

The Society

*Organ*

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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*Front Cover: Arthur O'Shaughnessy (Elliott & Fry)*

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

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## Editorial

One of the most important features of the early issues of the *Journal* for me was the occasional essay 'from the horse's mouth' by people who knew Elgar, and could tell us things about him which helped to give us a broader picture of the man and his music. Those days, inevitably, have passed, but we must not forget that there are Elgarians of today with particular practical expertise which can shed even more light on this fascinating man. So this is largely an issue of doctors: Messrs. Hunt, Harcup and Moore.

Donald Hunt will be well known to all readers as an indefatigable champion of Elgar's music for over half a century. As organist of Worcester Cathedral he presided over seven Three Choirs Festivals, and few who had the good fortune to be in Worcester in the summer of 2007 will forget the week of Elgar concerts he gave us as part of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. London Branch had the very bright idea of inviting Donald to talk about *The Music Makers* on the centenary of its first performance at the Birmingham Musical Festival. Those who heard his exposition of the work on that occasion (some of whom brought their scores) will be grateful for the many insights, practical performance tips, and delightful anecdotes that he gave us. I, for my part, am grateful that it has been possible to produce a more lasting version of his talk to celebrate that centenary in these pages.

Many of you will have had the opportunity of hearing John Harcup speak about the trials and tribulations of Elgar's health. I have been gently encouraging him, too, to put this into a more lasting form. He has done so, and so enabled future generations of Elgarians to benefit from the half a century of experience as a General Practitioner that he brings to the subject.

And where would we be without Jerrold Northrop Moore? He worked tirelessly with John Norris to bring the Complete Edition publication of *The Starlight Express* to fruition, so I was particularly pleased when he volunteered to review Andrew Davis's new recording for this issue.

I also have some editorial apologies to make. My thanks go to those who pointed out that gremlins had taken it upon themselves to reverse the cover picture in the last issue (it was the right way round when it left here, guv, honest!). I am suitably embarrassed to realise that the issue went through four proofs without me picking this up. My even greater thanks go to those (I hope there were some) who *didn't* notice. Likewise I didn't notice that Barry Collett, in his review of Relf Clark's latest book of essays, had referred to Relf as a past Chairman of London Branch. He was, of course, Secretary.

Martin Bird

## Thoughts on *The Music Makers* - a conductor's viewpoint

Donald Hunt

*This essay has been adapted from an illustrated talk given to the London Branch of the Elgar Society on 1 October 2012, the centenary of the work's first performance. Dr. Hunt also made reference to the Psalm 'Great is the Lord', another significant work of Elgar's which was completed in 1912.<sup>1</sup>*

On 1 January 1912 the Elgars moved into their new London home, Severn House. The first music that Elgar completed there was the 'Imperial Masque' *The Crown of India*. It was a success, and on the strength of it the Duke of Argyll, no less, suggested that Elgar should write an opera, which he suggested should be on the life of Columba. Elgar thought about it, and decided that he wasn't interested, particularly as the saint was reputed to have a dislike of the feminine article, so much so that he wouldn't even allow a cow on Iona. He became very homesick for Worcestershire, writing to Canon Gorton: 'I long for a sight of my own country'<sup>2</sup>. He was ill, too, at this time, Alice noting 'E. very uneasy about noise in ear'<sup>3</sup>, and he spent most of April in what he himself called 'cold storage'.

In March he resumed work on *Great is the Lord*, which he had started in 1910, shortly after completion of the Violin Concerto. Now this is a most interesting work, and full of the most effective writing. Elgar said of it himself, 'it is very big stuff of Wesley'<sup>4</sup> length but alas! not of Wesley's grandeur'.<sup>5</sup> Now Samuel Sebastian Wesley was a composer, and organist as well, that Elgar admired greatly. He came across him at the 1875 Mock Festival at Worcester when the Dean and Chapter, anxious to retain the patronage of the Earl of Dudley, who had paid for a new organ and contributed handsomely to the Cathedral Restoration Fund, said there would be no festival that year apart from church services. Wesley, who was organist of Gloucester Cathedral, came to play, and Elgar experienced him playing Bach.

1 See Martin Bird, 'Oh - Praise the Lord!', *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.17, No.3 (August 2012).

2 Letter to Canon Charles Gorton 25 March 1912, published in Percy Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 205.

3 Alice Elgar diary 28 March 1912.

4 Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876) chorister of the Chapel Royal, organist of Hereford Cathedral, 1832; Exeter Cathedral, 1835; Leeds Parish Church, 1842; Winchester Cathedral, 1849; and Gloucester Cathedral, 1865.

5 Letter from Elgar to Henry Clayton, 29 March 1912, published in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 765-6.

Elgar heard S. S. Wesley at Worcester in 1875, and often spoke to me of the thrilling effect Wesley's playing had upon him. The occasion was the outgoing voluntary at a Three Choirs Festival evensong. Wesley began with a long extemporisation, designed to lead up to Bach's Choral Prelude 'Wir glauben all an einen Gott', breaking off the extemporisation in an arresting way before entering upon the Prelude. The effect upon Elgar was so great that in after years when he returned to live in Worcester and would constantly slip into the old cathedral which had so many memories for him and which he greatly loved, he almost invariably asked me to play him something, and we always had to end with the Giant. But I do not know that I was ever able to recapture the impression left upon him by Wesley.<sup>6</sup>

Wesley wrote these very extended anthems all in separate sections, among them *Let us lift up our hearts*, which Elgar orchestrated for the 1923 Worcester Festival. Now in the case of *Great is the Lord* Elgar joined these sections together. It starts off with a big tune which returns at the end to give the piece unity. In between there's a fiery section (a section described by Alice as Elgar's 'flying kings'), and then quite suddenly there's the most beautiful baritone solo. At the end of this he does a complete twist - an amazing modulation - going into a sacred dance before ending with the big tune. We need to remember, too, that it was written at or just after the time that the Violin Concerto and First Symphony had been written, when he was besotted with keys and the relationship between D major and Ab major, so remote from each other. I think this is such an important piece and unjustly neglected. Elgar later orchestrated it as he tended to do with everything, he couldn't help himself, but in my opinion the orchestration is very overblown and you lose a lot of the lovely detail you get in its original form with organ.

### *The Music Makers*

Early in May he was able to turn his attention to a work which was to be produced at the Birmingham Musical Festival in the autumn, and which he had been sketching on and off since 1904. This was a setting of O'Shaughnessy's Ode 'We are the music makers', which appears in a volume of his poetry entitled *Music and Moonlight*. Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy (1844-1881) was Irish. A friend of the leading French poets of the century, he was also closely associated with the pre-Raphaelites. His working life was spent in the British Museum where he was an authority on fish and reptiles.

[There] was to be found, in the very bowels of the building, the elegant and melodious Arthur O'Shaughnessy, in an odour of spirits of wine, preserving in many a small and cunning phial rare fishes as graceful and pallid as himself. He was a sort of mystery, revealed twice a day. In the morning, a smart, swift figure in a long frock-coat, with romantic eyes and bushy whiskers, he would be seen entering the monument and descending into its depths, to be observed no more till he as swiftly rose and left it late in the afternoon.<sup>7</sup>

For some reason he was always under the threat of dismissal, and he died, sadly, at the very early age of 34.

There's a suggestion that some of Elgar's setting of *The Music Makers* was composed on one of his fishing visits to Mordiford Bridge near Hereford, one of his favourite haunts. There was also the inspiration he found from walking around the tree-lined Judge's Walk on Hampstead Heath, a

6 Ivor Atkins, quoted in Wulstan Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1984) 475.

7 Edmund Gosse, *Silhouettes* (London: William Heinemann, 1925), 173.

place he enjoyed considerably: indeed, he wrote the name at the end of the vocal score; that's often forgotten.<sup>8</sup> He completed the vocal score on 18 July and (it must have been a terrible summer rather like the one we've just experienced) he wrote to Windflower next day, saying:

Yesterday was the usual awful day which inevitably occurs when I have completed a work: it has always been so: but this time I promised myself 'a day!' - I should be crowned, - it wd. be lovely weather, - I should have open air & sympathy & everything to mark the end of the work - to get away from the labour part & dream over it happily. Yes: I was to be crowned - for the first time in my life - But - I sent the last page to the printer. Alice & Carice were away for the day & I wandered alone on to the heath - it was bitterly cold - I wrapped myself in a thick overcoat & sat for two minutes, tears streaming out of my cold eyes and loathed the world, - came back to the house - empty & cold - how I hated having written anything: so I wandered out again & shivered & longed to destroy the work of my hands - all wasted. - & this was to have been the one real day in my artistic life - sympathy at the end of work.

"World losers & world-forsakers for ever & ever" How true it is.<sup>9</sup>

### **First performance**

The work was performed at the Birmingham Festival on 1 October at the evening concert (the morning and afternoon had been taken up by *Elijah*, with soloists Clarence Whitehill, Carrie Tubb, Clara Butt, and John McCormack). *The Music Makers* opened the concert, after which Sibelius conducted the first English performance of his Fourth Symphony. The second half of the concert was conducted by Henry Wood. Moritz Rosenthal was the soloist in Liszt's First Piano Concerto; then came the Third *Brandenburg Concerto*, played by all 70 string players of the Festival Orchestra, Purcell's aria 'Mad Bess' sung by Muriel Foster, Rosenthal's *Humoresque on Themes by Johann Strauss*, and the evening finished with Rossini's Overture to *William Tell*. That's an amazing list - by my reckoning about two and a half hours of music without allowing for applause and gaps between items!

The soloist was Muriel Foster, who was reported to have rendered it splendidly and, according to Lady Elgar, her husband 'conducted magnificently'. The work was well received for the most part and the juxtaposition of Elgar and Sibelius is interesting. There is no evidence that they actually met or conversed at all, though it is difficult to imagine that they didn't when, at the very least, one would have been coming off the stage into the artists' room when the other was waiting to go on. Nor is there any evidence to tell us what either composer thought of the other's work. The fact that Elgar refused to attend the reception for Sibelius in 1921 doesn't signify any more than the fact that he didn't like that sort of event, as its organiser realised only too well.

... Please do not let me be a bore with the enclosed card. I am having a small reception for Sibelius who has been bottled up in Finland through the war and revolution. I think, however, that you (wisely) eschew these kind of gatherings. But I need not say how delighted we should be to see you; In any case if your daughter is free perhaps she will look in upon us. It will not be too dull, because I expect

8 Though the manuscript full score is inscribed, more prosaically, 'Edward Elgar, Little Langleys, Steep, Hants. Augt. 20 1912', the address of an old friend, Winifred Murray, with whom the Elgars were staying.

9 Letter to Alice Stuart Wortley, 19 July 1912, Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 7676.

nearly all the young people from the Finnish and Czech delegations.<sup>10</sup>

In the audience for that first performance was Delius, and he wrote:

Last night I heard the "Musik Makers" Elgar & the Symphony of Sibelius - Elgars work is not very interesting - & very noisy - The chorus treated in the old way & very heavily orchestrated - It did not interest me - Sibelius interested me much more - He is trying to do something new & has a fine feeling for nature & he is also unconventional. - Sometimes a bit sketchy & ragged. But I should like to hear the work again - He is a very nice fellow & we were together with Bantock before & after the Concert.<sup>11</sup>

Parry, who heard the work in November when Frederick Bridge performed it at the Albert Hall with the Royal Choral Society, thought it had 'Some good bits but mostly commonplace'<sup>12</sup>, which, coming from Parry, is a bit of a nerve! But the work was taken up enthusiastically all around the country, especially in the north of England where all the choral societies clamoured to do it, and it was very quickly included in the Three Choirs Festival, though it was 1920 before it was possible to put it on in Worcester. It had four more airings at the Three Choirs before the Second World War, but surprisingly it then wasn't done again at the Three Choirs until I did it at Worcester in 1975. It's only had four more performances until this year, which seems incredibly neglectful when you think that *Gerontius* has had 40 performances at the Three Choirs in the period we're talking about, *The Kingdom* more than a dozen, and even *The Apostles* has had eight, despite the expense of putting on that work.

### **Personal memories**

When I first went to Leeds I inherited in the parish church a super choir - huge - and they were terrific at singing 'the big stuff', as they say, and I was surprised when I looked into the library to see that they had *Great is the Lord*. But I was equally surprised to discover that they hadn't been singing it, especially as my predecessor was Melville Cooke,<sup>13</sup> who had known Elgar. I said 'we must learn this' and they loved it and they gave a superb performance of it. Immediately after that, at Evensong, I was accosted by a certain Professor of Music who came into the organ loft and said 'If you're doing that sort of rubbish you can say goodbye to your career - anyway the man was a Roman Catholic'. I was so shattered that I didn't have the courage of my convictions to do that work again for a long time afterwards. That was not a nice experience, but then I worked with choirs in Halifax and Bradford and the Leeds Philharmonic, either conducting or preparing them. It was a great experience to work with Malcolm Sargent because he, I felt, had Elgar at his finger tips in a way that perhaps some of the more renowned Elgar conductors haven't.

10 Letter from Rosa Newmarch, 6 February 1921, EBM letter 6118.

11 Letter from Delius to his wife, 2 October 1912, published in Lionel Carley, *Delius A life in letters* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988).

12 Parry diary, 28 November 1912.

13 Melville Cook (1912-1993) was born in Gloucester, where he stayed until 1935, firstly as a chorister and then as assistant organist at the Cathedral under Herbert Sumsion. In 1937 he became the youngest choirmaster and organist to be appointed at Leeds parish church. In 1956 he became organist and choirmaster at Hereford Cathedral, and in 1966 he emigrated to Canada to become organist and choirmaster at churches in Winnipeg and Toronto, returning to England on the death of his wife in 1986.

I remember that one of the first things that I heard performed in Yorkshire by a particular Choral Society conducted by a certain knight of the realm was *The Music Makers*, and there were all sorts of peculiar things happening: the ending I thought was one of the silliest things I ever heard. As you know it dies away to nothing, and so this conductor had the choir all humming away like anything - but then half a dozen people on each side put a very distinct 's' on 'dreams'. It was an extraordinary way to end the piece.

*The Music Makers* appeared a lot of times while I was in Yorkshire and I got to know it very well, and on one occasion Herbert Sumsion<sup>14</sup> came to Leeds to play the organ for me (I had been his assistant at Gloucester) when we were giving *The Music Makers*. I thought it had gone well, but afterwards he said: 'I must talk to you about this - you're doing it too fast. You've got to give Elgar shape and breadth.' That's something which I've always remembered. As I got to know him better the pupil/teacher relationship ceased and we became good friends, and he told me more and more about things that Elgar himself used to do: things that he recommended that I take on board, and there were a lot of things of interest in *The Music Makers*.

I also remember, as a youth, playing the piano and filling in for all the instruments that were missing on a Tuesday afternoon at the Gloucester Orchestral Society. This was used regularly, with a bit of professional stiffening, to accompany the Choral Society, and I remember when they were doing *The Music Makers* and things weren't going well at the final rehearsal. Now Herbert Sumsion never had lost his temper in any way, but he could be very firm, and on this occasion he just said 'I think it would be better if we started from the choral entry'. In other words, the whole of the Prelude was abandoned because they couldn't play it! But he didn't lose his rag, he just said 'I think it would be better ...', so in the evening we had a chord of F minor and off we went.

### Poem and setting

O'Shaughnessy's poem appealed to Elgar because it matched his own belief that by living apart from other men and, said Elgar, 'placing his lever in heaven' the artist could 'move the world'.<sup>15</sup> In recent years some of Elgar's most ardent admirers think they have found in this poem sinister overtones of colonialism and class-distinction. I've even heard the word 'fascism' used by some to describe the sentiments of the text. Yes, the word 'empire' is quoted and, true, there is a hint of militarism from time to time. You might even raise the eyebrows at 'the soldier, the king and the peasant': but the poem is only dealing in the language and expressing the opinions of the time. In reality these are only passing comments in a poem that's basically concerned with the particular feelings that Elgar needed to express. Are we really prepared to turn our backs on an artistic creation which is merely expressing those feelings in the language of the time? If so, we would be depriving ourselves of some of the most wonderful music we have.

In any event this music must surely rank with Elgar's finest creations, and provides ample proof of his strong belief that music and the arts in general can be of more benefit to the human race than the building of empires. The work comes from a vintage period of his creative life, and in some ways can be seen as the culmination of his period of 'dreaming'; indeed originally when

14 Herbert Whitton (John) Sumsion (1899-1995) was born in Gloucester, was a chorister there, and became a pupil of Herbert Brewer. He was Professor of Harmony at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia from 1926 to 1928, returning to England to take up the post of Organist at Gloucester on the death of Brewer, retiring in 1967. He recorded Elgar's Organ Sonata for EMI in Gloucester Cathedral in 1965.

15 Elgar's Birmingham University Lecture, 16 March 1905, paraphrased from David Hume (1711-1776), *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Elgar started work he gave the work the title of 'The Dreamers'. There can be little doubt that the autobiographical nature of the poem appealed strongly to Elgar: just as he'd enshrined the soul of people in other works such as the *Enigma Variations*, so in this instance he was prepared to bare his own soul by quoting themes from earlier works. We needn't dwell on that, and there's nothing wrong with it anyway: Mozart, Wagner and Richard Strauss did much the same thing. These quotations just add to the picturesqueness of the score: they shouldn't dominate our thoughts. Incidentally, he seems to be quoting from the Cello Concerto at times, despite the fact that it hadn't yet been written. And then, of course, he borrows other themes from incomplete or scarcely known works. For the passage 'A wondrous thing of our dreaming' (Fig.42) Elgar digs into an unfinished string quartet of 1907 to find the accompanying violin arabesques, and for a little moment between Figs.47 and 48 you get the gentlemen singing 'our dreams shall become' and the ladies echoing it. He took that from a little fanciful duo called 'He and she'.

Elgar wasn't always entirely faithful to the structure of the poem. O'Shaughnessy's balance between past and future is very important: for instance 'for each age is a dream that is dying or one that is coming to birth'. Now Elgar preferred to emphasise the 'dream that is dying' rather than something which is coming to birth, so he repeated the opening lines of the poem at this point. Of course we accept that he would put his own interpretation onto the poem. He knew perfectly well what O'Shaughnessy was writing, I'm sure of that. It was that sense of progress. But Elgar wanted to use the poem in a different sort of way: he preferred to look back, rather than forward, and so he brings back the opening lines (he called it the 'artist theme') several times, like bookends to each of the stanzas

The whole work with one short exception is on the flat side of tonality. There's only one section which has a key signature containing a sharp, starting at Fig.44 with 'the soldier, the king, and the peasant', and arriving firmly in G major at Fig.46 with 'till our dream shall become their present, and their work in the world be done'. It is, perhaps, significant that this Elgar's solitary glimpse of a sharp tonality coincides with O'Shaughnessy's solitary glimpse of the 'present'. And it may surprise you to know that there is more choral writing in *The Music Makers* than there is in *Gerontius*. There are more notes to sing, by a long, long way, and the music for the chorus is much more difficult and complex.

As always with Elgar, the score is crammed with detailed markings: there's so much that he's asking the choir to do. Even in the first bars of the choral entry you find *sostenuto*, *piano*, *pianissimo*, *poco ritardando*, *a tempo*, and little *crescendos* and *diminuendos*. Then there are all these staccato marks. Elgar littered his score with these things for choir and orchestra and so often they are ignored. It's these sorts of details that we ought to observe otherwise we're not really doing service to Elgar. Just think of all the time that Elgar, with his poor eyesight, spent writing in all these fine details - for us to ignore!

In his phrasing he's just as specific, and it's obvious that he's thought deeply about O'Shaughnessy's text and how he can use it to express what it means to him. Just to dwell on the words 'dream' and 'dreamers' offers us a master-class in how to sing not only with expression but with intelligence. In two-syllable words like 'dreamers' it's clear that he doesn't want people to sing dreamers: he puts a phrase mark over dreamers and that can only indicate that he wants it to be sung smoothly with the first syllable stressed. Then you get onto the word 'dream' and a magical moment (Fig.21) when he asks for a comma in the orchestra as well as the choir before the word 'dream'. For the conductor it's a bit of a minefield of course, with the risk that someone is going to sing or play too soon. A similar little comma comes between 'yet' and 'we' at Fig.13. They are important. I have heard a conductor, who shall be nameless, say 'forget all those commas, cross

them out, they're irrelevant', but that's a terrible thing to do because they're part and parcel of Elgar's style.

Good phrasing requires good choral technique, but it's the simple things in choral singing that are often the most effective. Take the end of the third stanza, for example, (Fig.37), where Elgar brings back the 'we are the dreamer of dreams'. So often you find in performances an enormous gap between 'dreamers' and 'of dreams', which has got to be wrong because Elgar would never leave you with the chord on the second syllable of 'dreamers' unresolved. It's also seems odd to sing 'we are the dreamers' - big breath - 'of dreams'. It seems strange, but it's just one of the many things that have become almost traditional to do. There are good musical reasons apart from the sense of the words not to make a gap here and, after all, it's easy to get a big choir to sound as if it *never* has to take a breath providing you have a disciplined breathing pattern. If you arrange to stagger breathing between the voices it's perfectly possible to go on almost endlessly.

Then, in the passage where the slow movement of the violin concerto appears quietly in the background (Fig.76), the choir have to sing 'in our dreaming' and then in a completely different character for 'in our singing'. The contrast has to be done almost facially rather than by thinking about producing a different quality of tone. More of a smiling tone for 'in our singing', where Elgar marks *diminuendo molto*, *tenuto* and *dolce*, all that in one bar: it obviously meant something very special to him.

It's unusual to find unaccompanied passages in Elgar's major choral works as, generally speaking, he doesn't trust people to sing in tune and so often he supports them, unwisely in many ways, with clarinets and bassoons. He would have known that Mendelssohn, like many composers of his period, used clarinets and bassoons to take the place of the organ continuo. Elgar tended to use those instruments to back up the voices where he felt they couldn't cope. But at 'world losers and world forsakers' (Fig.12) he lets the choir sing completely on its own, and these three bars include the lovely phrase 'on whom the pale moon gleams', which goes from *piano* to a *subito pianissimo*. That's terribly difficult to achieve. I know from experience that to get choirs to sing that *pianissimo* suddenly is almost impossible, so what I do is to get them to crescendo on the three notes before ('on whom the') and then drop back down to where they started, so everybody thinks they've heard a wonderful *pianissimo*!

But to get back to Elgar's mistrust of unaccompanied choir: there are only four completely unaccompanied passages in the whole work, and none of them is more than four bars long. At Fig.78, for example ('for we are afar with the dawning'), it will appear from the vocal score that it's unaccompanied, but in the full score he's added clarinets and bassoons, presumably because he felt that the choir wouldn't be able to come in accurately having sung a unison 'C' on the previous page and having to sing another 'C' on the next page straight afterwards: something quite beyond their capabilities! The chords quite spoil the effect, and Herbert Sumsion said to me, 'If your choir is good they don't need those chords. Do what Elgar did: take them out'. I never have used them. Elgar was quite used to doing that sort of thing, and there are many other cases as well where he couldn't trust the choirs.<sup>16</sup>

Strangely enough, immediately after this, at Fig.79 ('out of the infinite morning'), he leaves the choir unaccompanied, and the sopranos can very easily lose pitch on their major third on the 'in' of 'infinite' if they don't place the vowel sound with care. It's one of those instances where the

16 Editor's note: Elgar wasn't afraid to ask for help at the last moment, either. A letter to Charles Perkins, organist of the Birmingham Festival, written on the day of the first performance of *The Apostles*, reads: 'I shall be so much obliged if you will 'help' the chorus (soft 8ft but something they can hear) at [167] & onwards if you think necessary throughout the Bass solo.'

interval between 'Bb' and 'D' has to be greater than usual.

Having said all that, Elgar writes wonderful and very difficult part songs, which are, of course, unaccompanied, so he obviously thought of the massed choirs at festival time as a rather different sort of animal to the choirs which would have sung the part songs.

Another thing that Herbert Sumsion told me comes at the very end of the first stanza, leading into Fig.15. Here Elgar was insistent that the orchestra was taken off and the chorus were left singing '[ever it] seems' - their pause doesn't come along until the end of the bar. So there's a moment where you just hear this lovely soft chord, then on the upbeat where I bring the orchestra in, that's where they should come off.

A conductor is often accused of letting the orchestra play too loud and drowning the singers. People tend to forget that Elgar knew what he was doing. Frequently you'll find *fortissimo* for the orchestra and the choir marked *mezzo-forte*, so obviously he wanted the orchestra to dominate. It's all part of the sound world which is very special to Elgar. Often it's just impossible to get the brass to play down to a level to match the choir marking - you wouldn't even ask. It must be intended as it's written in such a way that you can't do anything else. That's just something that happens with this work or with any of Elgar's choral writing. People say the orchestra's too loud and don't stop to think about what Elgar's wanting to say. Mind you, they never complain if the choir's too loud.

A further example comes at the start of the third stanza, 'We, in the ages lying' (Fig.27), where he marks the choir right down to *piano*, getting softer, yet with the orchestra marked *mezzo-piano* with *crescendos* and *diminuendos*. Do you know that's the only place in this work where Elgar uses *mezzo-piano*? As a rule he doesn't use *mezzo-pianos*. I assure you that if you look through *Gerontius* you won't find a *mezzo-piano* anywhere. This can make things difficult for the conductor as there's a long way from *piano* to *mezzo-forte*: you're either soft or loud or a little bit in the middle with Elgar.

The core of the work, in a sense, is the fifth stanza, beginning 'They had no vision amazing', and not merely because it is the fifth of nine stanzas. Here we come to the famous juxtaposition of keys that Elgar loved so much, from G major to Eb major. It appears in the *Enigma* from variation VIII (W.N.) to variation IX (Nimrod), and again in the First Symphony from the end of the scherzo to the beginning of the slow movement. You find it, even, in one of his earliest piano pieces, *Rosemary*. But in *The Music Makers*, although the key signature changes precisely at the start of the contralto solo (Fig.49), the music doesn't settle into its new tonality until the arrival of the Nimrod theme itself (Fig.51). This and the coda of the Second Symphony are the two main themes here, though, if you listen carefully, references to other themes ('the soldier, the king, and the peasant') are still floating around, as if Elgar is saying that it is 'they [who] had no divine foreshowing of the land'.

We know, of course, that the 'Nimrod' theme was brought in at this point ('but on one man's soul it has broken, a light that shall not depart;') in gratitude to Jaeger for his help and support. I remember training the Leeds Philharmonic choir for Malcolm Sargent on the day that Winston Churchill died, and we happened to be rehearsing this section. Do you know, there was hardly a dry eye in the place? It was the most extraordinarily moving moment.

Thinking of Malcolm Sargent, there's a moment (two bars before Fig.81) where Elgar leaves out the tenors from the ensemble, presumably to give them time to gather steam to sing their solo line 'in spite of their human scorning'. This seems very strange, as it means dividing the altos, not in the best part of their voice, to carry some important notes. It's strange, because the tenor lead isn't particularly difficult or demanding. Unashamedly I do what Sargent did, which is to take out the second alto notes and get the tenors to sing them. It's very much in their range and then they

can go down instead of up to the word 'cry' with the basses, and be confident of their starting note for their solo lead. And the balance works so much better, so it's a gain all round.

A final word about choral singing, to stress the importance of the choir turning their pages three or four bars before Figs. 78 and 103 (not a big ask to memorise) thereby avoiding the distraction and noise of page turning. So often I have experienced performances where the atmosphere has been lost and singers unprepared for the next task because of this simple procedure not being adopted. Indeed, singers should be watchful of such moments even when they have nothing to sing over the page: Novello have made rather a habit of putting page turns in moments of silence, for example, before Figs. 85 and 100.

'A singer who sings no more' marks the end of O'Shaughnessey's poem, but not of Elgar's setting. It's not an adequate ending as far as he was concerned, and he seems to feel that O'Shaughnessey's ending is rather dismissive, so for one last time we hear 'We are the music makers, and we are the dreamers of dreams', the double basses providing the sole orchestra support into the last bar, and then the choir dying away absolutely to nothing, *niente*.

He closed his manuscript with a quotation from the 16<sup>th</sup> century poet Torquato Tasso, which he'd used before: 'Bramo assai, poco spero, nulla chieggio' ('I long for much, I hope for little, I ask for nothing'). As Michael Kennedy has said, this music is emanating from a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, adding that the work is central to a full understanding of Elgar's complex and enigmatic personality.

*The conductor Dr. Donald Hunt, OBE, was organist at Worcester Cathedral from 1976 to 1996. A Vice-President of the Elgar Society, he has been deeply involved with the music of Elgar all his life, and was the driving force behind the 150<sup>th</sup> Elgar Anniversary Festival at Worcester in 2007. His Worcester Cathedral recordings of Elgar's organ music (Regis RRC1001) and church music, including 'Great is the Lord' (Helios CDH55147) are both currently available.*

## Reactions to *The Music Makers*

### Martin Bird

The appearance of *The Music Makers* was an important musical event. It was the first major choral work to come from Elgar's pen since *The Apostles* of 1906, and it marked the return of Elgar to the Birmingham Musical Festival. Although Richter had performed the Symphony and *Gerontius* at the 1909 Festival, Elgar himself had gone to Birmingham only on the Tuesday afternoon to hear the Symphony in the evening, and Alice had joined him next morning for *Gerontius*. They had returned to Plâs Gwyn after lunch. Furthermore, *The Music Makers* commission of 1912 was the first he had accepted from any English festival since *The Kingdom*.

So, in addition to the normal press coverage, I would have expected to find plentiful letters of congratulations from his friends preserved at the Birthplace. Such letters exist in abundance for all the major works that preceded it, but there are none for *The Music Makers*, not even from its dedicatee, Nicholas Kilburn. From the microfilms made in the 1960s by the Worcester Record Office one can see how Carice had organised the Elgar correspondence: each of his friends merited his own foolscap folder and, in addition, major works each had their own folder which included any letters of congratulations received. Yet there is no folder for *The Music Makers*, and, strangely, no letters dating from the months around the first performance in the friends' folders even though many, including the Kilburns, the Stuart-Wortleys and Frank Schuster, were present. It is as if a concerted effort has been made not to preserve the correspondence, as was done with the letters from Windflower to Elgar, and, more understandably, the correspondence between Elgar and Alice.<sup>1</sup>

Donald Hunt has already referred to the reactions of Delius and Parry in his essay. Philip Heseltine, better known as the composer Peter Warlock, was also present at the first performance, and ...

... did not like it at all: it all seemed to me "sound and fury signifying nothing". The enormous number of quotations from his own works, and the obscure references to persons and things which do not in the least matter struck me as being quite absurd. Elgar himself looked ill and care-worn, and conducted in a very listless manner, though at times a sort of nervous energy seemed to come over him for a minute or two. I can't imagine how people can follow his beat.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite the lack of surviving letters, we may glean an impression of the reactions of Elgar's friends from their writings elsewhere. Alfred Littleton ...

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1 Though at least one slipped through the net, written to Alice in May 1902 on the back of a letter from Henry Ettling.

2 Letter from Philip Heseltine to Colin Taylor, 2 October 1912, quoted in Barry Smith, 'Elgar and Warlock', *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (March 2001), 7.

... heard the work produced at Birmingham, and he had a talk with R. H. Wilson - the Birmingham Choir-trainer - about it. Wilson told Littleton that both he & the Chorus were enchanted with the work, & that during rehearsals the Choir seemed to be quite excited about it.<sup>3</sup>

Ivor Atkins rather hedged his bets. He ...

... went over to Birmingham for the first performance ... Muriel Foster was in magnificent form, as were the chorus and orchestra, and my father told me that it was one of the best performances that he had heard at any Birmingham Triennial Festival. The concert was, however, made even more memorable for him, for in the second part Sibelius conducted the first performance of his Symphony No. 4. My father told me that this performance started for him his intense interest in the Finnish composer's work, which was to remain with him all his life.<sup>4</sup>

Robin Legge was also present in his capacity as Music Critic of the *Daily Telegraph*.

I do not find on one hearing of "The Music-makers" that its note is so much of sadness as of unsatisfied yearning. The composer seems to long himself to be convinced that the music makers are what the poet represents them to be; if they are, then surely here is a case of the most glorious optimism ... Where the poet speaks in general terms, Elgar appears to look at the personal aspect of the matter. The music is often of exquisite beauty, but ... its very mood is against it - this mood of yearning, alternating with a confident mood of massive power, and finally bringing a return to the prevailing lack of confidence, as if the subject were greater than the composer could translate into terms of music.<sup>5</sup>

But what of Nicholas Kilburn? He had been offered the dedication in February 1912 ...

When Saint came in to lunch I kept very solemn & quiet & he looked rather grey & tired after his morning office work. I told him that there was a letter from Lady Elgar about The Music Makers & I said who do you think it is dedicated to - which is of course bad grammar but a faithful record of my conversational style - he looked up so innocently & said "I don't know". "You" I shouted. He didn't seem to believe it for a moment & then it was lovely to see all the greyness & tiredness go out of his face. .... but he will write to you himself.<sup>6</sup>

... and Elgar had sent him a vocal score in August.

My dear Sir Edward

I have just returned from a three weeks holiday, & with much pride (of the proper sort!) I find here "The Music Makers", for which, with most hearty greetings, I kiss your dear hand. 'Tis delightful to discover in it ones beloved friends of past-times. The idea is a charming one, and greatly pleases me.<sup>7</sup>

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3 Letter from Henry Clayton to William Hannan, 8 November 1912, published in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers, Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 768.

4 Wulstan Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1984), 241.

5 *Daily Telegraph*, 2 October, 1912.

6 Letter from Alice Kilburn to Elgar, 20 February 1912, Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 6514.

7 Letter from Nicholas Kilburn to Elgar, 31 August 1912, EBM letter 6510.

Kilburn scheduled performances with a number of his choirs in the north of England, and on 21 November Alice reported a 'Very successful performance of "Music Makers" at Sunderland under the beloved Saint'.<sup>8</sup> Elgar had sent its dedicatee a telegram, saying: 'Love to you, and best wishes to your chorus.'<sup>9</sup> On Christmas Eve Kilburn wrote to Alice:

... I have desired to tell him and you that my choral folk love the Music Makers. All three choirs alike who have now tasted it.

The strong vitality and charm of the music appeals to them, & the interest is manifestly sincere and alive. 'Tis delightful to find difficulties which do not dismay, but give zest; stimulating even the stodgiest!

Whole tone scales, the obliquely intertwined tune, and the quotations, all a quaintness and a delight. With what genuine fitness of feeling dear "Gerontius" themes here take their place.<sup>10</sup>

The following March Kilburn conducted it again, this time in Bishop Auckland with Lady Maud Warrender as the soloist.

My dear Sir Edward.

Why I wonder have you been constantly in my mind during the last week or two? 'Tis not easy to say. Of course 'The Music Makers' & I have been at close quarters, & the best in me has gone forth in an earnest & loving endeavour to present its message, with all honours. You are aware I think that Lady Maud generously came to help us. She sang excellently well & had evidently made a serious study of the part. If perchance you meet she will tell you all abt. it.

One is never entirely satisfied, yet even I may say that much was done to make clear what the music means. Especially did I strive to impress on all concerned the importance of a subdued mystical treatment of certain parts of the work. Sing & play, I said, as though you were in dreamland; then all will be well. I mean at "Our dream shall become" -, "In our dreaming & singing" - & "Oh man it must ever be", & at the choral commencement, & ending of the work.<sup>11</sup>

It was more than a week before Elgar replied:

Your letter of the 16<sup>th</sup> - most kind & beautiful - deserved a better answer than I was capable of writing then or am capable of making now, - so ill have I been & so sick am I still - alas!

I thank you for all the loving care of your Ode and I was happy to know you had that rare creature with you at B. Auckland. Bless her!<sup>12</sup>

*Continued on page 35...*

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8 Alice Elgar diary, 21 November 1912.

9 Telegram from Elgar to Nicholas Kilburn, EBM press cuttings.

10 Letter from Nicholas Kilburn to Alice Elgar, 24 December 1912, EBM letter 9202.

11 Letter from Nicholas Kilburn to Elgar, 16 March 1913, EBM letter 6526/6495.

12 Letter from Elgar to Nicholas Kilburn, 26 March 1913, Percy Young transcription, EBM letter 6470.

## Edward Elgar - a medical enigma?

### Dr John Harcup OBE, MRCS, LRCP, MRCPGP

For a long time I have been fascinated by all the differing views about Edward Elgar – he has been dubbed a depressive, a manic depressive, a neurotic, a hypochondriac and a man with mercurial moods. Some or all of these are possibilities, but I think he has been ‘given a bad press’ and this paper is an attempt to set the record straight as best one can with hindsight. In doing this I have tried to enter the mind of this exceptionally talented musician and understand how he reacted to the medical events which assailed him.

His mother, Anne Elgar’s, assessment of her son, aged 17, in 1874 was: ‘Edward is nervous, sensitive and kind. He displays no vulgar frame of mind’. Biographer Jerrold Northrop Moore, in a radio broadcast, put this in another way: ‘Elgar had one less skin than the average person’. But, if he were not such a sensitive soul would we ever have heard *The Dream of Gerontius*, the Cello Concerto or the Second Symphony?

W.H. (Billy) Reed wrote about ‘the complex personality of Elgar’. Other authors have expressed their views; Diana McVeagh summed him up thus: ‘He tended to exaggerate and was subject to swiftly changing moods of dejection and effervescence. His approach to life was always emotional not intellectual.’ Rosa Burley, headmistress of The Mount school where he taught in Malvern, described a shy, frustrated, unhappy, moody man: ‘Mr Elgar was a puzzling person’ she wrote, ‘I have never known anyone who changed so abruptly and completely’. Another biographer asked, ‘Was he a manic depressive?’ and answered, ‘Not in the same way as Schumann was. Every great artist has an element of manic-depression in them.’ Those who suffer from what is now called Bipolar Affective Disorder (previously Manic Depression), see their condition mirrored in the life and works of Edward Elgar. This is not surprising, but is this correct and unbiased?

I have witnessed mania characterised by high mood, rapid speech, physical over-activity coupled with ideas of self importance and Elgar does not fit into this picture with his sense of insecurity and feelings of inadequacy. His low, flat periods usually followed times of overwork, high activity and composing to deadlines. This is a natural reaction and not a pathological one. I shall explore this later.

For evidence of his sense of humour we need only to look at his letters to Jaeger, his editor at Novello, and the sketch of him on a bicycle entitled ‘Jaegernaut’ or illustrations on postcards (demons over Worcester Cathedral for *Gerontius*) and the ‘japes’ as he called them, enjoyed with architect Troyte Griffith. We know from letters to his daughter, Carice, and his relationship with Dr Buck, a GP in Settle, Yorkshire, that he had an amazingly quick wit. Someone hearing his overture *Cockaigne* commented ‘Cocaine, I thought that was an anaesthetic. Let’s hope the overture won’t have that effect its hearers. If it does why not call it chloroform?’ To which Elgar instantly replied

‘Ether will do!’<sup>1</sup>

Carice recalled: ‘It is impossible to say that there was anything wrong with him – if something favourable happened digestion was forgotten ... terrible headache but if something exciting happened the headache would be quickly forgotten’.<sup>2</sup> According to Percy Young ‘He was a hypochondriac and subject to disturbing mood changes’. In other words, he was a man of mercurial moods.

Headmistress and friend, Rosa Burley, writes about his wife, Alice’s, deep devotion to him resulting in ‘far too much fuss about quite trifling, and indeed, imaginary ailments ... aggravated in this case by a sense of grievance over non-recognition’.<sup>3</sup> Was he really obsessed by imaginary illnesses? Is there a hint of hypochondriasis about him? Typical of this type of personality is the fact that the patient becomes close friends with his doctors in order to get quick reassurance from them. Certainly Elgar became friendly with at least three of his doctors – Dr East of Malvern, Dr Moore-Ede in Worcester and especially Sir Maurice Abbott Anderson of Harley Street, but there the similarity ends.

The chief trait of a hypochondriac is, according to a book by a wife who had to live with one, the unending succession of different illnesses, self diagnosed, one after the other. As soon as one malady is sorted out the patient decides he has something else wrong with him. He is an impatient patient and cannot wait to get the ‘all clear’ and reassurance from the medical profession.<sup>4</sup> According to one medical textbook, the most important characteristic is that the ‘patient’s concern is out of all proportion and is unjustified’. With Elgar the same illnesses were repeated throughout his life, sometimes in a pattern. He did not jump from one illness to a different one in unending succession. Like each one of us, he needed reassurance and, in his case, an opinion that nothing was going to affect his wish to compose ‘great music’, as he confided to Rosa Burley.

Wulstan Atkins commented that ‘he had a multi-faceted personality’ ... and that ‘everyone perceived him differently’. Were all these friends and observers exaggerating the traits of his personality? Diagnoses and treatments have changed since and even during Elgar’s lifetime. There are no medical records that I could discover and we are left with the observations of others, including his doting, anxious, wife and devoted daughter. Sometimes the man himself gives tantalising glimpses of his illnesses and feelings in letters and diary entries. Also, were the diagnoses correct or was Elgar a victim of medical mistakes and the paucity of medical knowledge at the time? Lastly, are we just basking in the blessing of hindsight?

Elgar’s first big, long-lasting medical problem was tonsillitis. This features in a letter he wrote to Dr Buck of Settle in Yorkshire, whom he had met at a British Medical Association meeting in Worcester in 1882. Both shared a love of music which forged a bond between them. Elgar’s words written in November 1883 are, we now know, amazingly prophetic. ‘I am better now, but I have never quite got rid of my throat and I do not think I ever shall as I really cannot stay in long enough to affect a radical cure’.<sup>5</sup> All his life he was plagued by recurrent colds and upper respiratory tract infections. Some of us are prone to viral infections whilst others sail through life rarely suffering from these illnesses. Elgar is in the former category. Though it is known that

1 W. H. Reed, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1938), 61.

2 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 135.

3 Rosa Burley and Frank Carruthers, *Edward Elgar, the record of a friendship*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972) 85.

4 Clare Chambers, *In a Good Light* (London: Arrow Books, 2005).

5 Letter from Elgar to Charles Buck, 11 November 1883, Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 10473.

stress lowers the efficiency of the body's immune system, it does not mean that these illnesses are necessarily psycho-somatic – a trap into which some biographers have fallen. On 30 March 1888 Elgar wrote to Buck: 'I have been ill for a long time off & on; got a severe cold which has, as usual played the plague with my b---ls.'<sup>6</sup> This is one of the many instances where he has a cold and a rare hint that he suffers from recurrent bowel problems. However, at the end of his life, members of the Worcestershire Club hid behind their newspapers when he entered as they were tired of hearing about his 'malfunctioning bowels'.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst staying with his elder sister Lucy in the autumn of 1888 Elgar sustained an eye injury which plagued him for years. Northrop Moore mentions this but nothing more. The details of what happened have only recently come to light in a 1937 interview with his brother-in-law, Charlie Pipe.<sup>8</sup> 'While Elgar lived with us he had a collie dog, given to him by Dr Buck of Settle and he allowed the animal to sleep in his bedroom. One night I heard a peculiar noise coming from his room and went to find Elgar with his hand to his eyes. It appears that the dog had jumped on his bed and had pawed his eyes. There was anxiety for some time that Elgar might lose his sight, but it all ended happily.'

Elgar sustained a corneal abrasion – a scratch from the dog's claw on the 'window' of the eye – resulting in a wound which could open up later at intervals, causing pain and inflammation according to an eye surgeon who I consulted. Had the damage been deeper, resulting in an ulcer, this would require medical attention and heal leaving an opaque white scar which would interfere with his vision. He did not appear to seek medical advice and his sight was only affected intermittently later. There is no mention of corneal scarring, nor any evidence of this in photographs, paintings or descriptions of him.

When he became engaged to Caroline Alice Roberts on 22 September 1888 there is no mention of the eye injury. He only refers to the original injury once, in a letter to Dr Buck dated a year later: 'but my eye (the one that was hurt) suddenly took cold & got inflamed & we have been stuck here ... with a doctor looking after the optic. I am glad to say I am allowed to read and to write today and we may be allowed to move tomorrow ...'.<sup>9</sup> 'Took cold' suggests a running eye due to inflammation. The recurrent eye problems crop up in the diaries written, in the main, by Alice after their marriage. An eye surgeon assured me that the diagnosis would be difficult without staining the cornea and viewing it with a slit lamp which was not invented until 1903. He stressed that the condition could recur spontaneously without any reason, producing severe pain and a watery discharge which would last for several days, starting usually at night. Here, Elgar describes running, that is inflamed, watery eyes; not bacterial 'sticky' ones. This fits the facts as we now know them. Rest and soothing eye drops were the only treatment.

Northrop Moore is sceptical about Elgar's eye problem: 'perhaps it was only coincidence that this particular form of ill health should show itself just when he could not see how to go on with his big composition, or how to return to London without it.' For this biographer his eye problem was a psycho-somatic one, but because of the eye injury my eye surgeon felt that it was very doubtful if these episodes were psycho-somatic. I was also informed that Elgar's eye problems could have been exacerbated by eye strain brought about by long hours of concentration when composing and also by conducting when his eyes were darting rapidly between the orchestra and the score.

6 Letter from Elgar to Charles Buck, 30 March 1888, EBM letter 10502.

7 Personal communication, Dr Donald Hunt, retired organist of Worcester Cathedral.

8 *Worcester Evening News*, 14 August 1937.

9 Letter from Elgar to Charles Buck, 6 October 1889, EBM letter 10518.

Other possible factors were incorrect refraction of his spectacle lenses, and unequal balance in the eye muscles, all of which contribute to eye strain. Sophisticated lenses were not available then to correct some of these problems. Another factor was the colour of artificial light at that time. It is now known that yellow light, as from gas or tungsten electric light, is not visually efficient or easy on the eyes. I have experienced light from 100 year old light bulbs in a museum in Dundee; the illumination was poor and the very yellow light made close work difficult.

At Forli, his home in Malvern Link, his letter to Dr Buck on 20 December 1891 mentions the recurrent and on-going tonsil problems: 'Here we flourish: except that I got a quinsy in the summer, & it has been an annoyance ever since, and is now.'<sup>10</sup> Quinsy is the old lay term for an abscess on the tonsils. The episode had occurred towards the end of August: 'E in much pain Young Dr Weir came at 10 p.m.!'<sup>11</sup> 'E very much pain Dr Weir 12-30 lanced the throat (poultrife held my head)'.<sup>12</sup>

1894 brought more dramatic throat problems according to the diaries: 'E. began to feel something with his throat. After dinner we looked & were frightened. Sent Mima & Rebecca to Dr. Bookless, he was not at home. We then sent them for Dr. East who came about 10 P.M. & said we must urgently use remedies at once. A. did them every 2 or 3 hours all night.'<sup>13</sup> This was tonsillitis in the days before antibiotics, so recovery was slow; it took about a month to resolve with the doctor visiting most days. Dr East became a family friend; this was more than the usual doctor-patient relationship. They shared musical interests in addition to cycling and snuff-taking, something which no doctor would encourage today!

Toothache also plagued him on occasions and there is one graphic, detailed, dental episode in October 1902, 'E. badsley toothache - Mrs. Dixon telephoned to her brother & he came & saw him & then fessed E. in a cab & took him to dentist. E. had gas & the tooth out. E. conducted "Gerontius" all the time he was under gas -'.<sup>14</sup>

His eyes continued to plague him and in a letter to August Jaeger of Novello in December 1901 he wrote: 'My eyes. The doctor wants me to give up as much music writing as possible! So do the publishers – and the critix – and the public – and the other composers & so does Ed: Elgar'.<sup>15</sup>

In 1903 he was working hard on parts one and two of *The Apostles* for the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festival, and was desperate to get to and finish part three. However, as he wrote from Craeg Lea, his second home in Malvern, on 28 June: 'I have been seeing my London doctor & my eyes are again in trouble - he forbids more work: now I propose to the Birmingham people that they produce Pts I & II of the Apostles - this portion is complete in itself & may well stand alone.'<sup>16</sup> His eye problems resulted in *The Apostles* ending with the Ascension.

Elgar's moods, which his wife invariably describes as 'E depressed', or 'E razer depressed' in their baby talk vocabulary, creep more frequently into the diary entries. However, later in the day or next day he is better. She seems to use the words every time Edward is 'down in the dumps' or feeling low. These are mood swings which last a few hours or a day or so at the most

10 Letter from Elgar to Charles Buck, 6 October 1889, EBM letter 10523.

11 Elgar diary, 31 August 1891, Martin Bird transcript.

12 Elgar diary, 2 September 1891, Martin Bird transcript.

13 Alice Elgar diary, 27 January 1894, Martin Bird transcript.

14 Alice Elgar diary, 5 October 1902, Martin Bird transcript.

15 Letter from Elgar to August Jaeger, 9 December 1901, EBM letter 8516.

16 Letter from Elgar to Henry Littleton, 28 June 1903, published in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers, Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 450.

and are not true clinical depression which lasts for three weeks or more. This could be a case of Brief Depressive Episodes, classed as a variant of classical depression in the Oxford Textbook of Medicine, where the depression lasts only one or more days as opposed to several months. But, Elgar's mood changes seem to last for hours. I believe there is more to Elgar's mental state than this. Let us compare his symptoms with those of a depressive:-

- **Altered sleep pattern.** There is no record of this in letters and diary entries.
- **Depressed mood present most of the day and every day.** The longest continuous length of his depression is 21 days which just makes it an episode of 'clinical' depression, but the diagnosis is flawed because of Alice's over use of this description. This is a far cry from the 6 to 9 months or more of untreated moderate to severe depression in the days before drug treatment.
- **Depressives cannot be cheered up or 'pull themselves together'.** Both wife and daughter said that they could change his moods.
- **Depression is worse in the mornings.** Elgar was moody anytime.
- **Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.** There are instances of this in his life which could be due to over-reaction to events and a letter which rules out a serious attempt. This will be discussed later.
- **Loss of confidence and self esteem.** Elgar started life with these traits, so this is the 'norm' for him.
- **Loss of interest or pleasure in activities usually giving pleasure.** He continues to walk, play golf and dabble in chemistry in his laboratory called The Ark in the grounds of Plâs Gwyn in Hereford except on one occasion.

Elgar does not fit into most of these criteria for depression.

Here is one of several examples of Alice's inappropriate use of the word 'depression' as the result of a natural reaction to an event or just being temporarily 'one degree under' and 'fed up'. 'E doing income tax', followed the next day by 'E still doing income tax. Raser depressed -'.<sup>17</sup> Don't we all feel like this when completing our tax returns? This is not depression!

Northrop Moore has pointed out 'Depression never affected Elgar's ability to write music'. Thus, his symptoms were not severe enough to affect his work and as such they do not fit into the description of classical depression as already set out. However, Elgar's mood swings correspond in part to what is now called the spectrum of Bipolar Affective Disorder as set out by American psychiatrist Kay Jamison in her book, *Touched with Fire*.<sup>18</sup> She states that much medical and scientific evidence points to one extreme containing the full blown cycle of seasonal mania and depression which does not stop the sufferer from functioning socially and professionally most of the time but can be life-disruptive leading to drug abuse and suicide in severe cases. At the other end of this spectrum is cyclothymia characterised by 'changes in mood, behaviour, thinking, sleep and energy levels'. Cyclothymia is not disabling but the episodes last longer than the diaries suggest. There was no treatment for this condition at that time, so Elgar was told 'Doctors advise golf' or recommended a change of environment and people. This resulted in trips to Italy or Llandrindod Wells and very often, visits to his sister, Pollie, at Stoke Prior.

Next to be considered is the vexed question of suicide. There is some evidence that Elgar

17 Alice Elgar diary, 21 May 1913 and 22 May 1913, Martin Bird transcript.

18 Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

had thoughts of suicide before or during 1902. The music critic Ernest Newman recalled how, at a dinner, Alice 'tactfully steered the conversation away from the topic of suicide that had suddenly arisen; she whispered to me that Edward was always talking of making an end of himself'.<sup>19</sup>

After the disastrous premiere of *Gerontius*, Elgar penned a letter to Jaeger: '[I] am at the end of my financial tether ... I really wish I were dead over & over again - but I dare not, for the sake of my relatives, do the job myself ... I've not read the papers yet re *Gerontius* and never shall now.'<sup>20</sup> Yet four paragraphs further on he continues 'We are very well & jolly ... I am riotously well thank goodness'. This is hardly a suicide note and he specifically rules out any serious attempts. This is borne out by Dr Herbert Sumsion, the organist at Gloucester Cathedral, who knew Elgar well and told Dr Donald Hunt, the organist at Worcester, that Elgar was often threatening suicide, but he put these threats down to an over-reaction to events. Another pointer to his suicidal thoughts is said to be hidden in the song cycle *Sea Pictures* according to 'Songs of Love and Death' by Patrick Little<sup>21</sup>, and the choice of the last poem, 'The Swimmer', written by the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon who shot himself. Did Elgar really share suicidal thoughts with this poet? Was he, as Patrick Little maintains, using it to overcome his frequent suicidal thoughts? This is possible but, perhaps, this theory is too tenuous?

This brings me to consider the artistic temperament. Some do not believe it exists. To others it is very real. I spoke to an experienced actress on the subject and her views were that the characteristics of the artistic temperament a person possesses are:

'A God-given acute imagination  
They are liable to highs & lows  
They have to find a creative outlet  
They have high expectations and an overblown sense of their own uniqueness  
They take risks and are always pushing against the boundaries  
Genius is inclusive in the artistic temperament'

Interestingly, the girls Elgar taught music in Malvern called him 'The Genius' and we can see him in some of these traits.

Dr Kay Jamison in *Touched with Fire* uses a raft of arguments 'for a compelling association, not to say actual overlap, between two temperaments – the artistic and the manic depressive ...'. She emphasises the importance of moods in 'igniting thought, changing perceptions ... and enabling transformation ...'. Manic depressive illness is, she maintains, a genetic disease, but I have failed to find evidence of this in the family. She traces a link going back to the Greeks and Aristotle between melancholia (depression), madness and inspiration. She quotes Dr W. H. Trethowan who looked at the lives of sixty composers and found that approximately half had a melancholic temperament and that mood disorders were the commonest and most important of part of their psychiatric problems.<sup>22</sup> Dr Adele Juda in a 1949 study found that 38 per cent of musicians had psychiatric problems, more than in the general population. At the end of her book Dr Jamison appends a list of writers, composers and poets with probable cyclothymia, major depression, or manic depressive

19 Ernest Newman, *Sunday Times*, 30 October 1955.

20 Letter from Elgar to August Jaeger, 26 October 1900, EBM letter 8446.

21 Patrick Little, 'Songs of Love and Death', *Elgar Society Journal* Vol.9, No.5, (March 1996), 168-175.

22 'Music and Mental Illness' in Macdonald Critchley and R. A. Henson, *Music and the Brain: Studies in the Neurology of Music*, (London: Heinemann, 1977).

illness; the name Edward Elgar is there amongst many others.

In March 1903 we have the first mention of lumbago in a letter to Jaeger: 'I have lumbago & am stuck in my chair ...'<sup>23</sup> The following day he reports: 'Lumbago, better; rheumatism, bad; temper, - evil; disposition, venomous; mind, - vacant'.<sup>24</sup> This symptom becomes more of a problem later in his life.

He became the victim of a 'badsley headache'<sup>25</sup> when the overture *In the South* was near to completion and, similarly, just before the first rehearsal of the *Introduction and Allegro* and the third *Pomp and Circumstance March* by the London Symphony Orchestra the diary records: 'E. out a little but very porsley. In evening so poorly we had a Dr. Sinclair<sup>26</sup> about 10.15 - A. slept on a sofa & tried to dokker E. up'.<sup>27</sup> These were not migraine with vomiting and visual disturbances, nor cluster headaches with long clear free periods. They occurred at times of stress. In 1906 he was under great pressure when composing *The Kingdom*, and he seemed to get headaches as soon as he started putting pen to paper in January of that year. At the beginning of February Alice had 'talked about many things to Mr. Alfred [Littleton] & about ½ part of "Apostles" music &c'.<sup>28</sup> - with eight months still to go before the first performance he was having doubts about his ability to complete the work in time - and a few days later we read: 'E. bad headache & saying must give up his work. A. dreadfully worried'.<sup>29</sup> On 6 April they sailed for America where Elgar had the orchestration of *The Kingdom*, the conducting of concerts and, not least, the heat to contend with: 'E. awoke very unwell & tired. Ordered carriage for church but was far too unwell'<sup>30</sup> is typical of the diary entries at this time. Back in Hereford she wrote despairingly 'Each day E. so unwell - & quite unfit for his work'.<sup>31</sup>

Later in the year he developed an infection of his eyelids. Alice graphically describes them as 'dreadfully bad, & swollen'.<sup>32</sup> Edward, jokingly, self-diagnoses this as 'gout in the eyelids' in a letter to Thomas Tertius Noble, the organist of York Minster.<sup>33</sup> This is rather a good description of the appearance of this condition. As a result, Alice writes that he was 'E. quite inclined to try Llandrindod [Wells]',<sup>34</sup> even though it was out of season. On 5 December they both made the rail journey to the Welsh spa in driving rain. They found the place 'deserted & wretched ... Shops shut. Cabs put away for summer'<sup>35</sup> and the pump room 'squalid'. Edward describes the cure in a letter: '... I was one of four or five others: we met like ghouls in the pumphoom at 7-30 a.m. in the dark:

23 Letter from Elgar to August Jaeger, 19 March 1903, EBM letter 8579.

24 Letter from Elgar to August Jaeger, 20 March 1903, EBM letter 8592.

25 Alice Elgar diary, 17 February 1904, Martin Bird transcript.

26 Dr. James Edward Sinclair, LRCP, LRCS (1850-1935).

27 Alice Elgar diary, 4 March 1905, Martin Bird transcript.

28 Alice Elgar diary, 1 February 1906, Martin Bird transcript.

29 Alice Elgar diary, 10 February 1906, Martin Bird transcript.

30 Alice Elgar diary, 29 April 1906, Martin Bird transcript.

31 Alice Elgar diary, 29 May 1906, Martin Bird transcript.

32 Alice Elgar diary, 2 December 1906, Martin Bird transcript.

33 Letter from Elgar to Thomas Tertius Noble, 22 December 1906, published in Percy Young, *Alice Elgar, Enigma of a Victorian Lady*, (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978), 159-160.

34 Alice Elgar diary, 4 December 1906, Martin Bird transcript.

35 Alice Elgar diary, 5 December 1906, Martin Bird transcript.

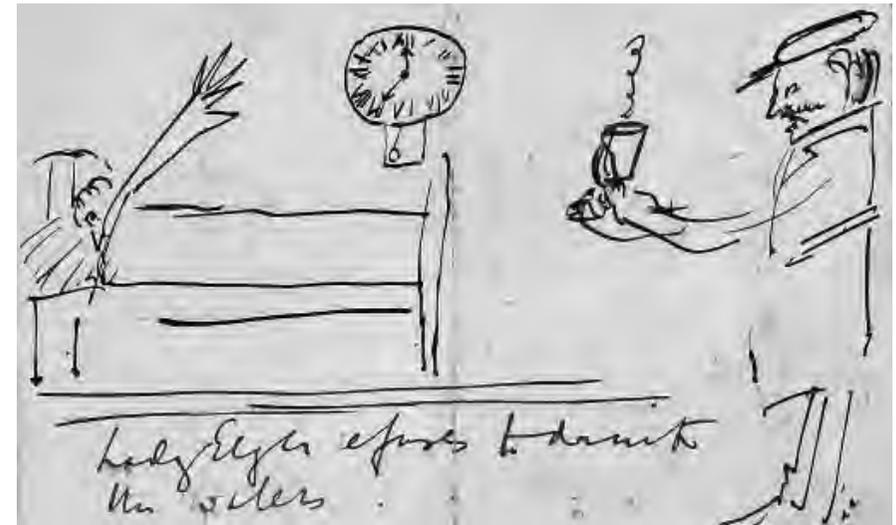


Fig.1: Lady Elgar refuses to drink the waters.

mysterious & strange; hooded & cloaked we quaffed smoking brine & sulphur & walked thro' dim-lit woods, sometimes in snow ...'<sup>36</sup> A letter to Carice contains an amusing sketch: 'You see the result of our visit: the little paint is firm & scorns the water at all times - I have sketched her at 7 a.m. - but she is firm about it all day'.<sup>37</sup>

In June 1907 Elgar attended a performance of *The Kingdom* in King's College, Cambridge, and met Arthur Benson, who noted in his diary: 'He told me his eyes were overstrained & he cd. do no work ... He seemed all strung on wires'<sup>38</sup> - a good description of a tense and anxious person. There was a huge burst of activity to finish the First Symphony between June and September 1908 which left him exhausted, but not depressed.

The year 1912 brought other medical problems. In January a new illness presented itself - giddiness and loss of balance suddenly afflicted him and he had actually fallen down in his Hampstead home, Severn House, more than once as a result. 'Gout in my eyes & head'<sup>39</sup> was diagnosed by the respected neurosurgeon Sir Victor Horsley of The National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic in Queen's Square, London. At this time the diagnosis of arthritic conditions was confused, little understood and the words gout and arthritis were interchanged, hence the seemingly odd diagnosis. Today it is known that arthritic conditions of the neck can contribute to these symptoms according to my orthopaedic colleagues, so the diagnosis in this context was not inappropriate.

A different symptom arose 'out of the blue' as noted by Alice on 28 March: 'E. vesy uneasy about noise in ear &c - Trusting Aurist wd do good -'.<sup>40</sup> He went the next day: 'E. & A. to aurist - [Edward] Law. Sir Maurice [Abbot Anderson] met E. there - E. depressed after interview &

36 Letter from Elgar to Sidney Colvin, 26 December 1906, EBM letter 3418.

37 Letter from Elgar to Carice, c. 9 December 1906, EBM scrapbooks.

38 Arthur Benson diary, 11 June 1907.

39 Letter from Elgar to Sidney Colvin, 1 February 1912, EBM letter 3432.

40 Alice Elgar diary, 28 March 1912, Martin Bird transcript.

wandered around by his dearest souse with no lunch. A. had to go as promised to lunch with Muriel [Foster].<sup>41</sup> On 1 April 'E. began his rest cure treatment ... E. did not like it', though by the 3<sup>rd</sup> was 'somewhat more reconciled'. Nevertheless, the following day 'E. in what he called "Cold Storage" -', and Alice recorded: 'E. going on resting & having baths'.<sup>42</sup> Were they hot or cold? Was this part of the Cold Water Cure Malvern was famous for in those days? Why should Alice single out having baths – a normal occurrence – if it was not part of a special prescribed regime? To compound the mystery it should be remembered that, at Birchwood, their holiday cottage at the northern end of the hills, Alice made Carice have cold baths. He carried on with the baths for several weeks. A male nurse, W.H.G. Norton, came to Severn House to administer them, and Elgar presented him with a signed photograph at the end of the course.<sup>43</sup> The day after he stopped the treatment 'Sir Maurice came - Much pleased with E. He is a dear person -'.<sup>44</sup>

However, there was no time to rest and he continued with conducting engagements including rehearsals for the 'Imperial Masque' *The Crown of India*. Nancy Price, the actress embodying India in the presentation, observed in her book *Into an Hour Glass*: 'Alas, his bright spirit wore his body to a rind. He gave too generously of himself and made too heavy a demand on his physical strength. I remember once when he was utterly exhausted during a rehearsal of the Crown of India ...'.<sup>45</sup> The rehearsals for *Crown of India* at the Coliseum, for which his old friend John Austin came from Worcester to assist, reached a climax at the beginning of March as the diaries describe:

4 March: 'E. to rehearsal at Coliseum - all the morning ... Mr. Austin came up to help E.'

5 March: 'E. to rehearsal all the morning, & Mr. Austin -'

6 March: 'E. to Rehearsal - & Mr. Austin -'

7 March: 'E. & Mr. Austin very busy with rehearsal -'

8 March: 'E. to rehearsal & Mr. Austin - Came back & rested & went to Bournemouth for Concert next day -'

9 March: 'At Bournemouth. Good Concert in aftn. returned about 11.30 - Did not seem the worse.'

10 March: 'To Spanish Place. Then to Coliseum for rehearsal - All getting on - dresses lovely, lights rather vague - Muriel [Foster] then & carried E. & A. off to Claridges for lunch. Then back to rehearsal all rather better.'

11 March: 'E. had a little rest. E. A. & C. & May [Grafton] to aftn. to Coliseum. 1<sup>st</sup> performance in aftn. Great success. Very enthusiastic. In evening ... better performance crowded & immense enthusiasm E. had to appear again & again. Home not too tired -'

*The Standard* newspaper described those punishing rehearsals: 'Sir Edward Elgar plays his own score at the piano, accompanying chorus and solos with extreme care and wonderful patience. He goes over separate bars, repeats special passages, and suggests alterations in phrasing, emphasis, and light and shade with untiring zeal. Then he will suddenly leave his place at the piano and, while a deputy succeeds him at the instruments, beats time with a walking-stick.'<sup>46</sup> Such was the effort he expended in the preparations for his performances, whenever possible.

At the beginning of August 'E. had swelled finger. Went to see Sir Maurice who sd. it was gout

41 Alice Elgar diary, 29 March 1912, Martin Bird transcript.

42 Alice Elgar diary, 7 April 1912, Martin Bird transcript.

43 Now in the possession of Arthur Reynolds.

44 Alice Elgar diary, 18 April 1912, Martin Bird transcript.

45 Nancy Price, *Into an Hour Glass*, (London: Museum Press, 1953), 213.

46 *The Standard*, 1 March 1912.

& that he must go to Harrogate.<sup>47</sup> What a surprising diagnosis on the first presentation of symptoms which could be due to many different causes. Gout is very painful and there is no mention of this, so the actual diagnosis is in doubt. Harrogate was full so Elgar never went there for any treatment and the hands healed. This is an example of a 'jumping to conclusions' diagnosis without proper investigations. Elgar consulted doctors who were at the top of the professional pecking order. All the London-based medical men he saw practised from Harley Street or adjacent Wimpole Street. Sir Maurice Abbot Anderson was a member of the British Laryngological, Rhinological and Otological Association and was 'Surgeon to HRH Princess Royal and Household', making him very successful. But what was an ENT surgeon doing diagnosing gout after only one episode? In a letter to Windflower four days later Elgar states that '... my gout has quieted down but I am suffering from my ear noises &c &c -'.<sup>48</sup>

Deafness had been affecting him for much of the year. He was now exhibiting the triad of symptoms – tinnitus, (noises in the ears), vertigo, and fluctuating hearing loss – which characterise Menière's disease. Other possible causes are recurrent attacks of dizziness known as episodic vertigo but they are not usually associated with deafness, and migraine which is associated with visual disturbances and prostration. Neither of these complaints fit Elgar's symptoms. There has been some debate about this diagnosis. The disease follows a pattern of remissions getting longer over time. The deafness is unilateral but, in up to 25 per cent of cases, it affects both ears. Elgar's deafness has been attributed to middle ear infection associated with his tonsillitis.<sup>49</sup> Northrop Moore also doubts the diagnosis and, writing about Elgar's deafness, records that 'surviving friends recall no such affliction through his last years'.<sup>50</sup> However, his hearing problem affected one ear and continued. According to a letter he wrote to Windflower in May 1929: 'I am not well & do not get on - quite private - it is my ear which has failed (& is painful) after threatening for years!'.<sup>51</sup> This fits into the unilateral and progressive nature of deafness in Menière's disease though pain denotes that he might have had a middle ear infection on this occasion. An ENT surgeon I spoke to agreed that Elgar most likely suffered from this condition.

The year 1912 brought Elgar face to face with creative suffering, as he explained in a letter to Ernest Newman on the subject of *The Music Makers*: '... the atmosphere of the music is mainly sad; but there are moments of enthusiasm, and bursts of joy occasionally approaching frenzy; moods which the creative artist suffers in creating or in contemplation of the unending influence of his creation. Yes, suffers:- this is the only word I dare to use; for even the highest ecstasy of "making" is mixed with the consciousness of the sombre dignity of the eternity of the artist's responsibility.'<sup>52</sup>

He continued to be unwell during 1913 despite travelling to Llandrindod Wells in March for an unsuccessful session of spa treatment. In view of his continued debility, Sir Maurice arranged a second opinion with Dr Morley Fletcher, who was a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and was in charge of the outpatient department at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. The diary entry for 27 March reads: '... A. vesy vesy anxious to know. E. with them nearly ½ hour. Then A. let in - & heard, D[eo]. G[ratias], no real organic disease but much that was wrong - but evidently to yield

47 Alice Elgar diary, 8 August 1912, Martin Bird transcript.

48 Letter from Elgar to Alice Stuart-Wortley, 12 August 1912, EBM letter 7828.

49 Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 210.

50 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987) 715.

51 Letter from Elgar to Alice Stuart-Wortley, 8 May 1929, EBM letter 7717.

52 Letter from Elgar to Ernest Newman, 14 August 1912, EBM letter 9878.

to treatment nice man ... Drs. insist on Golf -'. Then on 1 April: 'E. & A. to Dr. Morley Fletcher, D.G. the analysis was most satisfactory & digestion pronounced normal. Dr. M. F. advocated Stoke & gave A. all directions. So thankful of good report.' He went to his sister at Stoke Prior the very next day.

In July 1916, Sir Maurice Abbott Anderson endeavoured to cure the tonsillitis again with paints and tonics, finally resorting to electric cauterisation before the condition subsided, but only temporarily. Six months later the throat was cauterised again in January 1917. He was dogged by illness, debility and exhaustion which worsened as the year ended. Elgar even cancelled a concert with the Hallé, something unheard of, bar once, in the whole of his conducting career.

On Christmas Eve 1917 'Sir Maurice came in & gave new prescription'. Perhaps this was to take his mind off his discomfort and the worry of what was wrong with his digestion. Sensitive stomachs are easily disturbed by anxiety, the so-called nervous dyspepsia syndrome, which was a popular diagnosis in those days. According to Alice, he continued to be miserable all over Christmas and on 27 December 'Sir Maurice came & decided to bring a tummy specialist ... evidently very disappointed & puzzled over E -'. This was Dr William Hale-White, consultant physician at Guy's Hospital, a hospital with which he was to be associated for more than 70 years. He came on 29 December.

Sir Maurice brought Dr. Hale White to see E. nice little kind looking man in Khaki.<sup>53</sup> They decided, such a merciful relief, that was no organic trouble. Urged smoking, golf, change &c &c - Gave a new Meddi - D.G. that there was no serious malady -<sup>54</sup>

Alice was greatly relieved that the doctor's verdict was 'no organic trouble'. However, this opinion of 'no organic trouble' is often medical code for 'all in the mind' and a label of hypochondria. Personally, I find this opinion hard to believe in view of what happened in the next few months and the description of hypochondria which I described earlier.

Less than two weeks later Sir Maurice had decided that X-rays were the answer and these were taken the following day. The patient was 'only allowed tea & a little bread & butter at 7.30 a.m.'<sup>55</sup> according to Alice and they went to see Dr Stanley Melville, who later became President of the British Institute of Radiologists, in the morning and returned later that day for the verdict: 'Mercifully no sign of disease D.G. Tummy what they call dropped. An anxious time, & so thankful no bad malady -'.<sup>56</sup> Five days later 'Sir Maurice came & brought report of X-rays & photographs. D.G. no awful malady - Tummy much dropped, causing all the discomfort. Sir M more than good & kind & arranged for E. to go to him for treatment to begin next day, electric & a belt later - & is sure he will be restored & perhaps, pray God, be better than for years - Very anxious waiting for result of Rays - Muriel Foster came & stayed a long time & was really delightful so kind & sympathetic & affectionate -'.<sup>57</sup>

This diagnosis was an incorrect interpretation of the findings made by radiologists who trained in anatomy rooms where bodies lay flat. Here they observed that the stomach was small

53 During the war Hale-White served in Royal Army Medical Corps. at the City of London Territorial Hospital, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

54 Alice Elgar diary, 29 December 1917, Martin Bird transcript.

55 Alice Elgar diary, 10 January 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Alice Elgar diary, 15 January 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

and tucked up under the ribs. When radiologists looked at X-rays taken during life with the patient standing, they were surprised to see the stomach had dropped down. They diagnosed 'gastroptosis' or 'visceroproptosis' which was thought to be an abnormal state, causing symptoms that could be corrected by belts and electrical therapy. This diagnosis persisted in the textbooks for over 30 years!

On 16 January it was back 'To Sir Maurice for first electrical treatment. A. went wis him, E. found it quite pleasant -'.<sup>58</sup>

However, during those early months of 1918, Elgar, as she records repeatedly, was 'not vesy well'. In March, Mr Herbert Tilley, the first specialist ENT surgeon at University College Hospital, London, and President of the Laryngology section of the British Medical Association, was asked by Sir Maurice to give a second opinion. Elgar put things rather succinctly: 'E. to Mr. Tilley with Sir Maurice - Tonsils condemned'.<sup>59</sup> In a smart medical U-turn Sir Maurice now recommended that Elgar's tonsils should be removed as a matter of urgency, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> Elgar consented to the operation. He went into the Dorset Square Nursing Home on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 'E. feeling so ill, glad to go & try something - A. wis him in car about 5.30 - The Home seemed nice & a cheerful room Sir Maurice came & E. was very dood - Dreadful to leave him -',<sup>60</sup> and was operated on next day.

A long day of suspense as the opn was not till 3 P.M. E. was very calm, & bore the long suspense wonderfully. Then the nurse came & injected something in his arm to dry up saliva &c. Then Sir Maurice fetched him & he went downstairs so simply & cheerfully - A. went down to waiting room & as she entered just caught a glimpse of E. in his blue dressing gown, entering the Theatre - A. spent an anxious horrible 40 mins. then Sir M. & Tilley came & told her all was well. Sir M. showed her the worst tonsil all over abscess matter & a black stone, pea size, in it. A. not let go up so went home, returned at 7. found E. in great pain not knowing how to bear it, agonising to A. They gave him an injection & in 10 mins he was sleeping peacefully. A. had to leave him -<sup>61</sup>

Herbert Tilley was the national expert on throat problems at the time and modified the operation for the removal of tonsils. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought the introduction of the guillotine in an attempt to remove the tonsils completely; otherwise the tissue would grow again. This was not entirely successful and post operative bleeding was a major hazard. A surgeon named George Waugh (1875-1940) advocated a simple dissection operation. Tilley modified this by using a snare and tying off any blood vessels that were bleeding. This technique reduced the complication of haemorrhage to almost zero. Chloroform rather than ether was used as the anaesthetic.

In recurrent tonsillitis, ENT surgeons have noted not only the miserable throat symptoms, but also the 'additional general debility' associated with it. One surgeon also remarked to me that the fibrosed tonsils would be difficult to remove and that forty minutes was a very long time for this operation.

There is nothing in the diaries about complications or post operative bleeding, just a slow recovery with the occasional relapse.

He was in a great deal of pain for several days; there were not anything like the sedatives etc that we have now, but nevertheless he woke up one morning and asked for pencil and paper and wrote down

58 Alice Elgar diary, 16 January 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

59 Elgar diary, 6 March 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

60 Alice Elgar diary, 14 March 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

61 Alice Elgar diary, 15 March 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

the opening theme of the 'Cello Concerto' and he was allowed home on March 22<sup>nd</sup> to Mother's great relief. He was disappointed at not feeling quite well but straight away he began writing music ...<sup>62</sup>

Ten days after the operation Alice noticed that he was composing again: 'E. began a delightful Quartett. A remote lovely 1<sup>st</sup> subject. May he soon finish it - Wrote all day -'.<sup>63</sup>

It took Elgar's medical advisors too long to get to the cause of the problem. Were they distracted by his other illnesses? They certainly misjudged the severity of his tonsil infections and the devastating effect they had on him. Perhaps they were afraid of complications at his age, when anaesthesia was uncertain and post operative haemorrhage was common, so the operation had to wait for the advances in anaesthesia and the surgical technique pioneered by Mr Tilley. Tonsillectomy at the age of 60 was an ordeal and, more importantly for Elgar, those grossly infected tonsils would have contributed to his chronic debility and feelings of 'one degree under' and malaise going back 35 years to 1883!

A move to Sussex and Brinkwells, a secluded cottage found by Alice and surrounded by woods, worked wonders for his recovery. Thereafter there was only an occasional sore throat which resolved without medical intervention. The arrival of his piano at Brinkwells proved a turning point for more musical output as recalled by Alice: 'E. writing wonderful new music, different from anything else of his. A. calls it wood magic. So elusive & delicate.'<sup>64</sup> On 7 October she recorded the turning point in his convalescence: 'E. muss better. He lay on the sofa before dinner & A. read poetry things to him. Suddenly at dinner he said "I feel all right again" - & seemed so - D.G.'<sup>65</sup> At last he had lost the debility of decades; separation from the polluted air of London, away from crowds and their infections had enabled his body to recover. Two days later she noticed that he was 'E. possessed with his lovely new music - the 4tet - writing the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, so gracious & lovable -'.<sup>66</sup>

Unexpectedly, on 7 April 1920, Alice died in his arms of undetected lung cancer. Elgar was naturally devastated, writing to Ivor Atkins that 'you cannot fathom the loneliness & desolation of my life I fear'.<sup>67</sup> He complained that he was out of tune with the times and did not like either the new music or the composers of the day. After the funeral he stayed for two weeks with Pollie at Stoke Prior where he caught a cold and he had another episode of giddiness.

He had seen Arthur Thomson (later Sir Arthur), a physician at Birmingham General Hospital and consultant physician at Birmingham's Ear and Throat Hospital, who reported to Northrop Moore that Elgar was '... a neurotic, who most of all wanted reassurance. Again and again he would come in depressed as if all useful life was over; and after reassurance, he would brighten up perfectly. One day I looked right to the back of his eyes with an ophthalmoscope; there was nothing much wrong with them ...'.<sup>68</sup> He does not say that there was nothing wrong with Elgar's eyes and,

62 Manuscript note by Carice Elgar, quoted in Percy Young, *Alice Elgar, Enigma of a Victorian Lady*, (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978), 180.

63 Alice Elgar diary, 25 March 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

64 Alice Elgar diary, 24 August 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

65 Alice Elgar diary, 7 October 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

66 Alice Elgar diary, 9 October 1918, Martin Bird transcript.

67 Letter from Elgar to Ivor Atkins, 6 May 1920, published in Wulstan Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship*, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1984), 307.

68 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987) 773.

of course, he was not an eye specialist. I think this is rather a harsh assessment of Elgar, lacking in understanding of the personality and profession of the patient and ignorance of his medical history.

Was he a neurotic as Dr Thompson maintains? Certainly, he was anxious about himself for the reasons already mentioned. There is a deft definition of a neurotic 'who knows two and two make four and is terribly worried about it'. On a number of occasions he was told of his diagnoses and prognosis, causing him concern because of their possible effect on his music making.

As a GP, I have looked after a number of actors, artists, writers and musicians – all with a certain temperament. All were petrified of losing their ability to perform due to illness, whether it be an actor or singer losing their voice, the artist and pianist unable to use their hands and the composer unable to see or hear his music. This had a far reaching effect on their behaviour and stress levels. So I believe it was with Edward Elgar.

In September 1930 he was unable to attend a brass band competition at Crystal Palace due to pain put down to the sudden onset of sciatica. His lumbago of previous years is now described as sciatica. George Bernard Shaw recommended unconventional treatment: '... I think you might do worse than resort to E. T. Pheils, 92 Larkhall St, Birmingham, and ask him to feel you over and see whether you have put your haunch bone a little out ... It is no use going to regular doctors for these manipulative jobs and diagnoses: manual labour is beneath them. At worst osteopathy is very amusing at first.'<sup>69</sup> Thank goodness – in the light of the final diagnosis – that Elgar did not follow this up. He could still joke about this disability: 'my sciatica is not quiet: Carice says why not write a 'Sciatica' for orch:?' Quite a good title'.<sup>70</sup>

Three years later, Elgar conducted at the Proms again but the *Evening Standard* music critic later observed that 'He conducted from a chair, and, although he was cheerful when I went to see him after the concert, his voice was weak and his hands trembled. He had also lost a lot of weight ... He seemed to have shrunk to half the size'.<sup>71</sup> Unexplained weight loss is the hallmark of cancer somewhere in the body. Two months later, in a letter to Sir John Reith at the BBC on 7 October 1933, came news of a sudden operation: '... I have to go to a nursing home today for a sudden operation (gastric); this upsets all plans ... This catastrophe came without the slightest warning as I was in the midst of scoring the work.'<sup>72</sup> This was the Third Symphony.

The following day in South Bank Nursing Home in Worcester, Mr Norman Duggan, a surgeon at Worcester Royal Infirmary, operated under local anaesthetic and found that the so-called 'gastric' problem was intestinal obstruction due to an inoperable bowel cancer. His sciatica could have been due to secondary spread or pressure on the spine from the tumour. The underlying cause was never divulged to him, Carice saw to that, though we may surmise that he would have guessed the diagnosis. Towards the end he certainly knew he was dying.

We know from letters to Dr Buck that Elgar had bowel problems from years back and from Carice and Alice we learn that he had long standing digestive difficulties, so any early symptoms of the cancer in the 1930s were probably dismissed by Elgar and his daughter as all part of his old problems. The bleeding from a bowel cancer could have gone unnoticed or put down to bleeding from his haemorrhoids which were operated upon during Christmas Eve 1925.

69 Letter from George Bernard Shaw to Elgar, 28 September 1930, EBM letter 10355.

70 Letter from Elgar to Percy Hull, 2 October 1930, published in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford University Press, 1990) 431.

71 *Evening Standard*, 23 February 1934.

72 Letter from Elgar to Sir John Reith, 7 October 1933, published in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford University Press, 1990) 472.



Fig.2: Elgar at South Bank Nursing Home, 12 December 1933, part of a series of photographs taken at Elgar's specific request (Fred Hempstead).

He was seen again by Birmingham physician, Arthur Thompson, who remarked 'After all his years of worrying over imaginary troubles, he displayed magnificent courage in the face of great adversity'.<sup>73</sup> Dr Thompson's use of the words 'imaginary troubles' are a pretty damning indictment based on ignorance of the case history and on little hard evidence. There is nothing imaginary about sciatica due to cancer, a recurrent eye injury caused by a dog, debility from a diminished immune system and repeatedly infected tonsils. Problems with hearing and with the eyes are also a worrisome burden when you are a composer and conductor and when your livelihood depends on both those faculties.

The BBC approached his doctors to find a way for him to be without pain and finish the Third Symphony with a clear mind. Dr Thompson contemplated an operation to sever the spinal cord, but Elgar, rightly so in my mind, refused this drastic course of action.

He was also seen by a Dr Perkins, a friend of composer, Walford Davies, who had a machine for diagnosing and curing illness. This was installed in South Bank and the staff were shown how to use it; within ten days Elgar had improved temporarily and was well enough to receive visitors.<sup>74</sup> Was this a 'black box' and the use of Radionics? Trying this piece of alternative medicine, which is on the fringes of quackery, was a matter of desperation as there is no scientific evidence for its efficacy. On Christmas Day he wrote to Delius: '... I must tell you that I am still in the Nursing Home enduring incessant pain with occasional outbursts of something more acute; this is sciatica.'<sup>75</sup>

73 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987) 818.

74 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987) 820.

75 Letter from Elgar to Frederick Delius, 25 December 1933, EBM letter 9487.

In the New Year of 1934 he was transferred from the nursing home to Marl Bank, his Worcester house. There was a plan by Fred Gaisberg of HMV to get him to do one final recording. On 22 January when engineers came to record with him, he could not concentrate at first. Carice explained that this was partly because of the frequent injections of morphia, 'but it was principally the toxic poisoning from the wound that was making him so drowsy'.<sup>76</sup>

However, he perked up for the recording with the LSO and supervised a rehearsal of the 'Woodland Interlude' from *Caractacus*, one of his favourite compositions. This was achieved via a land line to the Abbey Road Studios in London. Other pieces were played, but all this took its toll on him and he never recovered.

Kathleen Harrison, Elgar's private nurse during his dying months, remembers his room 'with electrical contraptions' for the recording and how he would sometimes call for his notepad when he wanted to jot down some musical notes even at this stage of his terminal illness. She was with him when he died on the night of 23 February.<sup>77</sup> Carice noted: 'He just slept away'<sup>78</sup> in his bedroom within sight of his beloved Malvern Hills.

Dr Moore-Ede certified the cause of death as: 1) Exhaustion (today we would have put 'carcinomatosis'), 2) Carcinoma of the rectum.

In the end, perhaps Wulstan Atkins was right – everyone perceives Elgar differently. My own view is that he was not a hypochondriac imagining a string of illnesses; they were episodes of the same symptoms repeated over time. The tinnitus, vertigo and unilateral hearing loss of Menière's disease were real, culminating in complete deafness in one ear. His mood swings were part of his artistic temperament which exhibited the mild, cyclothymic end of the bipolar affective disorder (manic depressive) spectrum. His was not 'classical' depression but he fitted the description of 'a man of mercurial moods'. He had good reason to be neurotic as the symptoms he suffered threatened adversely to affect his music making. This anxiety brought on tension headaches and digestive upsets but these could also have been due to his cyclothymic personality.

After nine years of research I realise that I've reached yet another skin and much of the enigma is still tantalisingly elusive.

\* \* \* \* \*

This paper would not have been possible without the help of several medical colleagues in The History of Medicine Section of The Royal Society of Medicine, Chris Bennett and the staff of the Elgar Birthplace Museum and the writings of Jerrold Northrop Moore and Michael Kennedy.

*Dr. John Harcup, a retired General Practitioner, is Chairman of the West Midlands Branch of the Elgar Society and Chairman of the Malvern Spa Association.*

76 Frederick Gaisberg, *Music on Record*, (London: Robert Hale, 1936)

77 Worcester Royal Infirmary Nurses' League Newsletter 2011

78 Letter from Carice Elgar to Ernest Newman, 4 March 1934, EBM letter 9847.

## Hugh Blair and *Great is the Lord*

### Martin Bird

Hugh Blair (1864-1932) was assistant organist at Worcester Cathedral from 1886 to 1895, when he succeeded William Done as organist. A great friend of Elgar, it was largely due to him that Elgar completed *The Black Knight*, which is dedicated to him, *Sursum Corda* and the Organ Sonata, of which he gave the first performances, and *The Light of Life*.

He gave the Dean three months' notice in June 1897, on his wedding day, went on honeymoon to the Channel Islands, and never returned to Worcester. The Cathedral authorities formally suspended him at the end of July. He moved to London, where, like Elgar nearly ten years earlier, he struggled to find work; his wife Catherine, writing in June 1898, saying 'my husband has done no work since we were married'.<sup>1</sup>

By 1900, however, he had become Organist and Choirmaster of Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone. He was also giving advice on organ design, and it was in that capacity that he was engaged by the Metropolitan Borough of Battersea to advise on a new organ for the Town Hall. Having thus got his foot in the door, it is no surprise to discover that, when the Council decided they needed a Municipal Organist and Choirmaster, Blair was chosen from a total of 58 applicants.

He took on the new job in addition to his duties at Holy Trinity, which was just as well, for in October 1901 the district auditor took strong exception to rate-payer's money being spent on music and musicians, and in his annual report in 1902 took further exception to the payment of Blair's monthly salary of £12 10s. The Council appealed, and three councillors undertook to pay the salary until the matter was finally decided. Despite a further two years of arguments the Council lost the appeal and, incidentally, a similar appeal against the auditor's ruling that it was illegal to subsidise milk for children, and in 1904 it was reported that ...



Fig.1: Hugh Blair (Bennet and Sons Worcester)

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Catherine Blair to John Hooper, Chapter Clerk of Worcester Cathedral, 17 June 1898, Worcester Cathedral Muniments.

In view of the decision of the Local Government Board that they could not legally sanction any further payments made to the borough organist in respect of salary, the Council informed Mr. Blair, the borough organist, that they were unable to retain his services.<sup>2</sup>

... and Blair wrote to Elgar with the news.

... Since I saw you the Local Gov: Board have finally decided that the Battersea Council must cease paying my salary, and have threatened actually to surcharge those rash spirits among the Council who have dared to sign the cheque, these wretched creatures are now, I fancy, busy hiding their furniture and burying their silver spoons and Sunday clothes lest the Board should seize them, their wives, children and other valuables and cause the payment to be made!

I have duly received notice of the termination of my agreement and become extinct in July. I am sorry about it because I liked the work and we really did some very good things over there.<sup>3</sup>

He continued at Holy Trinity Church, and he and his wife had rooms next door in Osnaburgh Street. Once the Elgars had moved to Hampstead he was as frequent visitor to Severn House as he had been to Forli in the 1890s. When the Psalm *Great is the Lord* was published in 1912 Elgar was quick to present him with a copy.

He put it to good use, for in March 1914 he gave a short concert of Elgar's music at Holy Trinity after Matins.

My dear Elgar

I thought you would like to know that we have just had a very good practice and all the choir, about 40 of them are in the highest state of excitement. Of course you must not expect [*sic*] to hear Leeds Choir singing! mine is only a good church choir; for this great occasion strengthened by females of various ages and capacities but they are all "earnest endeavours"!!

On Sunday Matins and sermon will probably be despatched by 12.20 if we have any luck, then will come the Elgar music. The royal box, I mean the Rectors pen, or pens, will be at your service and a body of officials will probably be told off to watch your arrival and conduct you to your seat. I don't know if you will be presented with an illuminated address, to which you may suitably reply, but have no doubt you will be prepared for anything.

Lady Elgar very kindly asked me to come up tomorrow & if I don't hear to the contrary during the day shall hope to appear at 8.30

Ever yours only  
Hugh Blair<sup>4</sup>

The Elgars duly appeared *en masse*, though not before Alice had been to the Dominican Priory for the 10 o'clock service, and Muriel Foster had called at Severn House with her young son Anthony. As Alice noted in her diary:

E. A. & C. to Dr. Blair's Church for E.'s music - 2 movements of Sonata - some of it sounding rather blurred especially the exquisite 2nd movement. Beautiful Solo & Chorus from *Light of Life* - Ave

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report of the Metropolitan Borough of Battersea, 1903-4.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Hugh Blair to Elgar, 17 April 1904, Elgar Birthplace Museum letter 2516.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Hugh Blair to Elgar, 6 March 1914, EBM letter 2521.

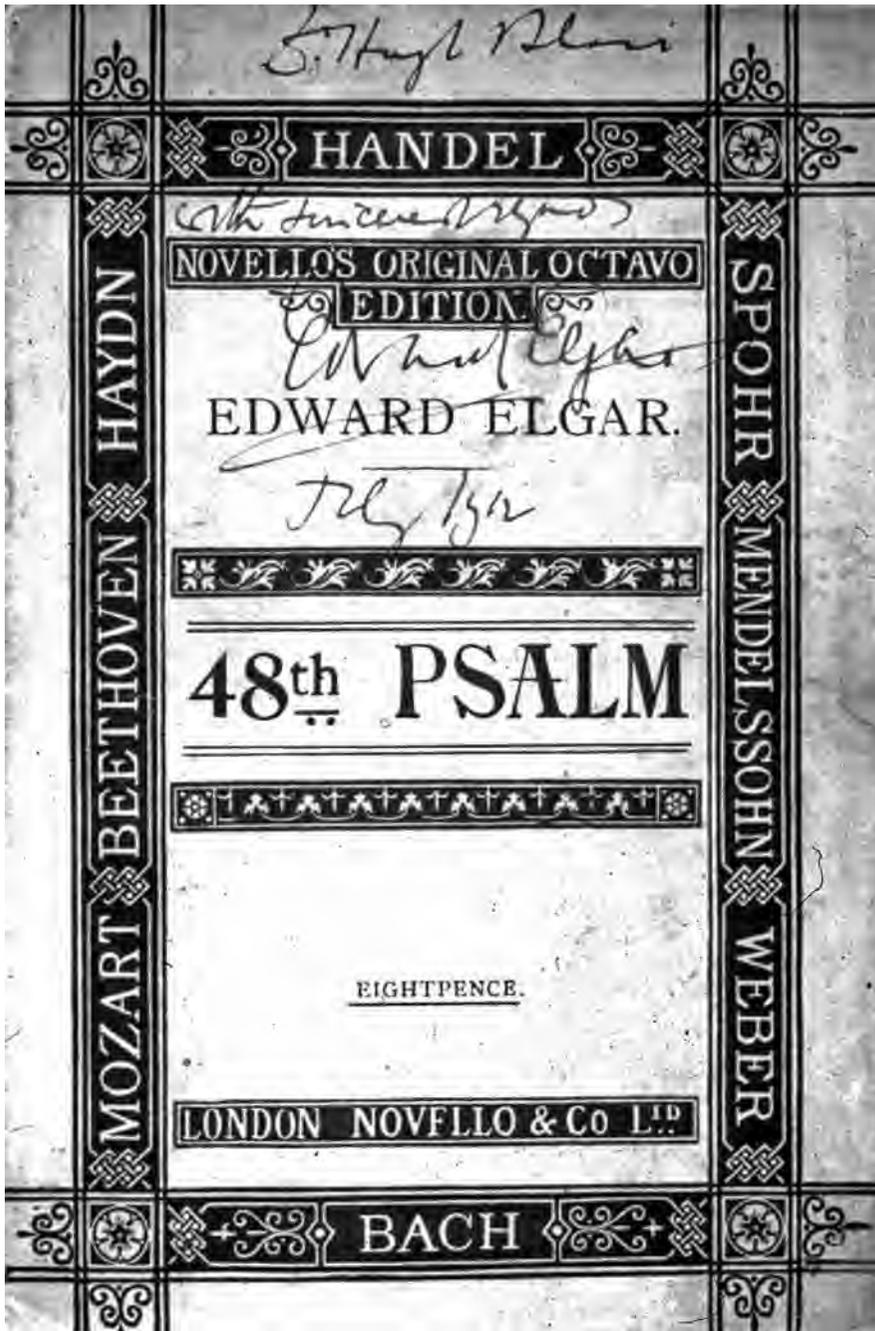


Fig.2: The cover of Blair's copy of Great is the Lord

Verum - & the Anthem 48th Psalm - Lunch with Dr. & Mrs. Griffiths. Very kind well arranged but very dull So peased to be home.

Blair's copy was acquired by Arthur Reynolds, and through his trust and kindness is beside me as I type. It is inscribed 'Dr. Hugh Blair with sincerest regards Edward Elgar July 1912'. I had hoped to find it full of additional markings to show how it was performed on that occasion: I should have known better, for of course all the markings needed have already been provided by Elgar. There are a couple of reminders as to registration and the use of the swell pedal, and two bars where he used the Tuba stop in where Elgar had not already specifically asked for it - and that is all.

A few days later Alice and Carice went with the Blair's to see a revival of Haddon Chambers' play *The Tyranny of Tears* at the Comedy Theatre. *The Times* thought it 'one of the brightest, deftest, sanest, and most humorous comedies of our generation': Alice dismissed it as 'rather stupid'. And a week later Blair went up to Severn House in the evening for dinner and billiards. Norman service had been resumed.

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*Continued from page 15 ...*

Two months later the Kilburns were at Severn House, and Alice was also able to record some exciting news ...

... For tea - Kilburns (3) Henry James, Winifred Murray, Streatfeild, Frances Colvin & Rev. Dr. Pun & composer & interpreter - & Harold Brooke. E. & C. short walk late - "Very successful party" E. said. A. peased. E. beginning to turn to Falstaff.<sup>13</sup>

... and within three months Alice was able to tell her namesake that it was finished. For the moment, at least, Elgar was back to something like his old self.

... I wanted to tell you Edward has finished his new work, he worked at high pressure to do so before coming here & now has proofs &c - to correct - I long for you to hear it - it is very wonderful most brilliant ... & with such pathetic moments & lovely "interludes"<sup>14</sup>

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13 Alice Elgar diary, 25 May 1913.

14 Letter from Alice Elgar to Alice Kilburn, 16 August 1913, EBM letter 10177.



320 pp + x

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### Michael Allis: *British Music and Literary Context; Artistic Connections in the Long Nineteenth Century*

Boydell & Brewer, 2012

Bearing in mind how fruitful was the artistic love affair between British composers and British poetry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this fascinating study of four turn-of-the-century composer and examples of their literary inspiration is long overdue. This book consists of five substantial chapters, two devoted to Elgar and one each to Parry, Stanford and Bantock. It makes for a fascinating narrative and is very well done as far as it goes, supported by remarkably wide reading, but dealing only with Parry, Stanford, Bantock and Elgar and a restricted number of poets for each. One is inevitably left asking for more. So here we have studies of Parry and Robert Bridges, Stanford and Tennyson, Bantock and Robert Browning and, unexpectedly, Elgar and Bulwer Lytton and Elgar and travel literature. (In his introduction Allis remarks 'a different book might have focused upon Sullivan and Scott, Delius and Dowson, and Holbrooke and Poe' – now there's a thought.)

The first chapter concerns Parry's *Invocation to Music*, the first collaboration between Parry and Bridges. (Later Bridges provided the words for *The Song of Darkness and Light*, the *Eton Memorial Ode* and *The Chivalry of the Sea*.) In studying *Invocation to Music* Allis draws our attention to the fact that 'one year after the vocal score of the *Invocation* was published by Novello, Bridges published his own alternative version of the poetic text, prefaced by an essay entitled 'The Musical Setting of Poetry' ... this chapter explores the implications of the essay in the context of Bridges' recent working experiences.' (p.15)

I have to say personally I don't feel any need to revisit Bridges' poetry away from the music, but this is valuable for reminding us of many choral works by Parry and Stanford which have not yet been revived, although the focus is resolutely on the literary history of the texts and the interpretation of the words rather than first-hand assessment of their musical expression in performance. Parry collaborated with Robert Bridges on two of his most successful choral works, and indeed, this commentator at least can remember the remarkable frisson of recognition at a first hearing of 'Rejoice, ye dead where'er your spirits dwell' at the modern revival of Parry's *Invocation to Music* given by Denys Darlow at Bath Abbey in April 1988. Parry and Bridges' collaboration was not altogether a happy one. Allis quotes Bridges writing to Lionel Muirhead: 'I have composed twice for him before, and each time sacrificed my poem to musical convenience'. Allis barely mentions *The Chivalry of the Sea*, possibly their most successful collaboration and

contributes nothing to our musical assessment of such forgotten scores as Parry's *A Song of Darkness and Light* and Stanford's oratorio *Eden* for which Bridges wrote the libretto. For me, discussion of such works that have yet to be revived, and of which we have no living performing experience, even on radio or CD, are high on my list requiring active assessment in performance.

When we come to Stanford and Tennyson we are on more familiar ground with at least some of it – I certainly have a long-held affection for Stanford's setting of *The Revenge* which I took part in when still at school. Here were two leading artistic figures of Victorian England collaborating on major projects. Allis lists 20 scores by Stanford with Tennysonian associations, including six choral works with orchestra, and four part songs, one of them the cycle of poems from *The Princess*. There were also two theatre scores. Inevitably the Tennyson settings include several major works which have not yet been accorded a modern revival, including *The Voyage of Maeldune* and the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, and so it is good to revisit them now, even though we cannot fully participate in the discussion until we know the music.

Allis goes into some detail on Stanford's late cantata *Merlin and the Gleam* which only survives as a printed vocal score – and until recently it has been assumed that Stanford never orchestrated it. It had remained unperformed until Jeremy Dibble's orchestration of 2002. Conducted by Garry Humphreys it appeared in the Broadheath Singers' final concert that year, before they disbanded. It is good to know that Allis has traced a performance in March 1920 directed by the composer, but it still gives no clue whether Stanford's full score survives and if so its location. As Allis notes: 'the musical style of *Merlin and the Gleam* has been criticised as being "exactly the same as that of his earliest settings",' and Allis concludes 'rather than a waning of Stanford's creative powers however, both the choice of text and the manner of the setting could be seen as a deliberate study in retrospection.' (p. 148) All concerned with the 2002 performance were somewhat mystified as to the music's exact meaning (Jeremy Dibble suggested, in his programme note 'its significance is one characteristic of the author's constant search for an ideal vision of life'). The choir were struck by the nature of the choral Epilogue, whereby Stanford had tacked on the 'Hymn' from Tennyson's *Akbar's Dream*, and as we sang Stanford's triumphal setting ('Once again thou flamest heavenward, once again we see thee rise') I could not but feel that in a work completed in August 1919 we were again hymning, through complex allusions, another First World War memorial piece.

In a 55-page discussion of Bantock and the poetry of Robert Browning more than a third is devoted to Bantock's orchestral tone-poem *Fifine at the Fair*. I have to say that as an owner of the original issue of Beecham's recording for many years I did not appreciate that it was cut, until Vernon Handley, preparing his recording, pointed out he would be recording it complete. In view of some of the negative earlier reviews, Allis quotes William McNaught's comment that 'The music is of the kind that needs a detailed time-table.' This is a splendid discussion on both the poetic and musical level and a really significant contribution to Bantock literature. If you have a warm spot for Bantock's music do explore it.

Bantock made vocal settings of many Browning poems. When researching Bantock songs for Dutton's CD collection in 2001, I spent a remarkable afternoon in the Royal Academy of Music with David Owen Norris as he played through a mountain of printed copies of Bantock songs, and we made summary judgements at the end of which the pile of rejects was bigger than the short list chosen for closer scrutiny for recording, including many by Browning. Clearly Bantock was an uneven composer, but at his best he wrote many delightful songs, and I have written elsewhere of the recording session that 'after three days we emerged so saturated in his colourful and exotic world ... one wondered why they are not the focus of every song recital'.

Perhaps the discovery of Allis's Bantock chapter is the *9 Dramatic Poems*, nine atmospheric

piano pieces after Browning's dramatic monologues. Allis writes 'the most effective of Bantock's reformulations in these miniatures ... is 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'. This monologue is spoken by an embittered monk and 'there is an inevitable comparison between the aggressive bile of the speaker and the peace of the cloister setting'. Generally Bantock tends to 'represent the music-making of the monologist himself'.

Although Browning is the subject of this chapter, what to me is the most interesting and problematic Browning settings – the sequence *Ferishtah's Fancies* – is not discussed. As an example of Bantock's orientalism it surely needs to be considered alongside his setting of *Omar Khayyam* and the *Five Ghazals of Hafiz*. Like many of Bantock's longer solo vocal works with orchestra it was rarely performed complete, but at the Proms, for example, the Epilogue had a number of performances over the years as a solo item, most recently in 1948. Unfortunately Allis does not deal with *Ferishtah*, but it is worth noting the problem that the manuscript full orchestral score and parts appear to have vanished, and as a Breitkopf work the assumption has been it was destroyed in an RAF raid on Leipzig in 1943. However performances of the Epilogue at the winter proms in 1947 and 1948 would suggest that all is not lost.

When we come to Elgar, Allis offers two studies, one more hypothetical than the other. Firstly, he develops Alice Elgar's suggested literary 'paratext' for the Piano Quintet and explores the potential for Edward Bulwer Lytton's occult novel *A Strange Story* to be the hidden 'quasi-programme' connected with the work. (p.9) The second Elgarian study is a discussion of his orchestral score *In the South*, written at Alassio, in the context of the travel literature of the time. Allis notes the positive initial reception of *In the South* and the 'less charitable' views of recent critics. He prints Elgar's incipits for *In the South* with Elgar's programmatic identification of them, and his commentary. This is an excellent discussion of Elgar's extra-musical references and the ways in which these are communicated to the listener. As Allis remarks: 'a literary perspective helps us to identify a number of elements which mirror strategies in travel literature which a purely musical approach might overlook'. We surely all agree that '*In the South* represents Elgar's most focused and extended account of the travel experience ... never again did he incorporate the foreign landscape quite so vividly within a musical setting.'

I know some music lovers are left cold by this kind of study, and would agree with Percy Young (*Elgar OM* p.187) about *In the South* that 'the guide books are a hindrance rather than a help for, while they draw attention to the weaknesses of the work ... they neither explain nor enhance the evident qualities of joy, pride, and wonderment'. But I must say this volume is a brilliant tour de force, even if one is constantly wanting more or wondering why some aspect has been overlooked. His range of sources cited is remarkably wide, the depth of literary knowledge equal to the musical. What we need now are performances and recordings of all the works that remain unheard for, despite Michael Allis's eloquence, without living experience of the music, played on the orchestra, we are still unable to add many of these scores to what George Bernard Shaw called our 'singing in the bath musical stock'.

Lewis Foreman

**Albert Gier, Meinhard Saremba, Benedict Taylor (editors): Sullivan  
Perspektiven. Arthur Sullivans Opern, Kantaten, Orchester- und  
Sakralmusik**

Oldlib-Verlag, Essen, 2012

This book of essays from the German Sullivan Society should have a wider appeal than might be apparent from its title. When the Society was founded in 2009 it was hoped to hold a conference on Sullivan's music. Although the conference could not take place for lack of financial support, the intended speakers were happy to have their papers published in book form, and this volume is the result. It contains 16 essays, of which twelve are in English and four in German.

Armed with my schoolboy German and Mr. Google's translation service I found the language barrier a surmountable problem, so there need be no holding back on that score by any English-speaking readers interested in Sullivan's operas, cantatas, orchestral and sacred music. My only quibble on the language front is that all the German essays are introduced in English and all the English essays in German. It would have been helpful, and not too much trouble, to have had every introduction in both German and English.

Some essays will, of course, be of more interest to Elgarians than others. Of particular interest to me was the inclusion of an address by Sullivan to the Birmingham and Midland Institute, of which he was President, in October 1888, in which, after a brief account of the musical history of England, he speaks most informatively on the position of music in English social and economic life, and the economic benefits to the country of a healthy music industry (the opportunity to provide the 18,892 miles of steel wire required to string a year's production of pianos is cited!).

Another that immediately took my attention was Roger Norrington's essay on 'Sullivan's orchestral sound world'. This turned out to be a reiteration of his well-known views on the use of vibrato by orchestral string players, with the name 'Sullivan' plugged into any space requiring the name of a late nineteenth century composer. He concludes by saying 'it's kind of lonely being the only person in the world pursuing an idea. Would any other conductors like to join me?' The fact is, not many people agree with him. As has been mentioned often in these pages, the evidence of early orchestral recordings reveals the use of a wide range of vibrato styles. Moreover, to take his argument to a logical conclusion, Elgar should have required orchestras to play with less vibrato when playing the *Serenade for Strings* than when playing his later works, and asked a European orchestra to play with more vibrato than they were accustomed to when playing his symphonies. Perhaps the editor could find some knowledgeable person to investigate the Elgarian sound world more thoroughly.

Elsewhere in the volume Albert Gier contributes an essay on facets of the libretto of *The Pirates of Penzance*; Meinhard Saremba one on Sullivan's depiction of evil and the demonic. Benedict Taylor surveys Sullivan's symphonic and orchestral music and analyses *The Golden Legend*; William



372 pp

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Parry talks about Sullivan's faith and his sacred music; Rev. Ian Bradley writes about Sullivan's (surprisingly many) hymn tunes; James Brooks Kuykendall contributes an essay on the dramatic structure of some of Sullivan's works and another on *Victoria and Merrie England*; Richard Silverman sets *Ivanhoe* in the context of other English opera and its subjects. David Eden writes about Sullivan and Imperialism; Arne Stollberg about *Ivanhoe* and its contribution to the idea of an English national opera. Martin Yates, chairman of the Sullivan Society in this country, compares and contrasts Sullivan and Britten (who as a young man revelled in the delights of the Savoy operas) as men of the theatre; and Pierre Degott writes (in English) about the translation of *The Mikado* into French.

All in all a book with something of interest to everyone, though not one to be consumed at one sitting. The German Sullivan Society is to be commended on its enterprise in commissioning and publishing these contributions to Sullivan scholarship.

Richard Wiley



**Maurice Leonard: Hope & Glory, A Life of Dame Clara Butt**  
Victorian Secrets, 2012

I was delighted to discover the other day that a new biography of Clara Butt was about to be published, the first, I think, since Winifred Ponder's of 1928. As some of that book has to be taken with more pinches of salt than the NHS recommend nowadays, I ordered a copy of the new one immediately, and waited for the satisfying thud on my door-mat. It came last week, and with an unexpected recommendation from Jilly Cooper, no less: 'Maurice Leonard has a gift for creating character and embroidering it with the most wonderful anecdotes and perceptions'. Indeed he does, but what he does not seem to have is any great awareness of musical life in general during Clara Butt's lifetime which means, sadly, that while the book is a rollicking good read, it cannot be taken as an accurate or comprehensive biography.

Alarm bells started to ring as early as chapter three, when I was told that Clara had her early singing lessons from Cyril Rootham's son Dan. Now, I'd no idea whether or not Rootham had a son called Dan, but I was pretty sure that at the very least the precocious youngster would still have been in nappies when Clara called for lessons. It took less than 30 seconds to establish from Wikipedia that the Dan in question was Cyril's father, not his son.

When it comes to her many dealings with Elgar, in the main Leonard regurgitates anecdotes, not always accurate, from other sources, laced with a fair degree of embroidery. Thus for *Sea Pictures* we get Ponder's tale of Clara being in her bath when Elgar first called and refusing to see her, and learn that 'he had written the cycle years earlier for soprano and piano, but orchestrated and transposed it for her. Comparisons with Clara hung like a spectre over all subsequent performers for years, but there have been several

decent recordings of it. Janet Baker did a fine version, particularly with one of the longer songs ...' And until now I had no idea that 'Elgar had written the Angel with her in mind but couldn't afford her': it had simply never occurred to me that the poor composer had been expected to pay the soloists' fees at Birmingham out of his own pocket, and that by the time he'd forked out for Edward Lloyd and Plunket Greene, he only had sufficient left to book Marie Brema, leaving Clara Butt sitting in the audience! Mind you, she'd only sung four of the *Sea Pictures* at the Festival the previous evening - maybe the money had run out then ...

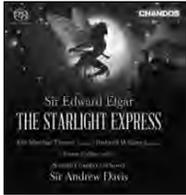
My point is not that Leonard has got so much wrong, or even that he could easily have checked his facts, but that seemingly it never occurred to him to check them. A day at the Birthplace would have produced more valuable information about Clara Butt and Elgar than appears in this book - it has a dozen letters between them, for a start, but there is no indication here that the author has ever been near the place.

Sadly, I can only report a missed opportunity. Still, as I say, it's a rollicking good read if you're not looking for accuracy, and the price is eminently reasonable.

The book includes a discography abridged from that compiled by Trevor Midgley, and readers are referred to the online version for more complete details. Although comprehensive with regard to all known Butt recordings - even to the extent of including a page of recordings annotated 'Untitled' - it, too, is sadly inadequate, for it lists recordings in alphabetical order by title only. Now this might be fine if you are looking for one her party pieces like 'A Fairy went a-marketing', though some might look first under 'F' for 'Fairy' rather than 'A' for 'A Fairy'. But anyone seeking the 'Angel's Farewell' from *Gerontius* would have to know that it started with the words 'Softly and gently'. Having got the hang of this idiosyncrasy you could then track down 'Where Corals Lie' without difficulty, though you need to know the first lines of the other four poems to see if Dame Clara recorded any more of the *Sea Pictures*. Pity, too, the poor Gluck enthusiast who, having mastered this art, looks triumphantly for 'Che farò senza Euridice' only to discover at a later date that it's listed as 'Sposa, Euridice .. Che Farò'. (I only stumbled across it because it happens to come directly after 'Softly and gently'). Yet another opportunity missed.

Martin Bird

248 pp  
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## CD REVIEWS

### Elgar: *The Starlight Express*

#### Carey: Songs from *The Starlight Express*

Elin Manahan Thomas (soprano), Roderick Williams (baritone), Simon Callow (narrator), Scottish Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos

CHSA 5111 (2 CD)

All previous recordings of Elgar's music to *The Starlight Express* have suffered from the lack of a comprehensive edition. Neither the play nor most of the music was ever printed. The last major recording (for EMI in 1974 under Vernon Handley) included all of Elgar's music, but with the bits to accompany stage action run together. At that time no one realised that buried in Novello's archive lay Elgar's copy of the stage play typescript - the only one known to survive.

When it turned up, the typescript revealed the intricacies of Violet Pearn's play based on Algernon Blackwood's novel *A Prisoner in Fairyland*. Elgar had marked it with cues for his music. His MS full score (now in the British Library) is marked with cues of play words; but they could only be of use once the play typescript turned up.

It became clear that a lot of the music was designed to be played under stage speech - what is called melodrama. But there were no surviving clues (beyond the MS and TS cues) as to how words and music fit together through the melodramas: all that had apparently been done in rehearsal, and forgotten afterwards. When The Elgar Edition of *The Starlight Express* was undertaken, it was not always easy to put Humpty-Dumpty together again. But its publication in 2010 brought the possibility of playing the entire work for the first time since its original production in 1915.

So it is sad indeed to find this new recording, while relying closely on The Elgar Edition, has side-stepped its major opportunity. One can speculate on the motives at work, but the conductor takes the blame on himself (he does not consider it so) in a prefatory essay heavily larded with the First Person Singular. He claims the play's sentimentality eliminates any possibility of reproducing it for modern audiences: as if full performances of Mozart's *Idomeneo* and *Clemenza di Tito* were to be denied because they belong to the outmoded genre of *opera seria*.

Andrew Davis himself has in fact written a connecting narrative to replace the stage action. The narrative covers most of the stage action without too many changes; and in its more than capable reading by Simon Callow, is clear and seldom tedious. But its manner will remind older listeners of children's tea-time wireless broadcasts - despite the extreme unlikelihood of its reaching more than a minute fraction of today's children.

A further disadvantage arises out of the narrative's clever concision of the

whole play. When an action taking say three hours in the theatre is reduced to half that time but with all its music intact, that music can become both repetitious and not clearly structured. With the present narrative and narrator, it must be said, a great proportion of the music survives the transfusion with good success.

The performance of that music on these records is in fact very well done. Andrew Davis is constantly responsive to the story's changing moods, acutely anticipating them where necessary. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra play superbly for him - only without any trace of the barrel organ called for in the score and vital to give the organ-grinder's music its character. To judge this loss - just listen to Handley's records where it creates an extra dimension.

Neither vocal soloist challenges Handley's Valerie Masterson and Derek Hammond-Stroud (who was perhaps the last of the 'uncle' baritones - a group evidently no longer extant). Davis's soprano lacks Masterson's security - and thus, the last degree of her deftness. But the major disappointment is Roderick Williams, a much-loved singer miscast on this evidence. His soft singing lacks both presence and focus, as if he was unsure of his character - or the microphone was badly placed. Only at higher volumes do we hear the familiar Williams mastery, and then it sounds almost a different voice. If only Simon Callow could have replaced him.

Which brings me reluctantly back to the new set's central difficulty for anyone who wants to study the work to which Elgar contributed his music. For that we must await a braver effort.

The remainder of the second disc is given over to two items. A *Starlight Express* 'Suite' allows one to listen to the major items of Elgar's music without the narration. And there are three *Starlight Express* songs written earlier by the Cambridge composer Clive Carey (1883-1968), sung by Roderick Williams to orchestrations by Andrew Davis. These are pleasant, mostly strophic, art songs without more than a shadow of Elgar's dramatic genius.

Jerrold Northrop Moore

### Elgar: *The Apostles*

Rebecca Evans (soprano), Alice Coote (mezzo-soprano), Paul Groves (tenor), Jacques Imbrailo (baritone), David Kempster (Peter), Brindley Sherratt (Judas), Hallé Youth Choir, Hallé Choir, Hallé Orchestra, conducted by Sir Mark Elder



Hallé

CD HLD 7534 (2 CD)

Readers will have read Andrew Neill's overwhelmingly positive review of Mark Elder's performance of *The Apostles* in Manchester's Bridgewater Hall on 5 May (*Elgar Society News* No. 47, August 2012, 30-32), and may have heard Elder's repeat performance at the Proms this summer. There is no doubt in my mind that those fortunate enough to be present in Manchester experienced an extraordinary event; one of those rare musical occasions

where every participant, whether performer or member of the audience, came together to produce a rare musical and emotional experience. But these great occasions have a habit of sounding more run of the mill when heard in domestic circumstances through a pair of loudspeakers and, sadly, for me this is one such.

The augmented Hallé forces (and they are huge, with a string section of 16, 16, 12, 10, 8 and a choir of 250) just do not have the same impact on disc as they had in the hall. In quiet passages everything sounds quite magical, but the recording, or my equipment, or both, make the climaxes sound ill-focused and not particularly climactic. The ‘great climax at the end’, where Elgar specifically says ‘The Side Drum must only assist the rhythm and must not be at all prominent’ is dominated by, you guessed it, the side drum. And, talking about impact, can it be right that 12 solo Apostles can seem to sing 88 choral tenors and basses off the stage?

The orchestral playing is, as Andrew suggests, sublime throughout. I’m not deliberately being picky, more reflecting how much more involved I had become in the performance in the second half, when I say that I was disturbed by a change of bow by the solo viola around [166] which would have been better done while the choir were still singing rather than in an otherwise silent beat. But without a doubt the Hallé players sound as though they are performing the music, rather than just playing the notes accurately.

In my hurry to listen to the recording, I had not reminded myself who the soloists were: mind you, there’s nothing like a ‘blind tasting’ to get rid of pre-conceived notions. I found Jesus’s accent disconcerting, and Judas seemingly unperturbed by what he had done. I was surprised to discover that Judas was sung by Brindley Sherratt, a man of immense operatic experience. I will admit to being brought up on John Carol Case’s cultured tones in the part of Jesus, but Jacques Imbrailo took a little getting used to, despite his fabulous voice. And, on a similar subject, since when was ‘torches’ (as in ‘cometh with lanterns and torches and weapons’) pronounced ‘torch-is’?

The performance gets off to a shaky start, with choir and orchestra drifting apart at times throughout the Prologue. Thereafter things improve considerably, but for me the performance did not take wing until Part 2. Conscious of the fact that my reaction is so obviously different to that of Andrew, I listened again, and also made comparisons with other performances on my shelves, both ‘live’ and ‘studio’. Some pretty amazing soloists have recorded *The Apostles*: to take just the role of Peter, I found John Cameron, John Shirley-Quirk, Benjamin Luxon and Bryn Terfel to savour. Nor do all live performances lose their impact in recording: Rozhdestvensky (a very fine yet almost forgotten Elgarian) with his BBC forces whipped up tremendous momentum in the Festival Hall in February 1982 by adding a spot of conducting genius to Elgar’s very specific markings.

Yet, to my mind, finest of all is Richard Hickox’s studio recording. The greatest compliment I can pay it is to say that it doesn’t sound like a studio performance. It is wonderfully paced and controlled by Hickox, and the LSO are every bit as good as the Hallé.

Getting back to the present issue, the booklet is also something of a curate’s egg. It contains Michael Kennedy’s fine essay from the concert programme, the complete text, and a complete listing of all who took part, from which one can see that separate oboe players were engaged for the brief off-stage section, thus avoiding problems of logistics. (Elgar gives the players time to creep out, and indicates in the full score when they should return to their seats.) But, while I am no fan of PR-inspired blurbs, I would have liked to have known a little about the soloists, especially as with 15 of them, by no means all of the names are familiar. The orchestral list is punctuated with \*, #, and the like, but nowhere is there an indication of what these symbols signify. All in all the booklet gives me the impression of being thrown together without too much thought.

I bought this set having read Andrew Neill’s review and having already got Mark Elder’s performance of *The Kingdom*. Maybe I was expecting too much: nevertheless I would urge you to experience this performance for yourself rather than take my impressions as fair and reasonable.

Martin Bird

**Elgar: *Carillon, Une Voix dans le Désert, Le Drapeau Belge, Polonia, Sospiri, Carissima, Rosemary, The Sanguine Fan, Sursum Corda***  
Susan Gritton (soprano), Simon Callow (speaker), BBC Concert Orchestra,  
conducted by John Wilson



Here, under the title ‘The “Longed-for Light” Elgar’s Music in Wartime’, is a treasure trove of relatively unfamiliar Elgar, beautifully played by the BBC Concert Orchestra and conducted by a man who, as anyone who has seen his Prom concerts can vouch, has the gift of making players and listeners alike enjoy the music. Moreover, John Wilson has a natural understanding of how Elgar should go, and so gives us performances that feel absolutely right. Stir into the mix a perfectly balanced recorded sound, and the result is one of those CDs that keeps returning to the turntable.

To give this miscellany the title ‘Elgar’s Music in Wartime’ is to burden it with unnecessary thoughts and expectations. Andrew Neill’s informative notes steer us carefully through the programme but, when all’s said and done, *Carissima* and *Sospiri* were completed before the vast majority of people thought there would be a war, *Rosemary*, although orchestrated in 1915, dates from 1882, and the only connection I can find between *Sursum Corda* and the First World War is that George V had a hand in the commencement of both. If one considers *The Spirit of England* and the chamber music as representing Elgar’s true feelings at this time then all we are left with here is a series of Elgarian pot-boilers that raised valuable funds for war-time charities. But let us examine the treasure trove more closely.

On 3 April 1894 H.R.H. the Duke of York came to Worcester to lay the

SOMM Recordings

SOMMCD247

foundation stone of the Victoria Institute. The following Sunday a celebratory service was held in the Cathedral.

Long before 6 o'clock all the seats in the nave were occupied, and even St. John's Chapel was full. Mr. J.W.L. Higley, of Malvern, a brilliant executant, played the great organ till 6.15, when the band commenced an Adagio Solenne - entitled *Sursum Corda* - by Mr. Elgar. Mr. Elgar rehearsed his piece with the band in the afternoon, though the doctor's veto prevented him assisting in the performance of it in the evening. However, under the able conductorship of Mr. Hugh Blair, Mus. Bac., it suffered nothing by his absence. The work bears the impress of a master of composition, and one inspired with much religious and poetic feeling.<sup>1</sup>

Referring in his sermon to 'the enthusiasm of Tuesday when the future heir to the Crown passed in triumphal procession through the streets', the Dean of Worcester declared that 'when they mingled with the singing crowd, when they saw the banners waving, and when they heard the boom of the guns, some of them perhaps sent forth their thoughts to the great future when the Royalty of the Lord should be revealed.' *Sursum Corda* has been shamefully neglected over the years. It is an early flowering of Elgar's genius and, to my mind, worth the price of the disc on its own.

*Carissima* and *Rosemary* are far better known, and the love and affection with which they are played makes me wish for a complete disc of 'The lighter Elgar' from this team. *The Sanguine Fan*, *Sospiri* and *Polonia* have all fared well on record, and the present performances stand up extremely well by comparison, although *Polonia* ideally needs a larger orchestra than the BBC Concert Orchestra to make its maximum effect.

Which leaves the three recitations ... what *do* you do with music so very much 'of the moment' a century later? It was so much 'of the moment' that Elgar's recording of *Carillon* gave the poem complete but cut the music. In contrast, Boult's 1970s recording gave the music complete but omitted the poem. At the first performance Tita Brand, the poet's wife, 'declaimed with a white heat of emotion'. On Elgar's recording we can hear Henry Ainley 'both in voice and presence, doing full justice to the inspiring words'. But what do we expect of Simon Callow? Will it be like Olivier rousing his troops at Agincourt? Will we get an attempt at Ainley's 'white heat of emotion' that merely reminds us of Alan Bennett's *Beyond the Fringe* sketch 'The Aftermyth of War'? Well, neither, actually. For whatever reason, Simon Callow was not present at the orchestral sessions (held, appropriately enough, in that part of Watford once known as Callowland). That is sad, for it means that he had to conjure up his image of the piece on his own in a BBC studio in London, speaking his part with (and those who have seen the session photographs will know what I mean) a certain patriotic nonchalance.

With *Une Voix dans le Désert* he is on safer ground, not least because he is dealing with a minor masterpiece. Here a far gentler recitation surrounds

1 *Worcester Herald*, 14 April 1894

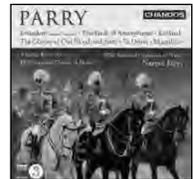
a soprano solo of perfect simplicity and stillness. That it was first produced on stage is understandable - that it provided the meat in a sandwich of *Cav* and *Pag* less so. Simon Callow does have a hint of the 'Are you sitting comfortably, then I'll begin' style that is used far more appropriately in the new recording of *The Starlight Express*, but no matter, and Susan Gritton's contribution is lovely. Elgar himself missed the moment with *Le Drapeau Belge*. It was not performed until 1917 when the particular horrors of Belgium must have seemed as nothing to the horrors that had followed elsewhere. And to hear Callow banging on remorselessly about the 'Black, yellow and red' brought to mind, not the Belgian flag, but the fact that they are the colours of Watford Football Club.

But, make no mistake, this is a superb disc and highly recommendable.

Martin Bird

**Parry: *Te Deum* (1911), *England, Suite - The Birds of Aristophanes*, *Jerusalem*, *The Glories of Our Blood and State*, *Magnificat* (1897)**

Amanda Roocroft (soprano), BBC National Chorus and Orchestra of Wales, conducted by Neeme Järvi



That well-known Patron of the Elgar Foundation, the Prince of Wales, has been doing his stuff again for Parry. Following the success of his Parry - the Royal Weddings and Parry - the TV Documentary, we now have this marvellous (and unexpected) disc from Chandos to which Charles has contributed two pages of introductory notes.

We, and Parry, have considerable cause to be thankful for his patronage. Reviewing a disc of Parry's choral works from Manchester Cathedral in November 2009 I bemoaned the fact that economics meant that we were unlikely to get recordings of his larger scale choral works in all their glory. Yet here are some, and, while I still hanker after a recording of *Judith*, we must truly give thanks to Chandos for their investment in this magnificent production.

As we well know, a certain Edward Elgar was commissioned by George Sinclair to compose a *Te Deum* and *Benedictus* for the opening service of the 1897 Hereford Musical Festival. He duly obliged, even though he had to go over to Hereford in June to play his sketches to Sinclair to see if they would be acceptable. Percy Hull was present, and remembered that Elgar 'was as nervous as a kitten and heaved a huge sigh of relief when Sinclair said: "It is very very modern, but I think it will do"'. What has got lost in the mists of time was that Sinclair commissioned a setting of the *Magnificat* from Parry for the Wednesday morning concert, and I bet he didn't have to audition! He produced a large-scale piece, with a substantial part for the soprano Anna Williams, whose last Three Choirs appearance this was before retirement. In their review of the year's music, the *Morning Post* declared that 'Two

Chandos

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of the most remarkable works of native origin produced during the year are undoubtedly the “Magnificat” of Dr. Hubert Parry and the fine “Requiem” of Professor Villiers Stanford.’ I rather agree: we already have a recording of the *Requiem* which shows that at times Stanford out-Verdis Verdi, and now we can hear this very fine *Magnificat*.

We can also now recreate the end of George V’s coronation service, for, in addition to commissioning Elgar to write a Coronation March, Frederick Bridge asked Parry for a *Te Deum*. It came right at the end of the service, while the King was having a no doubt well earned breather, and was followed immediately by the National Anthem and Elgar’s March. It received its second performance at the Worcester Festival that autumn, when Parry was ‘able to secure a far broader treatment than it received at the Coronation. He adopted very slow *tempi* in many parts of it, which increase its dignity to a surprising extent.’

Slow *tempi* are not a feature of Järvi’s Parry. Not the first (or even the hundred and first) name to spring to mind to conduct Parry, he does an incredible job. These performances have tremendous drive and a real sense of direction and purpose. The choir and orchestra sing and play magnificently, and Amanda Roocroft throws off her solos with aplomb. All is captured to perfection by the Chandos team.

The first verse of *Jerusalem* (in Parry’s orchestration) is sung by Roocroft, the choir taking over for verse two. The funeral ode *The Glories of our Blood and State* was written for the 1883 Gloucester Festival. *Berrow’s* thought it ‘earnest and full of meaning’, which seems as good a summing up as any. The only purely orchestral work on this disc, *The Birds*, was written for the Cambridge Greek Play of 1883, at which Stanford conducted.

No lover of Parry’s music should hold back, and if you dismiss Parry as a writer of turgid music, thickly orchestrated, then listen to this CD and prepare to be enlightened.

Martin Bird

All the Elgar CDs are available now from the Elgar Birthplace Museum. Remember that buying from the Birthplace is a way of contributing directly towards its finances at this difficult economic time. You may shop online at:

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## LETTERS

*From Robert Kay*

### ***Beau Brummel - scholarly edition and performing edition***

In his review of Vol. 21 of the Elgar Complete Edition in the August issue of the *Journal*, Julian Rushton raised some points of comparison between the Acuta and ECE editions of *Beau Brummel*. The distinction here is between a ‘scholarly edition’, aimed at musicologists and libraries, and a ‘performing edition’ aimed at the wider musical public.

Without performance, music is essentially useless. Consequently all Acuta Editions are designed primarily to assist the practical dissemination of music for which performing materials have hitherto been difficult or impossible to obtain. Editorial work is generally not highlighted as to do so contributes little to ease of comprehension or of performance. In some cases (e.g. our edition of the Oboe Soliloquy) to display all Editorial work on the printed page would have rendered the publication essentially useless from the performing standpoint.

With the very important proviso that any Editorial work should be faithful to the artistic and intellectual spirit of the original, most music-lovers are not really concerned whether a particular marking is the work of the composer or a subsequent Editor. That is not to say that Editorial work should not be done with complete rigour: the decision is simply whether to display it in the front window.

Julian is correct in his assumption that I was not aware of Mr. Lloyd-Jones’ own investigations into the *Beau Brummel* saga. Our respective articles were written from slightly different standpoints, and in particular the *Elgar Society Journal* context allowed the freedom to include an absolutely comprehensive account of the play’s brief career, and to make an informed guess as to what probably happened to the (lost) manuscript. In the circumstances, Mr. Lloyd-Jones is to be congratulated on his efforts to amass information which (I say with feeling) was difficult to track down and went against so many received ideas.

*From Andrew Neill*

### ***The Sanguine Fan***

Professor Julian Rushton’s review of Volume 21 of the Complete Edition (*The Sanguine Fan* and *Beau Brummel*) in Vol.17 No.5 rang a number of bells for me. I had just completed the notes for the new SOMM CD of music from the Great War and, in doing so, had listened several times to Elgar’s only ballet music. I had duly repeated the scenario with which we are familiar, namely that the ballet ends with Pan striking the male lover dead leaving the female lead weeping over the lifeless body. However, it is difficult to imagine this gruesome scene, through Elgar’s music. There is nothing tragic in what we hear and I found I was in agreement with Professor Rushton in that the

original synopsis from which Elgar worked presented a far sunnier outcome. This (in summary) describes the ending as: 'Pan raises his arm as if to strike [the young man] ... The mortal girl with a cry flings herself between Pan and the young man, and falls fainting into the young man's arms ... The mortal girl recovers, and the young man realizing she has saved him draws her to him.' It is not difficult, therefore, to agree with Professor Rushton's suggestion that it was this scenario that inspired Elgar's music and that, somehow this changed during the rehearsals to which Elgar acquiesced.

We know that actors (some very distinguished) participated in the two performances and it is possible that, as Professor Rushton suggested to me, Gerald 'Du Maurier decided his exit wasn't strong enough without a corpse'! In other words ignore the music and get on with the action. There was insufficient space in the CD booklet to air the argument but the scenario can be found in full in the Complete Edition as we know.

*From Alan Tongue*

**Don't B ♭, never B #, always B ♮.**

Further to the editor's fascinating note on the correct notes in the solo cello part in the Cello Concerto in the August edition of the *Journal*, I suggest that any discussion on this has to include Norman Del Mar's observation, as expressed in his delightful and compulsory read *Orchestral Variations: Confusion and Error in the Orchestra Repertoire* (London: Eulenburg, 1981, 124). 'Four bars after fig. 19: the ♭ to the B in the solo cello at the phrase [music example given] is missing in the first edition. It is sometimes the subject of controversy (the B ♮ strange to say, as makes very curious harmony) but has since been corrected in later printings of the score and solo part.'

I agree entirely with his use of the word 'curious': the B ♮ makes a diminished 5th with the F ♮, and this *diabolus in musica* is totally foreign to the nostalgic passage. There is also support for the B ♭ from the previous phrase, where the same chromatic bass line first appears, somewhat disguised by being in treble clef and with an enharmonic A # rather than the B ♭. And support, as you point out, from the fact that the B following the bar in question is marked ♮ only because of the preceding B ♭. Both these should confirm that the B ♭ is correct.

Incidentally, Norman Del Mar documents six other points of confusion in the score. In this regard Elgar and his publishers are following in the footsteps of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky *et al.* Fascinating stuff and designed to keep conductors on their toes.

Two related thoughts: might it be possible for our excellent circle of reviewers to first review privately each new addition to the Elgar Complete Edition before it goes to the printer, so that changes to any mistakes or omissions spotted could be made if agreed by the current editor? And might a list of corrections be published from time to time, or sent to subscribers?

*From Malcolm Walker*

### *Approaches to the part of Gerontius*

The comments of David Bury, Walter Hurst and Martin Bird regarding the interpretative approaches to Gerontius are indeed valuable and pertinent. My father, Norman Walker, who was the bass soloist in the 1945 complete recording, always considered Heddle Nash the finest exponent of Gerontius of his time. He felt Nash cleverly differentiated between the two parts of the oratorio. Another tenor much admired by my father in the part was Webster Booth. I recall hearing him sing Gerontius on two occasions. Nash's successor was by general consent Richard Lewis, but I find his approach cold, lacking in colour and remote as an interpreter. Certainly by the time he re-recorded the part in 1964 for Barbirolli he was not at his best, suffering from a cold at the time. I always regretted the Australian tenor Ronald Dowd was not used as he had sung the part most memorably in the 1963 Festival Hall performance with the Philharmonia under Barbirolli. (An off-air recording survives of this event.)

The mention of Nicolai Gedda is interesting in that Walter Legge had planned a recording in 1961-62 that would have included Christa Ludwig and Dietrich-Fischer with the Philharmonia under Barbirolli. This proposal was however rejected. However, aware of this fact, I did suggest Gedda's name to Christopher Bishop (Boult's recording producer) when it was mooted that Sir Adrian would be recording the oratorio. In the case of Domingo he would have taken part in a projected Barenboim recording for CBS in the 1970s, a version that would have also included Janet Baker and Fischer-Dieskau. This again failed to materialise. The reference to Fritz Wunderlich is interesting for it is possible had he lived he might have recorded the oratorio in time. What is extraordinary is that Jon Vickers never repeated his interpretation after his 1957 Italian broadcast under Barbirolli. I find his heroic singing of the 'Sanctus fortis' section in Part One truly memorable as well as much else.

*From Michael Plant*

### *Henry Purcell*

On re-reading the August *Journal*, my eye was caught by the Editor's recollection of an attempt he made to persuade another member that 'Purcell was a far greater composer than Elgar'. A little surprising for a man in his position, but Mr. Bird's industry and devotion to Elgar are beyond question. If he wishes to fly a few kites and test a few arguments, then why not? However, I was reminded that from my earliest days as a music-lover, there was always some grown-up who would tell me in magisterial tones which brooked no argument - adults were like that in those days - that 'Elgar was our greatest composer since Purcell'. None of Purcell's music was ever named in support of this opinion except perhaps 'Nymphs and Shepherds' or the noble tune from *Abdelazer* upon which Britten founded his 'Young Person's Guide'. Now that I am 63 and a grown-up myself (I suppose), I still hear this glib assertion, although it is obvious that Purcell holds nothing like Elgar's position in the esteem of the nation.

Purcell was a genius who flashed across the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and died at only 36, an age when

Elgar was barely getting started. The Purcell Complete Edition runs to 31 volumes and the tragedy for us is that so much of it requires special pleading in this, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the preposterous royal odes, theatrical music for plays we do not care to stage, lengthy 'semi-operas' and (just now and then) breath-takingly magnificent moments in otherwise obsolete occasional and ceremonial pieces. I have met plenty of people with personal memories of Elgar, who stands at the end of a tradition of symphonic music. He is (to me) clearly its greatest British exponent and he exploited the modern symphony orchestra in music undreamed of by Purcell. So am I comparing chalk and cheese? Sadly, the bulk of Purcell's music served the needs of his time, 300 years ago, and is now simply beyond my reach. If the Editor feels I am missing something, perhaps he will let us hear his arguments, for my own feelings are that we, the Elgar Society, should take a stand. Britain's greatest composer is not anyone since anyone. It is Elgar. Enough said.

### *A response from the editor*

Having sung the (too-many!) royal odes with the Louis Halsey Singers in the '60s and '70s, I can see Michael Plant's point - but surely they are no more preposterous than Elgar's 1902 contribution - and without them, in the set under review, we would have been deprived of 'Sound the Trumpet'. I conducted a fair amount of Purcell in the 1970s, including my own edition of *The Fairy Queen*, and I must say that for me his astonishing harmonies and word-setting have never been surpassed by an English composer. I, too, grew up with regular helpings of 'Nymphs and Shepherds' - following the popularity of Harty's 1929 recording with Manchester school children and the Hallé it became standard fare in school music lessons. But I also had the good fortune to sing as a treble in John Poole's choir at the University of London's church, St. George's, Bloomsbury, and was quite overwhelmed by Purcell's church music. I would urge any reader who has not yet discovered its beauties to hear some - and 'Hear my Prayer, O Lord' is as good a place to start as any - and he will find music that can hold its own in any century or company. As I said in my review, comparison is a pretty futile exercise - but aren't we lucky to have such fabulous composers as those on the 'Glorious Majesty' set?

To show how tastes and opinions change, I can't resist adding an extract from a letter written to Elgar in April 1903 by the English-born composer George Marshall-Hall, Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne and, incidentally, composer of an opera, *Dido and Aeneas*, first performed in 1899 in Melbourne.

One of the greatest pleasures I have had for a long time has been the perusal of your "St. Gerontius", a truly sincere and nobly conceived work, such as England has not produced since the time of Purcell, unless one excepts Hamish McCunn's early overtures - which have the charm of delightful freshness ... your work appears to me of very great significance and importance, and I hope very soon to be able to produce it here, the only difficulty in the way being our lack of a cultivated tenor, able to do justice to his very important part.

## 100 YEARS AGO ...

The beginning of September saw the start of the festival season, and after the London rehearsals the Elgars set up camp in Castle Pool House, Hereford, for the Three Choirs Festival. As ever, there was much by Elgar at the festival: the *Coronation March* at the opening service, the first performances of *The Torch* and *The River*, sung by Muriel Foster, and of the orchestral suite from *The Crown of India* and, on the Thursday, *Gerontius* with Muriel Foster and Gervase Elwes, a concert that attracted the largest audience of the week. On the Tuesday 'E. motored with Muriel to Broadheath'.

After the festival he told Windflower 'I am very weary & want a change badly', but there was to be no respite yet, as orchestral rehearsals for *The Music Makers*, which was to be premiered at the Birmingham Festival, commenced almost immediately in London. Elgar reported to Carice that 'All goes well except that which does not go at all'. In between orchestral rehearsals he went to Birmingham to rehearse the chorus, and in his spare moments (!) he painted the top corridor 'cream white - likewise the stairs: there will be several other stares when you see it.'

Elgar conducted *The Music Makers* at the evening concert on 1 October, where it was followed by Sibelius conducting the English premiere of his Fourth Symphony. Alice thought it 'Most splendid & impressive'. The critics agreed, the *Morning Post* reporting that 'the work evoked the first real enthusiasm of the festival', although 'there was less appreciation for the new Symphony by Sibelius'. Three days later Elgar conducted *The Apostles*. He was not well, and conducted sitting down.

The next day they 'started for Grasmere 12 something', where they stayed at the Prince of Wales Lake Hotel, overlooking Rydal Water. He told Windflower 'we have a boat & are on the lake all day - no one here or nearly no one - I go to sleep in the boat! & float about - so restful & good for nerves.' At the end of their holiday, though, he was writing to Rosa Burley saying 'I have this year been very unwell - gout of sorts - & much depressed - I suppose I am old! However I have plenty of vitality if there was any to feel vital for.'

They returned to Severn House on 14 October, and Elgar spent a few days with his sister Pollie in Stoke Prior at the end of the month.

The beginning of November found Windflower at Severn House playing 'C. Franck's Symphony as Duet' in preparation for Elgar's performance with the LSO on the 25<sup>th</sup>. He was also 'out seeing billiard tables'. After he had conducted the second performance of *The Music Makers* at Brighton, the whole family went 'to Harrow to look for a wow': Jock, an Aberdeen terrier, arrived on the 19<sup>th</sup>, lasting almost a fortnight before he 'went away, not quite trustworthy we feared'.

But December brought alternate delights, as on the 2<sup>nd</sup> the 'billiard table came - Interesting to see it put together - It took all day. E. very peased'. On the 9<sup>th</sup> he conducted an all-Elgar concert with the LSO, in which his old pupil, Marie Hall, played the Violin Concerto. Christmas was spent in Hampstead, with Hugh Blair coming on Christmas Eve 'to play billiards with E.' On Christmas Day they 'Opened letters & parcels E. not very well - Alice S. W. to tea', and on Boxing Day they went 'to Alice S. W.'s to lunch & to "John Bull's Other Island" - Most delightful - The noble & ideal left in instead of the poison of other B. Shaw'. The year ended with Muriel Foster coming 'to tea & to learn to play billiards'.

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