into simplistic political attitudes. Cobbe includes a memorandum, not actually a letter, in which he agonizes over the General Strike. Many letters deal with practical affairs – orchestral instruments, engagement of singers for Bach performances, how to cope with Bach's stratospheric trumpet parts, and so forth. Many are more personal, and the greatest impression is of familial warmth and extreme kindness to friends and younger musicians. He was active in trying to get German (usually Jewish) musicians released from wartime internment. His widowed colleague R.O. Morris moves in to the Vaughan Williams household, where Ursula Wood also repaired on being widowed. Still in the middle of war, he writes to Lord Kennet about his son's ambitions, offering counsel Elgar might have approved: 'my advice to young composer is "don't"'. Elgar is mentioned several times, usually with an approbation not always accorded to his contemporaries. There are tart things about Delius and Stravinsky; Vaughan Williams keeps

his distance from some kinds of modernism while generously praising those (such as Elizabeth Maconchy) whose 'wrong-note music' makes sense to him. There are only two letters to Elgar. The first, from 1931, signed 'Yrs affectionately' by seven other musicians including W.H. Reed and his wife, offers a gift of pencils to encourage Elgar to get on with a new symphony. The second, three days before Elgar died, asks for his blessing on the Dorking Festival performance of *Gerontius*, yet kindly adds 'Of course this wants no answer'. One hopes it brought the dying man some comfort.

Julian Rushton

xx + 679 pages,
c. £90

Oxford University
Press, 2008

ISBN 978-0-19-
925797-3

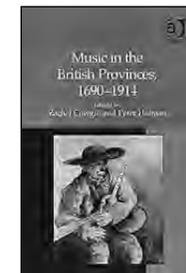
Music in the British Provinces 1690-1914

Edited by Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman

The old jibe about 'The Land Without Music' is repeated so often one feels that the English are rather proud of it. The preface to this compendium repeats it yet again and implies that the following essays will effectively kill the supposed slur by demonstrating the quantity of two centuries of provincial musical activity. It also points out that the term 'provincial' carries 'ideological baggage'. So it does, and I shall suggest later this has not been entirely abandoned in this work.

The most significant contributions are those by Rachel Cowgill ('Disputing Choruses in 1760s Halifax'), Sally Drage ('The Larks of Dean'), Peter Horton ('Outside the Cathedral'), Thomas Muir ('Music for St Cuthbert (Durham)'), and the late Catherine Dale ('The Provincial Musical Festival in 19th Century England'), to whose memory the book is dedicated. The reviewer can do no more than give a flavour of them. Rachel Cowgill's essay is a fascinating and amusing account of local chicanery and professional jealousy involving Joah Bates, William Herschel, organs, and the good people of Halifax. Bates, who went on to organise the famous Handel festivals in London, was a classic example of the self-made Northerner. In Halifax he founded a Messiah Club for both local and personal aggrandisement, carrying on a vigorous campaign against a rival organisation. In a revealing quote his son declares: '...we totally defeated our adversary ... and in consequence of which victory we determined to open our organ with the performance of the Messiah'.

In other words the oratorio was the musical equivalent of a weapon of mass destruction. This view of it, which must have contributed to the frequency of performance, was not just a West Riding feature. In her essay on the Larks of Dean (a Lancashire



428 pages, £70

Aldershot:
Ashgate, 2007

ISBN 978-0-7546-
3160-6



Plate 4: The Crown Hotel, Worcester in 2009

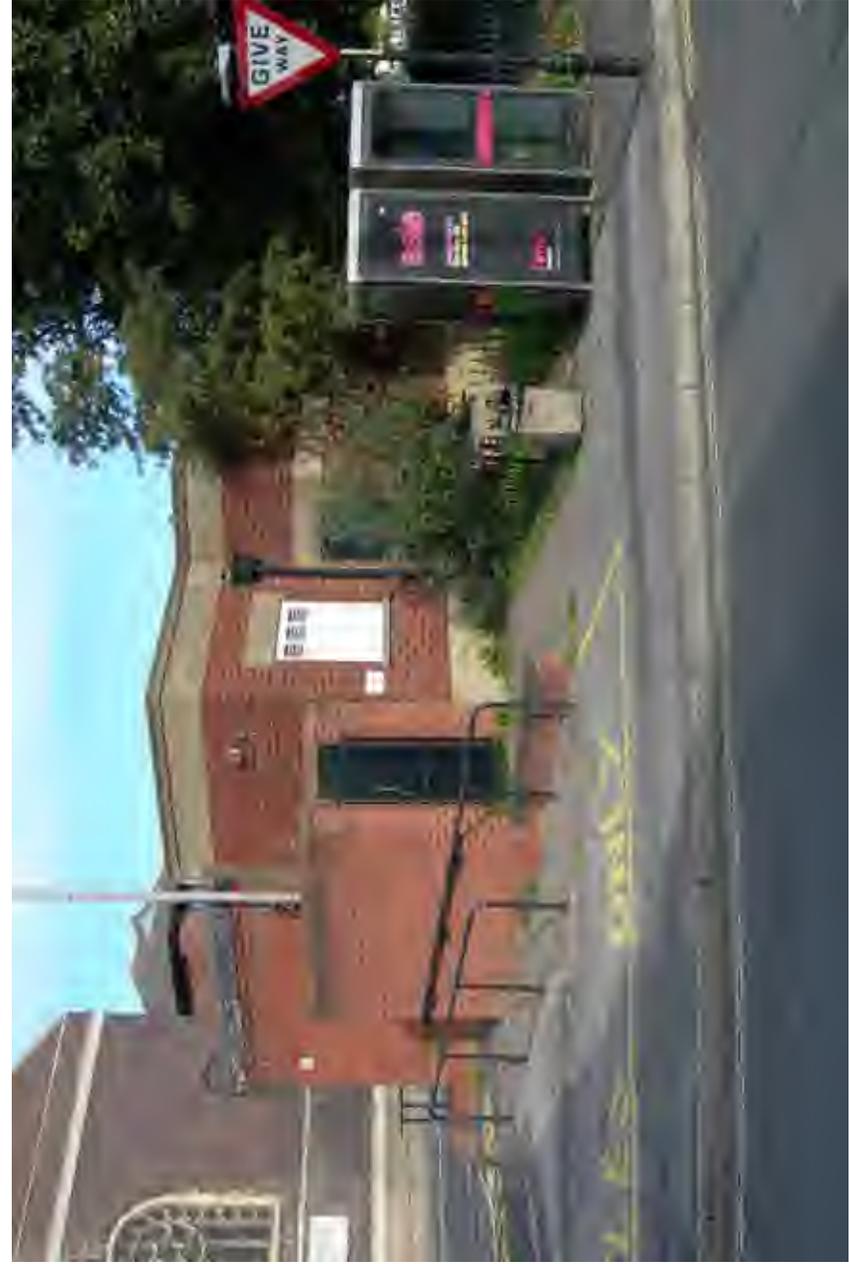


Plate 5: The site of the Music Hall, Worcester, in 2009



Plate 6: The site of the Theatre Royal, Worcester, in 2009

vocal group) Sally Drage notes that they sang Handel choruses 'at a fine tilting speed' and all double forte. Clearly the nuclear warhead was fully primed here. Peter Horton makes an interesting study of S.S. Wesley – a story of conflict between the self-opinionated Londoner and the professional provincials, fought out in 'somnolent' Hereford and glee-obsessed Exeter. He also notes that large forces were believed to be necessary if composers' intentions were to be met. So much for 'authentic performance'.

Thomas Muir's essay on St Cuthbert's, Durham, treats of Catholic music of the kind the young Elgar must have known. On the evidence of the poem quoted in honour of the 'Patron Saint of the Faithful North', Cuthbert must have worn his black and white striped shirt with true Geordie pride. The difficulties faced by Catholics in integrating their traditions with those of a strongly Protestant region are well brought out. Catherine Dale's contribution is largely concerned with the curious Bridlington Festival, organised by Alexander Bosville, Chief of Clan Macdonald and descendant of Dr Johnson's cicerone, which ran between 1894 and 1903. Elgar's *The Black Knight* was performed there. There is much interesting organisational and performance data, not to mention railway maps and timetables, on this and the contrasting Leeds and Birmingham Festivals. The figures are a graphic revelation of why it was commercially necessary to programme *Messiah* and *Elijah*.

Mention may also be made of Christina Bashford's piece on the production of programme notes. It is good to see her stress on the value of programmes as historical sources, although she does not discuss to what extent the syndicating of notes tended to provide 'spin' for particular works. An essay on performances of string quartets by the late Meredith McFarlane does make a few references to the activities of Avison in Newcastle and Marsh in Chichester, the only occurrences of their names in the book.

It is difficult to engage effectively with seventeen different authors, even more difficult when, though the subject is ostensibly homogeneous, it is treated in such a wide variety of ways. It has to be said that this reviewer approached the work with keen anticipation, but the overall impression left is of disappointment. The authors certainly can claim to have demonstrated that there was massive musical activity in Britain (though mainly England) in those years, but they do not dispose of their target libel. Indeed to some extent they even support it. Storms in teacups over the use of town halls, and the enthusiasms of reverend gentlemen for augmented fourths, along with augmented livings, seem unequivocally parochial by definition. Given that Avison and Marsh are the two most significant provincial composers before Elgar, the cursory treatment of them is hard to understand.

Little is said about the period after 1840, the most crucial for English music since the Elizabethans. Ashgate publications may be mainly for specialists but this one surely deals with a topic of general interest and historical significance. One can only hope that a monograph aimed at a wider readership will soon appear. Part of the problem seems to arise from contributors' self-indulgence and a desire to ratchet up research assessment ratings. In consequence the book reads, at times, like a history of cricket written by bat-makers.

Nevertheless it does induce reflection on two major issues which have never effectively been addressed. The first is how much genuine working-class involvement there was in music making and appreciation in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Elgar was not alone in declaring that his music was being performed by mill girls. We all know that much musical effort in these years was directed at calming radical passions in the lower classes, and this is frequently mentioned in the reviewed work. But did it have any real effect? Was there, as we would say today, 'buy-in'? Some years ago David Russell's analysis revealed that the Leeds choir had only 3% of its members who could be reasonably called 'working class' and the famous Huddersfield chorus none at all. Even the normally astute Cowgill is taken in by the phrase 'poor labouring men' to describe members of the Halifax club, though they apparently included weavers (who were then self-employed) and the owner of a bakery. The essay on the Bridlington Festival provides internal counter-argument in that the Festival is said to have lost support once the town became a resort of the working class. Reflection will show that for the genuine labouring poor to be involved would be highly unlikely – they were at work all the time, except when unemployed when they would simply not have been able to afford the costs. Even 6d would be too much for an unemployed worker, and Elgar displayed his lack of social 'nous' in urging that price as appealing to the 'lower orders'. There would always be the heroic exception, but in truth the handful who did involve themselves in music were almost middle class, certainly not Marxian proletariat. Nor can we escape the uncomfortable thought that involvement in music was a form of class aspiration.

The second issue is even more intriguing. Though these essays are almost falling over themselves to demonstrate that the provinces were a hotbed of musical activity throughout the period, their overall thesis only makes sense if the proposition is accepted that there were contrasting metropolitan and provincial cultures, and that the latter needed and needs to be defended against the former. Surely the historical truth is rather different. From 1649, when the country gentry banded together (temporarily) to execute their metropolitan monarch, to at least

the mid-nineteenth century and arguably until the 1930s, London was of limited significance in almost all aspects of national life. Stranded at the end of branch lines from Bristol and Lincoln, isolated by large swathes of impoverished agricultural country, disdained by Northern manufacturers as a seat of interfering politicians, absorbing the wealth the manufacturers were creating, a breeding place of poverty, disease, and social unrest, the 'Great Wen' of Cobbett, London was hardly a place to be asserting cultural hegemony. Railways are extolled in the essays as opening the provinces to London enlightenment; but railways carry passengers both ways. Throughout the nineteenth century the provinces provided the businessmen, novelists, musicians, and even politicians who made the most national impact. For some two centuries even sovereigns were reluctant to venture into a terra incognita of perceived hostility. Queen Victoria refused to visit Manchester because of its promotion of Cromwell, and she left York in high dudgeon, never to return, on hearing two councillors, Yorkshiremen no doubt, complaining about the cost of entertaining her. London had no permanent orchestra until 1905 by which time several provincial urban centres had acquired internationally acclaimed bands.

Elgar's two idiosyncratic moves to London are surely symptomatic. The first was probably more to do with his wife's snobbery – he seems to have spent most of his time in the National Gallery. The second was probably the result of his own snobbery but was equally unnecessary. He was our greatest provincial musician and the provinces repaid him by major promotion of his work throughout his life and afterwards, while the attitude of the Metropolis was frequently dismissive. Oddly he protested a dislike of precisely the places that gave him most support.

Since the Restoration English music had been a provincial activity, London merely an add-on. Hence the myth about a 'Land without Music' – foreigners saw England through their experience of London. That these important issues are not discussed in this work, despite the valuable and sometimes amusing data it contains, demonstrates why musical history should not be left only to musicologists.

Carl Newton



Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2009

xxvii + 496 pages

ISBN 978-1-874181-58-3

To order call BookSource (0141 642 9192).

Robin Daniels: *Cardus – Celebrant of Beauty*

When we approach the writings of Neville Cardus, their still-resonant appositeness can make us imagine that he is still with us, although he has been dead for some thirty years. That must surely be the mark of a truly great writer, and Cardus was certainly that, the *ne plus ultra* of critics of both music and cricket, and who is here justly celebrated in a fine volume by his friend, Robin Daniels. Mr. Daniels, who is like Cardus a Lancastrian, was very fortunate to have shared a friendship with the critic towards the end of his long life, and so this is not a biography but a Memoir, which may be seen as a companion to his *Conversations With Cardus*.¹

There is a biographical element to the book, of course: it is necessary to place Cardus in the context of the time he lived in. He was born in 1888, when as Daniels notes Tchaikovsky had just completed his Fifth Symphony; and his death came within a very few years of Britten's. Cardus met some of the most significant composers of the period – Delius, Richard Strauss, Sibelius, Lehár, Rachmaninoff, and of course Elgar. There isn't a great deal on our composer in this book, but Daniels comments that Cardus's favour on English composers fell upon E.E. as well as Britten, Delius, Tippett, Walton and Vaughan Williams. In fact the most lengthy reference to Elgar is to be had in a piece by Samuel Langford at the Three Choirs Festival in 1924. But Cardus witnessed the premiere of the First Symphony, and was proud to have been in the audience at the Manchester Free Trade Hall on that momentous occasion. Sixty-odd years later he reviewed Jacqueline du Pré playing the Cello Concerto at the Royal Festival Hall, and wrote '...We appeared to be not hearing but overhearing music which has a sunset touch – telling of the end of an epoch in our island story, but also of Elgar's acceptance of the end' – the end being on several emotional levels, which one can hear in the music, and with the knowledge of when that music appeared in Elgar's compositional life.

Cardus, like Langford, found great comfort in Elgar's music which Daniels appositely describes as 'history-haunted'. I think what marks Cardus out as a great critic is his knowledge and experience of so much in life (Daniels records how he never knew his father, and at first did not know that in order to make a living his mother and aunt would go out and sell their company to men with the money to buy it), and in the deep connection he felt with the world and humanity, which is distilled into art via the creative process. The great cricketers he went to see possessed a nobility of endeavour which he found also in the musical performers he heard and saw at the concert hall or opera house, and truly he celebrated their

1 London: Gollancz, 1976.

accomplishments.

I don't believe Cardus could have written a flat paragraph if he'd tried: he was too professional not to give his readers something which would strike home. His time with the *Manchester Guardian* helped him hone a style of writing which is piquantly individual. He never talked down those performers or players he heard or witnessed in action, but with a quiet authority (the authority which came from the humility at the self-recognition of his great gifts) he adumbrated with pen strokes of great finesse those experiences. His language hums with quiet vigour and enthusiasm. It is polished but never obviously so, and judicious without that ever becoming a fault. It has a lyricism all of its own, and apart from that, he knew the value of not over-egging the pudding.

Daniels notes in a chapter headed 'The Impossible Profession' (criticism) that 'the more people know, the less they seem to feel or want to feel ... An excess of analysis empties an arts review (and its prior encounter with a work) of much of its richness, of form and meaning'. It is an examination of how the critic runs many risks if he is to do his job well. In an appendix Daniels writes about what he believes are the qualities which a critic may (rather than should) display, and it is rather a daunting list. The fact that Cardus displayed so many qualities but without them being obvious attributes is what makes him so approachable. And I think what marks Cardus out as the critic's critic is that he doesn't make his criticism into an excuse to mount an attack, still less to patronise with what one might call 'gush', but seeks to share his experiences, and to encourage others to explore and understand their own. He illuminates and guides where others might want to obscure and throw false scents, thinking that they alone know all there is to know and that they will grudgingly share some of that knowledge with you if you ask nicely.

This is an affectionate and insightful book which ought to make many friends, but some may quibble at it not being a straightforward biography. I think that is one of its attractions, in that it need not be read straight the way through. Daniels has divided it into nine sections, into which he introduces Cardus's writings, and his interpretation of them. They cover such things as his early life, the nature of writing, the man himself, and, as noted above, the art of criticism. The latter is particularly illuminating as there is a lengthy examination of the consanguinity between Cardus and Walter Pater, both celebrants of beauty, something which is always badly needed in a bewilderingly aggressive world. Cardus's advice was often sought by the aspiring writer and critic about experiencing some event; that beautiful concert, or a cricket match: how should one approach it? He used one word, 'Savour'; and that is what one should do with this book: savour it.

Dominic Guyver

CD REVIEWS

Note from the CD reviews editor: The following are available from the Elgar Birthplace Museum: Goodwin *Nursery Suite* etc.; Norris *Falstaff*; Gritton orchestral songs; Haendel/Rattle Violin Concerto; *Fringes of the Fleet*. Buying from the Birthplace contributes directly to its finances at this difficult economic time. Their on-line shopping pages can be found at: www.elgarmuseum.org/trolleyed.

Readers will no doubt notice the frequent occurrence of reviews signed with my name. That is because only Naxos and Hyperion regularly provide the Society with review copies: other CDs reviewed are from my personal collection. Where we cannot obtain review copies, I would welcome reviews of appropriate new issues to supplant my own. They may be emailed to me at: martin.bird@easynet.co.uk.

Martin Bird



Edward German: a Miscellany

Tom Jones.
National Festival Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by David Russell Hulme

Naxos 8.660270-71

Overture *The Tempter*; Prelude, *Romeo and Juliet*; Symphonic poem *Hamlet*; *The Willow Song*; Symphony No. 1 in E minor BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by John Wilson



Dutton Epoch
CDLX 7156

March Rhapsody on Original Themes; Symphonic Suite in D minor (*The Leeds*); Symphony No. 2 in A minor (*The Norwich*); BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by John Wilson

In his biography of Elgar, Thomas Dunhill wrote:

I think, however, that his firm favourite amongst British composers was Edward German. I remember how, on one occasion, when German had expressed his admiration for some work of his, Elgar turned to him and said, very simply, 'however much you like my music you cannot possibly like it as much as I love yours'.¹



Dutton Epoch
CDLX 7202

1 Thomas Dunhill, *Sir Edward Elgar* (London: Blackie & Son, 1938).

My knowledge of German's music was limited to *Merrie England* and the *Welsh Rhapsody*, so I was tempted by the arrival of a review copy of *Tom Jones* and a sudden enthusiasm for the conductor John Wilson to buy the Dutton discs of symphonies and other orchestral music.

I started with the symphonies, and I cannot in all honesty say that either gripped me sufficiently to demand or maintain my full attention. Full (too full, perhaps) of good tunes and moments, but somehow lacking in the inevitability of development that comes from a strong underlying symphonic structure. It was as if German had laid out the contents of a couple of sketchbooks and cobbled them together with some leftovers from his incidental music. Then I noticed a reference in the notes to a review of the 'Norwich' symphony by George Bernard Shaw (for whom I have long had an enthusiasm), so I turned to him for a second opinion.

The symphony composed by Mr. Edward German for the Norwich Festival ... struck me as a mass of clever composition wasted. It is dramatic music without any subject, emotional music without any mood, formal music without conspicuous beauty and symmetry of design, externally a symphony, really a fulfilment of a commission or seizure of a professional opportunity, otherwise purposeless ... But compare the symphony with the incidental music to Henry VIII by the same hand, and note how Mr. German, when he gets on his own ground, with definite dramatic business in hand, suddenly becomes intelligible, interesting, purposeful, and individual.

The fact is, symphony is no more Mr. German's business than epic poetry is mine ... However, the Festival being happily over, he can easily break up the symphony, and use the scraps – which are valuable – as material for future work in his own line.²

I may, of course, be in a minority of two. Sir John Barbirolli revived the 'Norwich' in the 1930s, and told Michael Kennedy it was 'the sort of symphony Elgar might have written at that date' (1893).

I harboured no such doubts when I moved on to the other orchestral works. The *Leeds* Symphonic Suite especially, with its haunting pre-echo of *Sospiri*, is a work to sample and to savour. A few minor scrambles in the violins aside, everything is well played and excellently recorded. Our thanks must go to Michael Dutton, and to the anonymous donor who sponsored the recordings, for allowing us to share Elgar's enthusiasm and to get to know much unfamiliar music.

Tom Jones dates from 1907, and the first production was

2 George Bernard Shaw, *The World, 27 December 1893*, in Shaw, *Music in London*, Vol. 3 (London: Constable, 1932).

conducted by Hamish MacCunn, best known nowadays for his overture *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*. The musical style will be familiar to anyone who has heard *Merrie England*, and such numbers as Sophia's song 'Love maketh the heart a garden fair' should win over anyone who hears them. The new Naxos recording is a scrupulously researched affair that includes numbers discarded during the original run. It is well sung by a strong cast including Richard Morrison, Marianne Staykov and Heather Shipp in the main roles, and such stalwarts as Richard Suart in the lesser ones. The National Festival Chorus (all professionals) is in fine voice, though if the singers had to adopt fake West Country accents for 'Gurt-Uncle Jan Tappit', then someone at the sessions should have pointed out that they were also required six minutes earlier when they were in the same Upton pub. David Russell Hulme points in his notes to the operatic scale of German's conception, and numerous deft orchestral touches. Sadly, neither his conducting nor the orchestral playing quite translates what can be seen on the page into what can actually be heard. I am not certain to what extent this is the fault of the recording. Played at a level at which the solo voices come across comfortably, the orchestra seems to be churning out the notes at a constant mezzo-forte with half an eye on the clock. Substantially increasing the volume brings a corresponding improvement in orchestral 'presence', but makes the soloists uncomfortably prominent: a great shame. Out of interest, I dug out my old LP of German himself conducting excerpts from the opera, and was immediately taken by a real sense of pizzazz – and a rather better orchestral balance, despite there being nearly a century between the recording dates!

Martin Bird



Elgar

Nursery Suite; Dream Children; In Moonlight, Op. 50; *Romance*, Op. 62; *Sospiri*; *Serenade for Strings*, Op. 20; *Elegy*, Op. 58
Julie Price (bassoon), English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Paul Goodwin

Harmonia Mundi
hmGold

HMG 5072580

A brief notice of this reissue of Paul Goodwin's miscellany of some of Elgar's smaller orchestral works. He has a brisk, open-air approach – atop the Malvern Hills rather than basking in the Birthplace garden – that is a welcome antidote to some performances I have heard. Where time for reflection is called for, it is provided, but the music is never weighed down by externally applied emotion. A full list of orchestral personnel is provided,

and it is good to see such names as William Bennett (flute) and Osian Ellis (harp) still playing with the English Chamber Orchestra, and heard to such good effect. Julie Price, too, makes the most of that minor masterpiece, the *Romance* for Bassoon and Orchestra. Highly recommended, and at bargain price.

Martin Bird

Ivor Gurney: 30 songs

Susan Bickley, mezzo-soprano, Iain Burnside, piano

I am glad to see that Naxos is continuing to expand its English Song Series, adding to the impressive list of titles acquired from Collins Classics. This, no. 19 in the series, offers 30 songs from the more than 300 composed by Ivor Gurney (1890-1937). Stanford, who taught Gurney, described him as 'the one who most fulfilled the accepted ideas of genius', and on the evidence of this disc I would not quibble with that opinion.

Gurney's songs have an intimacy that makes one a privileged listener to the inner thoughts of the soul. Unlike Elgar's, one cannot imagine a Clara Butt belting them out to an audience of thousands, or, indeed, their being sung after dinner at a gathering around a domestic piano. They are much too precious for that: true art-songs. They are admirably performed by Susan Bickley and Iain Burnside, and presented in a recording of some perfection. I have had this disc of special pieces next to my CD player for a few weeks now, and I will happily admit to not having heard it all yet: the duties of a reviewer in this case being outweighed by duty to the music. It is to be sipped and savoured, not swallowed in one.

Martin Bird

Haydn Wood: A miscellany of light music

Various artists, including Haydn Wood

This CD is issued to mark the 50th anniversary of Haydn Wood's death. Like his contemporaries Eric Coates and Vivian Ellis, he is known as an expert purveyor of light music, chiefly orchestral miniatures and sentimental ballads, of which 'Roses of Picardy' is probably the best known today. He studied composition with Stanford, and also wrote more serious compositions, including a Piano Concerto, so his orchestral technique, in common with many other 'lighter' composers, is more than competent.

Most of the tracks on this well-filled CD come from the



Naxos 8.572151



Symposium 1386

1930s/1940s, and the transfer from the original 78s has been excellently accomplished. Of course the sound and dynamic range is restricted, and there is the ever present background hiss, but it is amazing at how quickly the ear adjusts to this. Several tracks feature Wood himself conducting the Light Symphony Orchestra in his own compositions, and the quality of sound allows much orchestral detail to come through, as well as giving plenty of depth and sonority to the sound.

What of the music itself? It is entirely redolent of its period, and ranges from the outdoors jollity of *A May-Day Overture*, through the pseudo-Celtic jiggery of *Mannin Veen (Dear Isle of Man)*, to the *Homage March* written for George V's Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1935, which is frankly awful. We also have four tracks recorded in 1924 by the acoustic process of *Three Famous Pictures* and *An Evening Song*. Here the sound quality brings one up with a jolt, and reminds one just how much better the later electrical process was. *An Evening Song* is a charming little piece, but it is rendered almost comical by the galumphing tuba, used in those days to strengthen the string bass sound. Other tracks include Sidney Torch giving a neat and brisk account of *The Horseguards*, *Whitehall* (which includes the signature tune to 'Down Your Way'), John McCormack singing *The Quietest Things*, Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth singing *Love's Garden of Roses* in that curious cut-glass accent of the time, and *Roving Fancies* played by Reginald Foort on his Giant Moller Concert Organ – rather like a warm bath in molasses.

Elgarians will be particularly interested in Haydn Wood's arrangement of four Elgar songs for orchestra, making a little suite. They have been recorded recently on the Dutton label. When I reviewed them (this Journal, July 2005) I found to my surprise that I rather liked them. Although it may be questioned whether there is any need for an orchestral arrangement of Elgar's best known songs, there is no doubt that Wood did it most skilfully, and that he conducted them in 1935 with real feeling and sensitivity. There is also a recording of *Mina*, one of Elgar's last compositions, placed rather strangely in the middle of the suite of songs, although this was the order of recording. It features some nice rubato, but it is too fast and misses some of the lilting charm of the work.

The CD ends with Peggy Cochrane's 1954 broadcast interview with Haydn Wood (apparently pronounced Hay-den, which is rather odd as he was named after the great composer) in which she plays snatches of his best known melodies, her swooning salon style making them almost indistinguishable under the welter and flurry of countermelody. This is a real period piece, sounding about as distant to our ears as a Tudor broadcast would

(if such a thing was possible). The final track is of Haydn Wood recorded in 1907 playing a violin morceau by Pierné (with piano; no truck about accompanist's names in those days!).

Light music composers of this era are getting more recognition now, especially on CD, and Haydn Wood deserves his place with them. I couldn't help but reflect, however, that the greatest light music composer of them all is Elgar himself. A few minutes of *The Starlight Express*, for example, or *The Wand of Youth*, puts the others into perspective.

Barry Collett

Alexander Mackenzie: Violin Concerto in C sharp minor, Op. 32; Pribroch Suite for violin and orchestra, Op. 42

Malcolm Stewart (violin), Royal Scottish National Orchestra conducted by Vernon Handley (Concerto) and David Davies (Pribroch)



Hyperion Helios
CDH 55343

Towards the end of 1932, Elgar wrote to Adrian Boult:

My dear Adrian:

If you can do me a favour I know you will: I never ask anything for myself however! But, can you put in one of your (say Studio) Concerts dear old Mackenzie's Violin Concerto: Isolde Menges plays it & it wd. give our old friend untold pleasure. I know there may be difficulties of all sorts - but it is just possible that it might be done.

Sarasate played it - in 1883 or 4 & I should love to hear it again ...³

Elgar's wish was granted, and the concerto was broadcast on 19 April 1933, played by Adila Fachiri with Boult conducting the BBC Orchestra (section D).

Elgar had first encountered Mackenzie while playing in the Worcester Musical Festival of 1881, when the composer conducted the first performance of his cantata *The Bride*.

The coming of Mackenzie was a real event. Here was a man fully equipped in every department of musical knowledge, who had been a violinist in orchestras in Germany. It gave orchestral players a real lift and widened the outlook of the old-fashioned professor considerably. 'The Bride' was a fine example of choral and orchestral writing, and had a rousing reception. I had the

³ Letter from Elgar to Boult, 15 January 1932, in Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Music & Friends, Letters to Adrian Boult* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979).

honour to meet the composer the following morning and actually shook hands with him at Sansome Lodge.⁴

Elgar was a member of the orchestra for the first performance of the Violin Concerto, at the Birmingham Festival of 1885, when it was played by Pablo Sarasate.

His MS. part propped up on the mantelpiece, we ploughed through the first reading with few stoppages. 'Je suis myope' was his only excuse for crying a halt, sight-reading being amazing and technical difficulties non-existent. Unreserved satisfaction having been expressed, we proceeded to a second and more careful trial. On the eventful evening at Birmingham an unduly prolonged programme brought on a new, full-blown concerto at a very late hour ...⁵

That programme also included the first performances of Ebenezer Prout's Third Symphony and Thomas Anderson's cantata *Yule Tide*.

Elgar's diary for 21 June 1890 reads 'E & A to Sarasate Concert at 3. Saw Miss Musgrave'. The concert was the last of a series of three given by Sarasate in St James's Hall, Piccadilly. He played Bruch's Violin Concerto in D minor and Mackenzie's *Pibroch* for violin and orchestra, both of which had been written for him.

This Scottish suite, written at his request and produced at the Leeds festival of 1889, became a favourite show-piece of the great violinist and was played by him in many countries – Mexico in 1890, and in Paris (*mirabile dictu*) with Colonne in 1894.⁶

Mackenzie, like Elgar, had started his professional career at a violinist, and these two pieces date from the period from which we might have had a similar work from Elgar; his diary for 28 November 1890 reads 'Very cold worked at Concerto', to which he has added at a later date: 'Violin – since destroyed'. So what are we to make of them a century or so later? Well, quite a lot. To say that the concerto sounds as if it could have been written by Brahms on a holiday in Scotland is not intended as a slur on either composer, for Mackenzie truly can hold his head up in such company. The Brahms and Mackenzie concertos are roughly contemporaneous; both were written with Joachim in

4 Elgar, *The College Hall*, 3 June 1931, published in *Three Pears*, *The Illustrated Worcestershire Magazine*, Christmas 1931.

5 Alexander Mackenzie, *A Musician's Narrative*, Cassell, London, 1927.

6 Ibid.

mind; and one of the composers could actually play the violin ... I defy anyone not to beam with pleasure at the appearance of the second subject (in the relative major) of the opening movement. Mackenzie actually was on holiday in Scotland when he completed *Pibroch*, writing to his (and Elgar's) friend Nicholas Kilburn:

I have been here since the 1st August, enjoying the damp, cold weather and scoring a new violin piece for Sarasate in the mornings. I have just finished it ten minutes ago however, so another opus (good or bad) goes out into this world of strife.⁷

Malcolm Stewart probably learned both pieces especially for this recording, but he plays them as though he has known them all his life. Vernon Handley had that miraculous knack of producing committed performances of unfamiliar music, rather than just offering the right notes at the right time; the Scottish National Orchestra plays with affection and fervour, and their one-time principal flautist, David Davies, is by no means overshadowed by his senior partner on the rostrum.

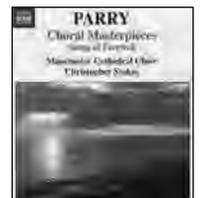
So with fine music, finely performed, at bargain price, offering the chance to experience for oneself one of the earlier influences on Elgar, what more is there to say?

Martin Bird

C. Hubert H. Parry: Choral Masterpieces

Songs of Farewell; Evening Service in D major – 'The Great'; 'I was glad when they said unto me'; *Jerusalem*; 'Hear my words, ye people'; 'Long since in Egypt's plenteous land' (*Judith*)

Jeffrey Makinson (organ), Manchester Cathedral Choir conducted by Christopher Stokes



Naxos 8.572104

This CD of choral works duplicates one made twenty years ago by Christopher Robinson and the Choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor (Hyperion CDA 66273), with one addition, the excerpt from *Judith*. The programme seeks the widest possible appeal, including as it does his finest motets, his most famous work, and two pieces which have been adapted as hymn tunes. If the most successful performances are of *Songs of Farewell* and the *Evening Service*, then that is because the music was written for the scale of forces employed here. 'I was glad', written for the

7 Letter from Alexander Mackenzie to Nicholas Kilburn, 16 August 1889, published in Duncan Barker's notes accompanying Hyperion CDH 55343.

Coronation of Edward VII, lacks its large choir and orchestra, its state trumpeters, and its cries of 'Vivat Rex Edwardus'. *Judith* lacks a soprano soloist (the solo line is taken by the trebles in unison) and an orchestra, and both *Jerusalem* and 'Hear my words, ye people' need sheer weight of numbers to provide the tingle factor. I accept that economics necessarily plays a part, which means that whereas I can hear the Elgar oratorios in all their glory, I may never hear *Judith*. But it is undeniably a shame that such a magnificent long-breathed melody cannot be given with all the majesty that its composer bestowed upon it.

And yet Parry triumphs over all. His music, which would be truly glorious in full colour, holds up pretty well in black and white. There are better performances of *Songs of Farewell* on record, notably Christopher Robinson's, or, for those with turntables and the patience to hunt out a copy, by the Louis Halsey Singers. But that is not to say you won't be rewarded musically by this disc, which is well sung and well recorded. In choral music at his best stands comparison with anyone, and this is at his best.

Martin Bird



Radegund Records
CD018-01

C. Hubert H. Parry: Sonatas for Violin and Piano:

Sonata in D minor; *Fantasia Sonata*; Sonata in D major
Rupert Luck (violin), Daniel Swain (piano)

It remains Parry's sad destiny for his music often to be described as 'Xian' or 'Yesque', where X and Y are the names of his mainstream Central European older contemporaries such as Schumann or Brahms. This is not to say that his music is derivative. It's just that he is panning the same Romantic stream as they, but with perhaps less confidence, less inventiveness. However, for the contemporary listener surfeited with the household names, there is a compensation – the possibility of discovering within Parry's *oeuvre* flecks, even the odd nugget, of new gold. Rupert Luck and Daniel Swain, young but clearly enthusiastic prospectors, make a persuasive case that his chamber music is potentially lucrative territory to explore.

That said, the violin sonata in D minor, written when Parry was 28, is something of a disappointment. To be sure, it is in turn Mendelssohnian and Schumannesque, and there is even the odd moment where one cannot help but think 'Sullivan?'. But – in rhythm, texture, melodic line – it's all a bit samey. The themes are matter-of-fact, their development no more than workmanlike. And I suppose it is expecting too much for a Victorian Lloyd's underwriter to do 'elfin' or 'lovesick'. Overall the piece is

satisfactory without being satisfying.

In the two years that separate the D minor sonata from the *Fantasia Sonata* in one movement, Parry abandoned insurance for a career as a full-time musician. The commitment shows in his music. The *Fantasia Sonata* of 1878 is Lisztian in its ambition, Schumannesque in the freedom of its flow. The discipline of compressing the traditional three or four movements into a single continuous rhapsody has resulted in greater variety and originality. Nominally in the (for a violinist) challenging key of B major, this later piece is far more wide-ranging in tonality, mood and complexity. The listening ear is constantly intrigued, often surprised, even occasionally startled. Yet still that stamp of individuality eludes him; the *Fantasia Sonata* is satisfying, but we – I – still don't respond with a gratifying 'Aaah, !'

By 1888, when he composed the D major Sonata, Parry had achieved a national reputation as the composer of two symphonies, a piano concerto, and large-scale choral works including his setting of Milton's *At a Solemn Music* ('Blest Pair of Sirens'). His third and last violin sonata is a work of greater maturity than its predecessors, self-assured and emotionally self-revealing in ways that they were not. But stamped with individuality? Sandwiched between the Brahmsian first movement and the hippity-hoppity finale is an *andante sostenuto* of uniquely English wistfulness. Melting, tender and – yes – gratifying, this for me is the 'buy it for this' track on the CD. If anyone in future tells me that a piece is Parry-esque, I hope this movement is what will have prompted the comparison.

All three violin sonatas were unpublished in Parry's lifetime. The present CD shows what a joy it is that this omission has now been rectified.⁸ Rupert Luck plays sweetly, though he is perhaps over-fond of the open E string, giving the occasional note in a melodic line an unlovely metallic and vibrato-less prominence. And the balance isn't great, the piano sounding subservient and muffled, as if behind a closed door. But these are minor quibbles.

Although at least the *Fantasia* and the D major sonatas fully deserve to be heard in the recital hall, I suspect Parry's violin and piano sonatas may be more fun to play than to listen to. This is no bad thing; chamber music's primary pleasure is to be found in the playing. All three sonatas lie within the technical reach of the accomplished amateur, and, acquaintance being made through this recording, will be great fun to work at. So, if you have the

⁸ A performing edition was published in 2003, based on the Musica Britannica edition edited by Jeremy Dibble, and it is available through Stainer and Bell at www.stainer.co.uk/acatalog/mb3.html ref. MB80.

wish and the opportunity to add something fresh to your playing repertoire, or if you are curious to explore some less familiar corners of the 'new English Renaissance', this CD will amply reward your modest outlay. In terms of gold, these three sonatas produce about one and a half nuggets, which is a fair return on anybody's investment.

Roger Neighbour



Dutton Epoch
CDLX 7228

Her Song: Orchestral songs and arias by Edward Elgar, John Ireland, Hubert Parry, Eric Gritton and John Sanders

Susan Gritton (soprano), BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Martyn Brabbins

Five composers, five orchestrators – a lovely wander down the leafy lanes of the English countryside. If the soul of a country is in its songs, then this is England as some would always like it to be. Some of these pieces have been orchestrated – put into their Sunday best – and, like some 'Sunday best' outfits, are less relaxed than they are in their (piano accompanied) everyday clothing. None the less this is a very pleasurable stroll through the less well known byways of English song.

I wonder if discs like this are arranged as if they were a concert or simply grouped by composer, allowing one to plan one's own programme, for there is scope for that here. This disc is arranged by composer and starts with Elgar. It may help to put right the injustice of Elgar's songs being the least well known part of his work, although he wrote nearly fifty. There are ten of them here; six with Elgar's own orchestral accompaniments, two orchestrated by others and two numbers taken from longer pieces. The texts he set were not always of the greatest poetic merit. *The Wind at Dawn* was a poem of his wife's, written before they met, and he attempted to disguise the authorship of one of his own, writing under the pseudonym of Pietro d'Alba, alias Carice's pet rabbit. The music on this disc is, however, unmistakably his, and in particular his own orchestrations.

The earliest song, written when Elgar was 31, is *The Wind at Dawn*, and the selection includes the Op. 59 song cycle, a number from *Grania and Diarmid*, and 'The sun goeth down' from *The Kingdom*. There is no doubt that the music for *The Kingdom* is on a different scale and intensity from the rest of these pieces, the solo violin part finely spun and the fusion of voice and full orchestra more convincing. The final cadence in particular is beautifully judged and the whole piece is played and sung with great artistry.

The Elgar pieces are followed by *O stay Madonna* by Eric

Gritton, the singer's grandfather, orchestrated by Robin Gritton, his son, and well worth inclusion in this collection, the composer being one of the foremost accompanists of his day and often chosen by Vaughan Williams to play his compositions. Parry's *Guenever's Soliloquy* is part of his unperformed and only opera *Guenever*, a cause of great disappointment when Carl Rosa did not stage it. Parry was a keen supporter of Wagner, attending the first Bayreuth Festival, and that is evident here in this excerpt from Act 1. (No coincidence then that his *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* in D is known by cathedral lay clerks as Wagner in D – and enjoyed for that reason!) John Sanders' *Evening on the Severn* (No. 4 from *Gloucestershire Visions*) started life as a piece for soprano, clarinet and piano, and was subsequently orchestrated for the Three Choirs Festival. John Sanders was the organist of Gloucester Cathedral and a conductor of the Three Choirs Festival. This beautiful piece is sung with treble-like purity of tone by Susan Gritton and is redolent of Sanders' love for his county: a gem.

John Ireland is probably the composer in this collection best known as a song writer – certainly better known than Elgar in that respect. The nine songs here are all orchestrated by Graham Parlett, the last four for strings only. They contain my favourite of the collection, a setting of *The Salley Gardens*. It is interesting that Ireland chose to set the words of well known poets (represented here are Sir Philip Sidney, A.E. Housman, W.B. Yeats, Christina Rossetti, and Thomas Hardy), whereas Elgar chose less celebrated writers; perhaps that is why his songs have never received the popularity of those of Ireland. The settings which use strings only are in some ways the most successful – perhaps a matter of scale.

Susan Gritton displays a wide range of vocal colours and is never less than beautifully musical, but she is perhaps at her best in the more quiet and reflective pieces, in particular *The Salley Gardens* in which her characterization of the words is exquisite. Martyn Brabbins and the BBC Concert Orchestra accompany with sensitivity and restraint, though on a few occasions the voice is lost in the weight of orchestral sound. The notes are interesting and informative, but a major drawback is the absence of the texts, very unfortunate on a song collection. With perseverance, however, they can be obtained via a download from the Dutton Vocalion website.

A fascinating disc showcasing some of the best of English Song for those who prefer the broader canvas of an orchestral accompaniment, beautifully sung and generally well recorded.

David Ireson



Naxos 8.570356

Charles Villiers Stanford: Symphony No. 1; Clarinet Concerto

Robert Plane (clarinet), Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
conducted by David Lloyd Jones

So, my end is in Stanford's beginning: the last CD in the Naxos series of his complete symphonies and it contains his Symphony No. 1, together with the Clarinet Concerto.

The symphony starts amiably enough with a substantial slow introduction which soon adopts a more serious tone, eventually rising to an imposing climax before the launching of the main movement proper. Immediately, with this first movement, we sense Stanford's symphonic allegiance to Beethoven and Schumann. The whole movement takes a little over eighteen minutes, surely the longest movement ever written by a British composer until the first movement of Elgar's First Symphony. Unfortunately, unlike Elgar's, Stanford's First, having been placed second in a competition sponsored by Alexandra Palace, was not performed again until 1879, and was neither published nor played again in the composer's lifetime. This neglect deprived the public of a fine work. Like the other Stanford symphonies which I have reviewed in recent editions of the Journal, it is magnificently wrought, with characteristic thematic invention, superb orchestration, and deft handling of structure.

The second movement is marked *In Ländler Tempo* and constitutes a wistful Scherzo with two Trios, much more convivial than the *Ländler* which, unless my ears deceive me, has that air of slender melancholy which all Elgarians have come to know and love. In fact, if I had not known, I could have been fooled into thinking that this was a piece by Elgar himself. The third movement is a bitter-sweet idyll. It belies Stanford's famed irascibility: the composer of this beautifully written movement had a heart of gold and comes across as a very considerate and thoughtful human being. The Finale is a much more bracing affair, vigorous, rhythmic, energetic. It brings the symphony to an effervescent conclusion.

In contrast to the neglect of the first symphony, Stanford's Clarinet Concerto is the most frequently heard and most often recorded of the composer's orchestral works. It plays continuously, the movements joined together like a fantasy. After a vigorous yet brief orchestral tutti, the soloist takes centre stage by introducing the energetic first subject; the second subject is a more relaxed affair. The central movement is one of Stanford's exquisite best. Infinitely appealing, it makes one wonder why Richard Mühlfield (for whom Brahms wrote several clarinet works and for whom and to whom Stanford wrote and dedicated this concerto) rejected the

work. It is a pure delight. This, if anything of Stanford's, is worth our memory. The finale begins with a vigorous orchestral passage before the soloist settles into the main theme, characterised by the spirit of the Irish dance so beloved of Stanford.⁹

While listening to these Naxos CDs of the complete Stanford symphonies, I have become used to the excellent playing of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, conducted by David Lloyd-Jones, and to the mellow acoustic of the Concert Hall at the Lighthouse in Poole. Here, the performances are supplemented by the admirable clarinet playing of Robert Plane. Having now listened to all seven symphonies, I can confirm that they are all worth hearing (my own favourite is No. 6). It is a pity they feature so rarely on the concert platform. I recommend them to all orchestras able to play them, and to all listeners who wish to hear some fine music, admirably constructed, orchestrated with skill and clarity, and with melodies and themes abounding in energy and nobility of expression.

Paul Adrian Rooke

I endorse Paul's opinion of the Stanford symphonies: they are well worth getting to know. There can't be too many other British composers (if any!) who have had a symphony commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic. But may I put in a special plea on behalf of the alternative cycle from Chandos, recorded around 20 years earlier by Vernon Handley and the Ulster Orchestra? These and their associated concert performances were, in some instances, the first performances for about a century. The recordings still sound well – often better than the Naxos discs – and Handley has a feel for the pacing of the music that sometimes eludes Lloyd-Jones. Although individually more expensive than the Naxos versions, the boxed set of the symphonies can, with a little digging, be discovered for a little over £30.

Martin Bird

9 My theory, as a clarinetist, is that Mühlfield was understandably puzzled when Stanford changed from the B flat clarinet to the more mellow A clarinet for the brilliant finale. It is the only instance I know of a concerto where this happens (ed.).



Testament
SBT 1444

Elgar: Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61
Sibelius: Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

Ida Haendel (violin); City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Simon Rattle

On this CD of public performances recorded by the BBC, the Elgar concerto is given the status of 'filler', though, as we shall see, it is far more than that. The Sibelius was recorded at a Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall on 7 September 1993, and Ida Haendel herself considers it her favourite performance of the concerto: '... it was just one of those occasions – you can never predict them – when everything worked'. One can only agree with her, and with Sibelius, whose letter of congratulation after her 1949 performance is reproduced in the accompanying booklet. Simon Rattle is a fine Sibelian, and contributes to a very tight performance. The recorded sound is wholly acceptable, without ever being wholly clear, especially as the orchestra is somewhat backwardly balanced.

The Elgar was recorded at the Royal Festival Hall on 22 February 1984, a date not without significance, as it was the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death. The concert opened with the first London performance of Britten's 1941 *American Overture*, and concluded with Nielsen's Fourth Symphony. Outside it had been raining all day, and the temperature had never crept above 5°, but inside Rattle and his magnificent orchestra immediately conjured up an atmosphere more redolent of steamy summer afternoons in Hereford or Italy ... or even Spain. It's all a bit too laid back and luxuriant, thought I, armed with my score with its metronome marking of crotchet = 100. I reached for Elgar's recording for confirmation, only to find that he had taken half a minute more than Rattle over the first movement! I laid aside my Beckmesserish slate, and allowed myself to be utterly beguiled by the performance from that moment on.

Haendel seems first to have played the concerto in London at a Promenade Concert with Sir Henry Wood in June 1942. I got to know her playing of it (and, I am ashamed to say, of her very existence) from her 1970s studio recording with Boult and the LPO, a much under-valued recording now reissued on Testament SBT 1146. She is technically superb, has an instrument and a tone to die for (nowhere else have I heard an open G string sound so rich and warm), and creates the concerto (I wouldn't even say 'recreates') as if she had a direct line to Elgar's soul. Moreover, to use a favourite Elgar word, she has 'brains', with the result that all this wonderful emotion is displayed within an overall understanding of the structure of the piece.

The CBSO at the time was unsurpassed among British orchestras, with an inner balance which only comes from listening to itself as well as to its conductor. Simon Rattle has to be nudged occasionally by his soloist to ensure that he does not dwell over-lovingly on the occasional detail – but what does that matter in the context of such wonderful music-making? The audience scarcely dares to breathe, still less to cough, and the BBC is content to let the musicians rather than its engineers take prime responsibility for the sound. My verdict – don't hold back!

Martin Bird

Elgar: *The Fringes of the Fleet, Inside the Bar, Big Steamers, Elegy*

Music by Ansell, German, Ireland and Haydn Wood
Roderick Williams, Nicolas Lester Duncan Rock, Laurence Meikle (baritones), Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Tom Higgins



SOMM CD 243

Ninety-two years after Elgar's war-time songs were recorded for the first time, the second recording to feature four baritones has been made. Brilliant as the 1917 recording was (using four seasoned actor/singers fresh from the stage of the Coliseum), a modern recording is needed of what are, in my view, five miniature masterpieces which remain constrained by neither time nor place. Barry Collett recorded the songs as part of his 'War Music' CD in 1987 (Pearl – SHE CD 9602), but the strength and importance of that recording lies in the three recitations and not, to my mind, in the four baritones who suffer in comparison to the four singers recorded here.

The complex story of the *Fringes of the Fleet* and Kipling's efforts to stop their performance cannot be fitted into a review, and I shall attempt to throw fresh light on this in conjunction with a full review of this CD in the March 2010 Journal. In the meantime all Elgarians should not hesitate to purchase a recording which contains things they will not know, as well as these special songs by Kipling and Elgar which tell a story of ordinary men doing what they could for their country in a terrible war. Here SOMM has used a new performing edition by Tom Higgins. Like Collett, Higgins has gone to great lengths to match the score to what he believes is performable version of the songs and which, through his work, have a chance of obtaining performances more widely.

For once these songs are not about the mud and slaughter of the Western Front, but they reflect with precision the humour, pathos,

terror and loss which all who fought had to deal with daily. By including *Inside the Bar* (poem by Gilbert Parker), Elgar created a song-cycle of rare insight and complexity which honoured those who played their part in ensuring, in the words of Kipling in *Big Steamers*, 'That no one may stop us from bringing you food'.

Andrew Neill



Elgar Editions
EECD009

Elgar: *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches 1-6 (arr. David Owen Norris); *Falstaff* (arr. Sigfrid Karg-Elert)

David Owen Norris (piano)

Piano transcriptions of orchestral works tend to fall into two categories: those that add something to the listener's understanding of the work transcribed, and those that simply seem like cardboard cut-outs of it. And an audience's reaction seems to divide too, even for the good transcriptions: some people simply cannot see the point, and feel that the works as originally written should be allowed to speak for themselves, not distilled through another medium. This second volume of David Owen Norris playing Elgar on the piano features his own transcriptions of the six *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches (including a reconstruction of the Sixth), and his account of Sigfrid Karg-Elert's transcription of *Falstaff*, made almost contemporaneously with the work itself, in 1914. The CD seems designed not merely to dispel scepticism among those who do not like and admire this genre of music, but to raise the question of why more such writing is not done.

Karg-Elert made his *Falstaff* transcription, as well as the First and Second Symphonies, in an age when the gramophone was in its infancy and the piano was the principal form of musical entertainment in many households. Transcribing an orchestral work could bring the full range of the orchestra – or so it would seem – into the parlour of the average suburban home. Once the gramophone, and then the wireless, could bring the orchestra itself to the fireside, the urge to transcribe withered, and Karg-Elert was one of a dying breed of composers who used his skills to that effect. As the immensely informative sleeve notes to this CD point out, his transcription of the First Symphony proved well beyond the capabilities of the average domestic pianist. Novello, who commissioned him to make it, asked him to be less adventurous when adapting the Second, with the result that that the transcription is infinitely less interesting: for one thing that we aficionados of the transcription always enjoy is its ability to let us hear facets of the work that might not have been so obvious

when hearing the orchestral rendition with which we have become familiar.

David Owen Norris, gifted in this discipline as he is, highlights the nature of the craft: he reminds us that the piano is 'a compact source of very precise sounds [that] must pretend to be a widely-spread group of not-quite unanimous individuals, some of whose instruments are slow to speak'. So the transcriber's task is to have the piano make everything apparent. This is not straightforward. 'Unlike the piano, most of these instruments can vary the timbre and dynamic of a single prolonged note. We quickly unlearn the obsession with rattling precision that ruins so much piano playing. We develop means of sustaining and even swelling the sound, of differentiating three or four textures at once ... we broaden our tonal palette to reflect the difference between three trombones and one flute, and we adopt what I might call a spatial rhetoric, which is just one of several informed ways of playing out of tune'. Norris notes that the pianos of over a century ago were far more suited to this sort of exercise than the modern Steinway. He warns his listeners that he has taken certain liberties with the orchestral scores in making his reductions, and he has also edited some of Karg-Elert. Since the result sounds like authentic Elgar, and much as one might suspect these words would have sounded had Elgar written them for the piano, we can only conclude that his judgment was right. 'Some of my solutions still surprise me, as I listen back', he confesses, though he also admits that in the Marches 'a few counter-melodies remain unheard': but then 'the insoluble problem of every transcriber is that two hands can only do so much'.

All that said, his transcriptions of the Marches are a triumph. If one immerses oneself in them, one is shocked when one next comes to play a recording of the orchestral originals. It would be an exaggeration to call Norris's tempi slow, but they are measured, which has at times a peculiar effect. They add to the intended stateliness of the works; they bring out an additional aspect of dignity in a piece as well-known as No. 1. No. 3 becomes reflective, at times sad, its nobility having a special Edwardian flavour of restrained passion. At times in all the Marches, but especially in Nos. 1 and 4, there is a firmness of playing which, coupled with the precision of the tempi, remind me of Busoni. Elgar would himself probably not have relished such a remark: but the approach Norris takes to bringing these orchestral works to life on the piano is absolutely right. Yet these accounts are not just about percussiveness: the trio in No. 4 is played with a sensitivity and beauty that is almost heartbreaking.

It is precisely through hearing familiar works in such a novel guise that one comes to hear them anew and experience something

utterly different from what one thought one had registered over decades of hearing them as they were intended to be heard. Some of these Marches fell into disrepute after Elgar's death as being the theme-music of Empire and of Edwardian splendour: it is hard to understand why when one hears these transcriptions, where the works become beautiful essays for piano. Nor should one underestimate the quality of Norris's virtuosity: it is a faultless performance at all times. His transcriptional feat is significant, his pianism no less so. For these works alone, and for his performance of them, this disc becomes essential to every lover of Elgar's music.

Every quality the pianist brings to his own transcriptions applies to his treatment of Karg-Elert's *Falstaff*. It is a spellbinding account, and to those who have always regarded the symphonic study as perhaps Elgar's finest work there are, again, new aspects opened up to us. Norris is more than equal to the full range of expression required: whether in the wit and colour of the early passages, the somewhat menacing pomp of King Henry V's progress, or the pathos of the ultimate decline. It is wonderful not just to have a recording of this transcription, but to have such a superbly played and judged one. Yet to have it on CD is one thing: next, this deserves to be played in the recital hall, and merits a place in the regular repertoire of Elgar's canon.

Simon Heffer

LETTERS

From Martin Bird

Wulstan Atkins, who contributed so much both to the Elgar Society and to the Elgar Birthplace Museum, was well known as Elgar's godson. I would be interested to know if there is any firm evidence, other than from his own lips, to back this up, for the circumstantial evidence surrounding his birth and baptism suggests that this may not have been the case.

He was born on 24 November 1904, and all the Worcester papers of 26 November carried a similar announcement:

ATKINS – On 24th November, at 8, College Yard, Worcester, the wife of Ivor Atkins, a son.

In Wulstan Atkins's *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (David & Charles, 1984) he quotes a letter from Elgar written on 16 December 'in response to a letter from my father telling him of my birth'.

Many thanks: so glad to hear you are well & flourishing, all three of you I hope. I am so very happy about the new arrival & envy you your son – alas! I receive in this world all that I never want or wish for.

Elgar was in London, having recently returned from a short European tour with Frank Schuster, and was apparently catching up with a mountain of correspondence, as he had written to Troyte on the 12th: 'I am well & overwhelmed with letters'.

But another most interesting letter, of 7 December, is to be found in Isabel Semler's book *Horatio Parker* (Putnam 1942). Mrs Semler was Parker's daughter, and the letter is from Wulstan's mother, Dora, to Parker.

My dear Professor:

I expect you and Mrs. Parker have called us both by a good many bad names for never writing, but though we do not write we often talk and think about you. Now this is to tell you a piece of news and to make a request. The news is, we are the proud possessors of a son who arrived on November 24th. The request is, will you be one of his Godfathers? We are both very anxious you should be, and we promise we will try and bring him up in quite a correct manner so as to save you any anxiety in the matter. If you will be a Godpapa will you send us a wire at our expense saying so? The Christening is to be on the 21st of December. I am afraid you won't be present, but if you feel inclined to run over, a warm welcome will await you, and if you don't we will get someone to represent you.

With our love to you and Mrs. Parker. We hope you are both coming to the Festival next year. You really must.

Believe me,

Yours affectionately,

Dora Atkins.

We are asking Professor Sanford to be the other Godfather. Please wire in any case, but we hope it will be, yes.

Parker had known the Atkinses at least since 1899, when he conducted his 'Hora Novissima' at the Worcester Festival, and he was there again in 1902 with Professor Sanford. Both Parker and Sanford, of course, were also friends of Elgar.

On 20 December both Elgar and Atkins were in Birmingham, at a supper at the Clef Club in honour of Richard Strauss. To quote Wulstan again: 'This was a memorable evening with Elgar and Strauss as the principal speakers. It was Elgar's first public speech in Birmingham since he had accepted the chair of music'. The next day the pair returned home, Atkins to Worcester and Elgar to Hereford, where he found waiting for him the proofs of *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 3, which is dedicated to Atkins. He immediately wrote to Atkins:

The score (proof) is here: & it looks well. Will you be able to look it thro' if I send it? Send a p.c. & say: you must not think of it if you are busy: but it is Noel, & over a pipe, look you, you might do much to amend the failings of

Yours ever

Reynart

But 21 December was the day of Wulstan's baptism, and Entry No. 90 in the records of 'Baptisms solemnized in the Precincts of the Cathedral Church of S. Mary in the County of Worcester in the Year 1904' confirms the event, performed by the Dean of Worcester, R. W. Forrest. Wulstan's was one of only two baptisms in the Cathedral in 1904.

One would like to think that if Elgar had been godfather, he would have stopped off in Worcester with Atkins to attend the ceremony on his way back to Hereford, but probably not, for Alice's diary has him back in Hereford in time for lunch:

E. home from Birm. by lunch time – Dragon. Looked well & in good spirits. D.G.

Very nice evening & he made a long speech – wh. made a great effect.

And to quote Wulstan once more: 'Christmas is a very busy time for cathedral organists, and Atkins could only spare an odd hour or so. He accordingly went over the next morning, and after he had inspected the proof Elgar played over the whole March'.

All of which suggests that Elgar may have been no more than an unofficial godfather to Wulstan. But I have found nothing conclusive either way. We have a letter inviting Parker and Sanford to be godfathers, but we do not know if a similar one was sent to Elgar. Nor do we know for sure who was present at the ceremony.

There is also the question as to whether Elgar, as a Roman Catholic and an ex-

organist of the Roman Catholic Church in Worcester, would have been permitted to be the godparent of the Cathedral organist at a ceremony conducted by the Dean, or even thought suitable. I consulted Canon Brian Andrews on that one, and his reply is again inconclusive. 'It is possible to have a Roman Catholic as a godparent now; it's a matter of individual conscience. And baptism is the one sacrament which is now universally recognised by both denominations – but was it then? I ask myself. That means that EE would have had to promise that WA was brought up as a Christian, not necessarily as a Catholic. If he wasn't at the baptism, someone else could have stood proxy for him'.

I would be most interested to hear if anyone can shed any light on this, dare I say it, enigmatic business.

From Barry Collett

Julian Rushton, in his review of the new publication of Elgar's *Empire March*, raises an interesting point about which work uses Elgar's largest orchestra. Elgar's 'standard' orchestra was the large Romantic orchestra anyway, consisting of triple woodwind (piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon), usual full brass (three trumpets, four horns, three trombones, tuba), strings, two harps, timpani, and usually three extra percussionists. These are the orchestral forces for the First Symphony, *Falstaff*, *In the South*, *Le Drapeau Belge*, the oratorios, *The Music Makers*, *The Spirit of England*, and most of the Marches. But he adds and subtracts, making a definitive answer impossible. The first *Pomp and Circumstance* March needs five percussionists, plus organ, and two cornets, but drops the cor anglais. So does the *March of the Mogul Emperors* from *The Crown of India*. The Second Symphony adds an extra percussionist and an E flat clarinet. *The Apostles* uses an organ, as do most of the choral works, but also adds a shofar. The *Empire March*, with its harps, array of percussion and organ, is certainly among the most richly scored, but I think I would award the final palm to the Symphonic Prelude *Polonia*, which needs full orchestra, two harps, organ and six percussionists! They all, needless to say, show Elgar's mastery of this rich orchestral palette.

From Alistair Cooke

In his splendid article 'Elgar in Birmingham' (July 2009), Stuart Freed notes that the second city had to wait until 1920 for a permanent orchestra of its own. It would have waited even longer if Neville Chamberlain as Lord Mayor during the First World War had not made the establishment of an orchestra supported from the rates a central part of his plans for reform conceived in the same ambitious spirit as those of his famous father, Joe. Neville Chamberlain's biographer Robert Self describes how 'his forceful leadership conferred a new sense of unity and common purpose upon the city's musical community, previously notorious for its acute jealousies and bitter internecine struggles'. In 1917 he persuaded Sir Thomas Beecham (not a universally popular choice) to keep an orchestra in being for three years; in 1919 the Corporation agreed to give it financial support. Thus was born

the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the first of its kind in Britain.

Sadly Chamberlain had no time for Elgar. According to his daughter, he 'thought the style of music pompous and referred scornfully to the direction on a score that passages were to be played "nobilmente"'. Some Elgarians may feel that these misjudgements are almost as unfortunate as his efforts to appease Hitler in the late 1930s. To me, an admirer of Chamberlain, they seem his only lapses.

From Geoffrey Hodgkins

Over the last few years several writers on Elgar have seen fit to suggest that his success was not so much due to the quality of his music as to his ability to insinuate himself into the favours of influential people, especially critics. He was apparently 'a tireless self-promoter' who made his way in the world 'by a determined combination of music and manoeuvring, of creativity and calculation'.¹

Some years ago I wrote an article for the Journal in which I pointed out that all the evidence suggests that the opposite is the case. In his excellent article 'Elgar in Birmingham', Stuart Freed quotes from Joseph Bennett's review in *The Daily Telegraph* of the first performance of *The Apostles*.² I quote a slightly fuller version, which includes the previous four sentences.

It is a good omen that at last a man of our own race and nation has come to the extreme front and drawn to himself the wondering admiration of all who profess and call themselves musicians and lovers of the art. There is something impressive in the position now occupied by Elgar. He is not an intriguer. He does not compass heaven and earth making proselytes to believe in his own powers, neither does he trim his sails to catch the varying breezes of popular opinion. Having something to say in the fashion which appears to him best, he says it straight out, and leaves the issue to the Fates. Yet, though sturdily independent, courting nobody, he now occupies the position of a man with whom most people are determined to be pleased.

It is unnecessary to comment further, except to say that what is particularly interesting about this notice is that Bennett – we are led to believe – was the first critic to become ensnared into Elgar's sycophantic web when he received a letter from the composer in 1890 relating to the forthcoming premiere of *Froissart* at the Three Choirs Festival that year.

From Christopher Morley

How refreshing to find something of genuine relevance in the Elgar Society Journal, transcending the (forgive me) occasional anorakisms of Elgarian minutiae and tenuous connections.

But Stuart Freed's otherwise interesting article on 'Elgar in Birmingham' (July 2009) is compromised almost immediately by the assertion in his opening paragraph that in 1882 the city had no 'purpose-built performing arena'. In fact Birmingham

1 David Cannadine, 'Orchestrating his own life: Sir Edward Elgar as a historical personality', in *Elgar: An Anniversary Portrait* (London: Continuum, 2007), 20, 21.

2 This Journal, July 2009, 28–9.

Town Hall itself had been completed in 1834 for precisely that purpose, and to attract major musicians from all over Europe to the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festival. Only a dozen years later, Mendelssohn premiered *Elijah* there. Had the German composer not died so young, it is almost certain that Elgar would have played in the orchestra under him at later Birmingham Triennial Festivals, just as he did under Dvořák.

From Steven Halls

Further to my review of the Adela Maddison Piano Quintet in last July's Journal, I received the letter from Society member, Eric Wetherell, reproduced below. I realise that we cannot claim Adela's life as being germane to Elgar's but, as Eric contributed more to my knowledge of this interesting composer, I thought other readers might have other information. Responses please to chairman@elgar.org.

From Eric Wetherell

I read with interest Steven Halls's review of the Adela Maddison's Piano Quintet of 1916, though I first came across her name some years ago in a quite different context. As a Radio 3 producer in about 1984, I took on the task of recording a series of programmes of Fauré's complete piano music, and found to my surprise from BBC archives that a few works had never before been broadcast.

I found that Fauré's Seventh Nocturne was dedicated to Adela Maddison, who is mentioned in specific terms in Robert Orledge's book on the composer.³ The implication is that she had left her English husband to be set up in a flat in Paris at Fauré's expense; but, aware that this was not entirely certain, I was careful to state in my script only that 'the full story of Fauré's relationship with her is still to be told'. When the programme went out some weeks later, I had a call from the Head of Radio 3 to say that a lady had rung in. She was a niece of Adela Maddison and had been amazed to hear what I had written, as she had had no idea of this liaison. Fortunately I was able to quote my source and this appeared to satisfy her, as I heard no more about it.

The Nocturne in question is not easy; it is written in 18/8 with one section in six sharps, so she must have been a respectable pianist.⁴ Fauré's letters mention her once or twice, but not in terms that suggest anything more than friendship.

From Ian Parrott

With reference to the Variation G.R.S. (this Journal, July 2009, 15), this must have been one of Elgar's japes. Bulldogs normally dislike water. However, if Dan fell into the Wye, it is very unlikely that his paddling would match the pedalling which Elgar had so carefully written in 1898 with notes a third apart to represent an organist's

3 Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Eulenburg, 1979), 16-17.

4 Beginning in C sharp minor and ending in D flat major, Fauré's beautiful and moving Seventh Nocturne has passages in six sharps and in six flats. Orledge (loc. cit.) says 'Adela Maddison was almost certainly one of the great loves of Fauré's life' [ed.].

feet, with orchestration for two bassoons, *mf*, and double bass, *p*, without cello, beautifully suggesting an organ. As I've said before, I studied with E.C. Broadhurst, who learned from Sinclair never to play a wrong pedal note.⁵

From Edmund M. Green

The Elgar Society should form a committee either to edit or to revise completely Wikipedia's article on the 'Enigma' Variations. In my opinion, the article, as it now stands, is so flawed that mere editing probably will not correct its many deficiencies.

A major problem is that almost no attention is given to the music. Only the first section of the original theme is quoted, followed by two lines of commentary. This is then followed by a description of each variation which all but ignores Elgar's own descriptions in 'My Friends Pictured Within'.

The section on the 'Enigma' itself partially misstates the problem. It starts 'The "Enigma" of the title refers to two puzzles. The first puzzle is to determine which of Elgar's friends each variation represents'. In fact, Elgar stated the first puzzle in the original program notes when he wrote 'The enigma I will not explain – its dark saying must be left unguessed'. An explanation of the word 'Enigma' is the first problem, not the identity of the friends pictured, which was, with the exception of Variation XIII, never a puzzle. A related problem is the description of Variation XIII in which Helen Weaver shares an equal place with Lady Mary Lygon. As Julian Rushton wrote, 'There is no doubt that the dedicatee of XIII is Lady Mary Lygon'. There is not a shred of evidence that Helen Weaver was the dedicatee and this romantic fantasy should finally be put to rest. The article also states that Basil Nevinson (B.G.N. of Variation XII) inspired Elgar to write his Cello Concerto, something I can't find anywhere in the literature.

The section on the *Enigma* goes on to say that 'Others believe (without saying what the first set of persons believe) that the hidden theme was itself a variation on some well-known theme'. It then lists many solutions, most of which are not variations. Most grievous of all the problems with the solution section is that although most of the solutions are described in a line or two, someone has posted a twenty-five line description of Marshall Portnoy's Bach's *Art of Fugue* 'solution'. This one solution takes up approximately one-third of all the space devoted to the subject.

It seems to me that the Elgar Society should be the final arbiter of Wikipedia's article on the Variations, and should take action accordingly.

From Michael Plant

I have known and loved the 'Enigma' Variations for over 45 years, and have never wanted to see a full explanation of its mysteries. They're such good box office! However, still the theories come (reviews, Journal, July 2009) and I write, simply as a music-lover, to stress the view that there may just not be a sophisticated, unambiguous answer to all the questions. This is not a crossword puzzle or a

⁵ See also my article, 'The Enigma V', in *An Elgar Companion*, ed. Christopher Redwood (Ashbourne, Sequoia, 1983), 82–90.

whodunit and the creative process does not lend itself to the musical equivalent of painting-by-numbers. Where there are real answers to be had, I think we have them. The identities of the friends whose characters are pictured within were supposed to be private, but have long been known (more or less to the satisfaction of all), although the work can be fully enjoyed by an unbriefed listener who 'nose nuffin'.

For the rest, only twice have I come across anything with that 'it's-obvious-when-you-think-about-it' quality, and I would like to share my thoughts with any researchers still out there as a warning against complexity. First, the 'dark saying' now looks like Elgar having a dig at a certain type of over-serious programme music (I have a lot of that sort of thing in my own CD collection!). Our own Journal (July 2008) has quite recently brought this to light. That squares with Jaeger's comment when he was asked ('just a bit of his humour' or something like that). Secondly, 'Enigma' is sometimes billed as 'Variations on an Original Theme'. But is it a wholly original theme? It's an elaboration of a phrase which is played several times in Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony (slow movement). Elgar knew that symphony well. He even had it in his record collection.⁶ Once the resemblance was pointed out to me, I have never heard either work in the same way again. I am not a composer, but I am sure I should resort to joshing, avuncular humour, evasion, mystification, the laying of false trails and all the rest, if I thought I might have to admit to using even a little bit of someone else's music.

From Rev. Joseph Farrell KHS

Having heard and admired the recent release of an archive CD of *The Dream of Gerontius* sung in German, I sent a copy to Pope Benedict at the Vatican. It is well known that he has been a life-long admirer of the life and works of John Henry Cardinal Newman. He is also a very accomplished pianist with a fondness for the music of Bach and Mozart. On his being elected Pope four years ago, some of the nearby residents were said to be glad that he would be moving away because of the loud music he often played late at night! I thought that I might redress his possible unfamiliarity with the music of Elgar, and so I hope that the German version might set matters right.

I was very pleased to receive the attached letter from one of his secretaries [see below]. As he is now on his annual holiday break, I hope that he may have the time to listen to it.

Letter to Father Farrell from Monsignor Gabriele Caccia

The Holy Father wishes me to express his gratitude for your kind letter and the gift of a Compact Disc. He appreciates your thoughtful gesture and the sentiments which prompted you to write to him. His Holiness will remember you and your parishioners in his prayers. He invokes upon you God's blessings of joy and peace.

⁶ He had heard it shortly before starting work on the symphony, as noted many years ago by Joseph Cooper and Jerrold Northrop Moore [ed.].

ISSN 0143-1269

*Printed by
Westpoint Printing Co. Ltd,
113 Fazeley Street,
Birmingham B5 5RX*