



## MUSIC REVIEWS

### **Elgar: *Secular Part-songs and Unison Songs***

Elgar Complete Edition Vol. 13, edited by Donald Hunt (Rickmansworth: Elgar Society Edition Ltd., 2014)

ISBN  
978-1-904856-13-9  
289 pp. + xxxi.

Elgar's part-songs seem to occupy the artistic equivalent of a back lane in the composer's compositional output. Those we consider as the favourites (*My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land*, *As Torrents in Summer*, *Love*) feature occasionally in the concert programmes of choirs who perhaps might be put off by the difficulties of the later songs which are often shrugged off as pieces Elgar wrote while on holiday. Yet, as Donald Hunt rightly points out in his forward to the edition, in the same way that Beethoven insisted on returning to the medium of the string quartet, Elgar wrote part-songs throughout his creative life (from 1889 to 1933), despite not being a particularly skilled singer. Subsequently, these songs possess their own subtly intensities that, if performed with a 'particular knack', confront the listener with deeply emotive sensations as well as some exquisite vocal sonorities.

One major advantage of this new edition is to be able to trace not only the development in Elgar's choral writing, but also the growing autonomy of these miniatures. From the early stages when Novello took the liberty to publish certain pieces in sets and numerous arrangements were made, Elgar carved out his own genre (perhaps giving reasoning as to the use of 'choral song' from Op.71 onwards at William McNaught's suggestion), transforming many of the features commonly associated with the part-song – 'cliché-ridden harmonies, sequences and predictable melodic contours' – even by Op.45. By the time of the *Four Part-Songs*, Op.53, and most particularly in *Go, Song of Mine*, Op.57, the pieces rival any instrumental work of Elgar's in their seriousness and intellectual content.

The insights offered by this edition into the compositional processes and contexts behind these songs are invaluable to any Elgar enthusiast, and have clearly been researched and prepared with the utmost care and diligence. The editorial markings are practical and informative. Of particular interest in regards to how Elgar thought about his part-songs is his comment to Jaeger concerning *Evening Scene*: 'my best bit of landscape so far in that line'; the changes he made to Coventry Patmore's original are indicative of how much imagery mattered to the composer. Additional curiosities follow in the Appendix containing some expertly crafted representations of sketches of pieces that remained unfinished, which are instructive if only for the purpose of viewing Elgar's workings-out.

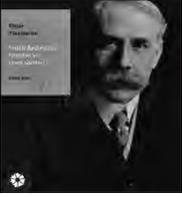
It is particularly refreshing to see such a diversity of styles in one collection. The jaunty *The Song of the Bull (In May Week)* (I was gutted to discover this song having only just graduated from Cambridge) is followed

by the challenging *The Herald* which contains some of the most dysfunctional harmonic progressions in Elgar's music. Significant, too, is *The Reveille*, Op. 54, which offers an unusually political voice – 'For the great heart of the nation, throbbing, answered, "Lord, we come!"' – and may necessitate further investigation as regards to Elgar's true feelings of war and Imperialism.

Some typographical errors in both text and music are minor nicks in what is overall an impressive and long-anticipated edition. While it may not be practical for singers, the clarity of typesetting and editor's comments on the performance of this demanding repertoire makes it indispensable for choral directors (albeit ones with a sturdy music stand!). With this, it is hoped that Elgar's part-songs will enjoy a more active future.

George Parris

## BOOK REVIEWS



### **Emre Aracı: *Elgar Türkiye'de: İngiliz bestecinin İstanbul ve İzmir günleri***

Istanbul: Pera Müzesi, 2014

106 pp

ISBN

978-605-4642-26-7

Elgar's visit to Turkey in 1905 was the subject of an article by Andrew Neill in this Journal ten years ago<sup>1</sup>, and has received spasmodic attention elsewhere. It is good to see that it has now attracted the attention of a Turkish musicologist. Dr Aracı, a graduate of Edinburgh University, is a composer and music historian who has taken a special interest in European-Turkish musical connections, with a substantial number of recordings and publications to his credit, in both Turkish and English.

The title of this little book reads: 'Elgar in Turkey: an English composer's days in Istanbul and Izmir'. The 3-page introduction briefly runs through some other musicians' connections with Turkey and Turkish music: Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Holst and Adrian Boult, before giving the background to the present work and mentioning the sources used, in the Birthplace Museum and Birmingham University Library. Fuller details of these are given in a bibliography at the end.

The book is divided into some 34 sections (too brief to be called chapters), starting with the state of Elgar's life and career in 1905, followed by the 'unexpected invitation' (from Lady Beresford). Then his progress is traced through London, Brindisi, Corfu, Patras, Athens, on board HMS *Bulwark*, Lemnos and Çanakkale to Istanbul, where his surroundings, impressions, movements and contacts are enumerated in some detail. Next comes Izmir (Smyrna) with his visit to the Mevlevi dervishes and the impressions which led to In Smyrna. The final sections follow his return through, Greece, Italy, Dover and London.

The text of the book is entirely in Turkish, but over 60 of its 106 pages are taken up wholly or partly by illustrations depicting people and places. Some of these will be familiar to Elgarians, but there are many which may not be. So enthusiasts, even if they do not read Turkish, might find it worth acquiring.

Geoffrey Roper

*Editor's note: attracted by the above review I ordered a copy of this book from Turkey. Delivery was promised within two months: it arrived in only a week. To my surprise and delight, the copy I received is entirely in English, and I wholeheartedly endorse Geoffrey Roper's recommendation.*

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1 Neill, Andrew, 'Elgar in Smyrna, 1905', *Elgar Society Journal*, 14/3 (2005), 2-24. Addendum, 14/4 (2006), 28-29.

**Albert Gier, Meinhard Saremba, Benedict Taylor (editors):**  
***Sullivan Perspektiven II – Arthur Sullivans Bühnenwerke, Oratorien,***  
***Schauspielmusik und Lieder***  
Essen: Oldib-Verlag, 2014



412 pp

ISBN

978-3-939556-42-8

This is the second book of Sullivan essays edited by this formidable trio of scholars, and is comparable to the two Elgar volumes of *Elgar Studies* edited by Raymond Monk a couple of decades ago, that is to say, they are the products of a vibrant composer Society – here the Deutsche Sullivan-Gesellschaft (German Sullivan Society) created in 2009 – aimed not at the general reader but to the committed and knowledgeable connoisseur of the composer in question. Above all, the editors want to carry on increasing the growing interest in German music- and theatre-studies in Arthur Sullivan and British music. I might add that the Sullivan Society, under the inexhaustible Meinhard Saremba, is hosting an Elgar conference in Bamberg next April, and I suggest Society members look out for further details in the *Elgar Society News*. It is appropriate that, given Saremba's dual expertise, his is the only essay in the volume under review that compares Sullivan and Elgar, in a fascinating study of the influence of Sullivan's *The Light of the World* on *The Light of Life* and *The Apostles*. I urge the editor of our *Journal* to consider translating this essay for inclusion in the *Journal*, for I am sure fellow readers will find it as perceptive as I do.

Just as in *Edward Elgar, Musik-Konzepte* edited by Ulrich Tadday that I reviewed in a recent *Journal*, this fascinating volume is written in a mixture of German and English, with contributions from ten Anglophone and seven German-speaking contributors. These are grouped into studies of the operas, the oratorios and sacred dramas, *Schauspielmusik*, a difficult to translate concept that emanates from the theatre and covers in effect the incidental music, and finally, song. Regrettably, there is not the space to give detailed review of all, or indeed some, of the studies, suffice it to say that any of us with an interest in Sullivan will enjoy discovering fascinating details and perspectives on a composer still constrained in the UK by the success of the Savoy Operas. At the same time, we aficionados of Elgar will make constant comparisons between the respective social, artistic and intellectual milieux in which Sullivan and Elgar found themselves, noting the differences (of which we were already aware) and, more interestingly, the similarities.

The most obvious example is that the *Schauspielmusik* section is overwhelmingly dominated by Sullivan's responses to Shakespeare, and these fascinating studies open up the whole of the Nineteenth Century's musical engagement with the Bard, from Mendelssohn through to *Falstaff* (never mind that we really should go even further back to Purcell). And we should point out that the Germany-trained and Mendelssohn-influenced Sullivan reminds us that German intellectual and artistic society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries embraced Shakespeare on a scale only comparable to the reverse embracing in England of Wagner.

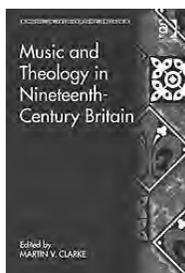
To give a less titanic example, Daniel Townsend's *Couleur Locale* in

*Haddon Hall & The Gondoliers* can remind us of the similarities of Sullivan and Elgar in their adoption of the charming and simplistic musical mannerisms to denote the foreign and exotic – think *Spanish Lady*, *Sérénade Mauresque*, *From the Bavarian Highlands*, *Spanish Serenade*, *In the South* – and their nods towards more ancient styles – the polkas, minuets and sarabandes, and *Contrasts: The Gavotte - AD 1700 and 1900*. Concerning the *faux-antique*, Mr Townsend quotes from, and irritatingly frequently refers to, p.545 of a large 2011 G&S study, ‘as Carolyn Williams succinctly expresses it “the past is a foreign country”’. Come on, that reference itself is lifted from the famous opening of L.P. Hartley’s *The Go-Between*: ‘The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there’.

Finally, what most surprised me was my enjoyment of, and fascination by, James Brooks Kuykendall’s *Structures & Textures of Savoy Recitative*. The analysis and detail led to an interesting conclusion on page 110 ‘What has remained unrecognized is that the many varieties of recitative structures (Gilbert) and textures (Sullivan) manifested in their works were essential to the style they cultivated. The demise of recitative at the turn of the century precipitated the ossification of Savoy Opera even more than the deaths of Sullivan (1900) and Gilbert (1911)’.

It set me thinking how misplaced is our regret that we never had a finished opera from Elgar. Besides the fact that he was manifestly incapable of writing one, Elgar pleaded he never found a suitable libretto. Well, our omniscient Editor, Martin Bird, tells me that W.S. Gilbert approached Elgar in 1906 with a scenario for an opera based on his 1870s play ‘The Wicked World’, but nothing came of it. Pity, because Gilbert’s astonishing poetic and dramatic virtuosity would at least have reminded Elgar there was no excuse for a lack of a libretto, and would probably have persuaded him not to waste any more time on a fruitless exercise.

Steven Halls



**Martin V. Clarke, (editor):**  
***Music and Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain***  
Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012

Over the past twenty years or so Ashgate – originally under the name of Scholar – has brought out many important books on British music, and this compilation of eleven essays by different authors is a valuable addition to the list. Inevitably perhaps there are some journeys down the highways and byways of British culture; but they reflect the fact that the nineteenth century was when Britain – as well as other European countries and the United States – began to move from being a largely rural society into the modern world (to say nothing of spreading its influence beyond its shores). Traditional beliefs were often challenged, especially by advances in science: yet the 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw the growth of many Christian churches. The movement which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Wesley brothers eventually became a separate denomination known as the Methodists, in which music played

262 pp

ISBN 9781409409892

an important part; and many other 'nonconformist' churches followed suit. Roman Catholic emancipation in 1829 led to considerable numerical growth, enhanced by a significant number of Irish Immigrants; and the church received an enormous fillip in 1845 when the distinguished Anglican theologian John Henry Newman converted to Catholicism.

Seven of the eleven chapters deal with hymnody or liturgical music, including a fascinating piece by Charles Edward McGuire on the attempt by several London evangelists from the London Missionary Society to teach the inhabitants of Malagasy (previously Madagascar) to sing western hymns rather than allow them to use the music associated with their pre-Christian lives. This was done by using the Tonic Sol-fa method.

In a well-researched piece Peter Horton has analysed the choice of texts used in anthems during the nineteenth century, where lyricists began to move away from setting mainly words from the psalms.

This leaves two chapters. The first is by David Brown, Professor of Theology at St Andrews, and entitled 'From *Elijah* to *The Kingdom*: Music and Scripture Interacting in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century English Oratorio'. *The Kingdom*, Brown says, 'can be seen to mark the end of an era not only for Elgar himself but also for the oratorio'. Moving through Parry, Stainer, Stanford, and Sullivan, Brown makes some very interesting points, including how Elgar portrays the characters of the soloists in *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*.

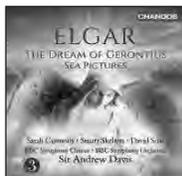
The final chapter is by Jeremy Begbie, Research Professor in Theology at Duke Divinity School, North Carolina, and formerly at Cambridge University. His article – 'Confidence and Anxiety in Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*' – picks up on the ambivalence of these two moods, and quotes an expression of Matthew Riley: 'a double-edged emotional vocabulary'. Begbie speaks of 'an unresolved oscillation between confidence and anxiety, a striving and a shrinking, a reaching forth and a holding back.' In Part I, 'any assurance felt by Gerontius seems to be repeatedly under threat'. This ambivalence, says Begbie is 'rather more deep-seated... regarding the soul's confidence before God'. He gives a helpful explanation of the doctrine of purgatory, which, he says, 'came to be seen as a kind of extension of the earthly practice of penance'. Newman seemed to want to 'distance himself from the punitive dimensions that had accrued to the doctrine'. In dealing with the musicological perspectives, Begbie draws on the writings of Riley and J.P.E. Harper-Scott, with particular reference to the contrasting tonalities in Elgar's First Symphony. A section entitled 'Psychological Perspectives' looks at Elgar's personality, with its 'turmoil and inner contradictions'; and sees Elgar's work in the context of *fin de siecle* 'decadence', as covered in the writings of Byron Adams. The final section deals with theological questions of purgatory and Christian assurance.

Beautifully written, and intensely scholarly, this is not an article to be read over mid-morning coffee; but for those interested in this aspect of Elgar's life and work, a stimulating and thought-provoking piece.

The book, as ever with Ashgate, is beautifully produced; but not the cheapest buy at around £60.

Geoffrey Hodgkins

## CD REVIEWS



CHANDOS  
CHSA5140

### *The Dream of Gerontius; Sea Pictures*

Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano), Stuart Skelton (tenor), David Soar (bass),  
BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis

Yet another *Dream of Gerontius* recording arrives for review. I make this the eighteenth commercial recording so far, and that excludes various pirated editions floating about of foreign performances. This is not a complaint, in fact it is very pleasing to see the attention paid to one of Elgar's masterworks, but I haven't found my ideal *Gerontius* yet, feeling that there is always one stumbling block (usually a soloist) that precludes ideal enjoyment. The previous recording, which I reviewed in the April *Journal*, is a case in point. It was an unexpected recording from Belgium, with a superb choral contribution from Collegium Vocale Gent and fine work from the Royal Flemish Philharmonic Orchestra, but I had my reservations about a couple of the soloists, and Edo de Waart's conducting was strong on devotion and mysticism but short on operatic fervour. But this new version comes as close as any to what I want to hear in this work.

I have long felt that Sir Andrew Davis is one of this country's finest Elgar conductors, along with Mark Elder. He chose to celebrate his recent 70<sup>th</sup> birthday by performing all three of Elgar's great oratorios. *Gerontius* was the one I missed, so I'm grateful to catch up with it now, while hoping that Chandos also recorded Davis's superb accounts of *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. After listening, my notepad had far fewer comments than normal, which I take to be satisfaction with every aspect of the performance.

Davis always understands the importance of keeping the tempi moving, so that the music doesn't sag. The Prelude here moves along at an ideal speed, not hurried in any way, but far from the funereal speed that is so often adopted. Chandos's recording captures the fine detail of the instrumentation admirably – listen, for example, to the clarity of the soft ominous roll on the timpani, played with wooden sticks, at the first entry of the voice. The recording also copes well with the full outbursts of sound, although I found I had to increase the volume control a little to gain the full impact. Davis is also alive to all the myriad markings in the score, not an *allargando* or a *stringendo* is missed, so that Elgar's flexible rhythms swirl and surge as they should. The BBC Symphony Orchestra has Elgarian style in their bloodstream, and throughout the composer's wonderfully judged orchestral effects make their proper impact. The BBC Symphony Chorus too is excellent, powerful in the great choral climaxes and suitably ethereal in the mystic and hushed semi-chorus sections.

The soloists are as fine a team as any yet assembled on recordings. I have always wished to hear a Wagnerian heldentenor in the part of Gerontius,

and the Australian tenor Stuart Skelton has the right heroic ring to his voice to suit this taxing part admirably. The ‘Take me Away’ climax near the end is thrillingly done, and both he and Davis notice that the ‘Sanctus Fortis’ episode is marked *Allegro Moderato*, so that the sensible tempo adopted is not the usual headlong rush. The bass David Soar is new to me, but he sings with passion and authority, and he leads the final chorus in Part One with great majesty. Sarah Connolly’s Angel is now well-known and ideally suited to the part, her warm mezzo-soprano consoling and comforting Gerontius’s questioning and troubled spirit. My only real quibble occurs in the Prelude. Twice, at Fig.10 in the score and also eight bars before, Elgar breaks the orchestra’s surging rhythms abruptly by his characteristic use of a double line across the bar-line, signifying a brief cut-off of sound. Davis holds the break too long I think, as though a pause sign was there instead. It is a small quibble, but one that startled me every time I heard it.

Elgar’s *Sea Pictures* completes this two-disc set, the work with the opus number immediately preceding that of *Gerontius*. Janet Baker’s classic recording from 1965 is usually held to be the touchstone recording, although I’ve never cared for it much, largely owing to Barbirolli’s expansive tempi. There have been many fine recordings since, but this must now go to the head of the list. Sarah Connolly’s voice has wonderful flexibility and warmth throughout the range Elgar asks of it, from low G below the staff to high A above it. It has not the dark contralto tones of, say, Gladys Ripley, whose 1950s recording has recently appeared on CD. But that kind of voice (like Clara Butt, for whom *Sea Pictures* was written) sounds a bit old-fashioned to my ears, while Connolly’s lighter mezzo-soprano and impeccable diction present the work in the best possible light. Needless to say Andrew Davis sees to it that Elgar’s wonderfully evocative and atmospheric orchestration is fully realized.

Overall, this recording must rank among the finest for these two works. I retain an affection for Boult’s 1976 recording with Nicolai Gedda in the title role, and I particularly like Elder’s performance with his Hallé forces. Then, for an interesting alternative, listen to the recording on the Elgar Society’s own label of Hans Swarowski leading Austrian/ German forces and soloists, singing in German, with the acclaimed Julius Patzak in the title role. Quite refreshing!

Finally, I have not mentioned the bonus track on the present new recording, when a ‘concert version’ of the *Gerontius* Prelude is given. This simply means that the Prelude is repeated again, with a D major chord tacked on to complete it, just before the voice enters. But does anyone play the Prelude on its own these days? It is not a separate overture, and is so much linked thematically and emotionally to the rest of the work that it seems perverse to play it by itself. But it is an easy enough job to end the CD after the work’s final chords have died away and before the bonus track begins.

Barry Collett



***The Spirit of England; With Proud Thanksgiving; Carillon; Arthur***

Judith Howarth (soprano), London Symphony Chorus, Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by John Wilson

Simon Callow (speaker), BBC Concert Orchestra, conducted by John Wilson (*Carillon*)

Orchestra of St. Paul's, conducted by Ben Palmer (*Arthur*)

SOMM

SOMMCD 255

This disc is entitled *The Binyon Settings*, and is the culmination of a long-cherished wish of Somm's Siva Oke and our own Andrew Neill to record the works on which Elgar and his friend Laurence Binyon collaborated. It was, in Siva's words, 'a real labour of love', and that love of Elgar's music and Binyon's poetry is nowhere more apparent than in the full-page list of sponsors which takes pride of place in the accompanying booklet. They include the Binyon family, the Elgar family, the Elgar Foundation, Elgar Works and, not least, the Elgar Society with funds from the [Ernie] Kay Trust.

Add to that the rather important fact that the disc contains the first recording of the complete incidental music to *Arthur*, in its original orchestration, and we can begin to appreciate why, again in Siva's words, this is 'a very special release of the music of Elgar'.

Elgar's friendship with Binyon dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century: their first recorded meeting was in December 1901 at Ridgehurst, the Hertfordshire home of Edward Speyer. Their first collaboration, however, was not until the Great War, when Elgar set three of Binyon's poems written soon after the outbreak of war: the result was *The Spirit of England*. In 1919 he was commissioned to write a choral work for the unveiling ceremony of the Cenotaph, for which he adapted both his music and Binyon's text to produce *With Proud Thanksgiving* from the third part of *The Spirit of England*: 'For the Fallen'.

These choral works are here in the very capable hands of John Wilson, who, as I have said before in these pages, 'has a natural understanding of how Elgar should go, and so gives us performances that feel absolutely right'. Judith Howarth has not only a fine voice but the ability to use it with great insight, so that the listener is riveted to the texts: a singer with 'brains', as Elgar would have said. The London Symphony Chorus, while sounding rather lacking in numbers, especially in the tenors, nevertheless does a fine job, and the Philharmonia make a lovely, gleaming, well-balanced sound.

John Wilson is in charge, too, for *Carillon*. Hang on, I hear you say, surely that's a setting of a poem by Emile Cammaerts, not Binyon; and you'd be absolutely right. During the Second World War Binyon, with Cammaerts' consent, wrote a more reflective poem to go with Elgar's music, and it is that version which is given here. The performance of the music is that recorded for Somm's earlier CD, 'The Longed-for Light' and, just as Simon Callow's reading of Cammaerts' poem was grafted on at a later date, so now is his reading of Binyon's. ('Lotte, ein Schwindel!', exclaimed Otto Klemperer to his daughter when a similar piece of trickery was applied to one of his recordings.) But the result fully justifies the means, and Simon Callow is

much more at home with Binyon's sentiments of quiet reflection than he was with Cammaerts' indignantly patriotic ones. I'd heard variously derogatory comments about the Binyon version of *Carillon*: now I've actually heard it it seems far more pertinent to today's world than Cammaerts' time capsule.

Which leaves the incidental music to the 1923 production at the Old Vic of Binyon's play, *Arthur*. It is extraordinary that we have had to wait until now to hear this major composition of Elgar's in its entirety and pretty much as the composer conceived it. There is a misconception that, after Alice's death, Elgar produced nothing of consequence. Here we have a 35 minute work – longer than *Falstaff* – which suggests that more than just a spark of creativity remained. The music has been edited by Ben Palmer, who conducts the present performance with his own players, the Orchestra of St. Paul's.

Unlike the Chandos recordings of *The Crown of India* and *The Starlight Express*, no attempt has been made to incorporate the script of the play into the recording, so all we have to guide us through the plot is an extensive synopsis which incorporates Elgar's cues and notes from his score. It means that often we listen to a series of brief snatches of music, some less than 30 seconds long, without having an aural picture to provide context. While this is totally understandable when one thinks of the economics of producing a disc of the play incorporating the incidental music, it is nonetheless a little regrettable in that we cannot experience Elgar's music in something like the context for which it was written.

What is more regrettable is that the music is performed with minimal vibrato on the part of the strings: unsurprising in that Ben Palmer has acted as assistant to Roger Norrington but, to my mind and ears, misguided. Barry Collett commented on the disadvantages of this approach in his December 2011 review for the *Journal* of a Norrington Elgar disc, though Meinhard Saremba was quick to point out its advantages in a letter published in the April 2012 issue. Luckily we can turn to the 1923 recording of *In the South* to hear exactly what style of playing Elgar expected from his string players, and there, just within the first side, we find a tremendous range of vibrato styles. Why does this matter so much in the *Arthur* music? Well, Elgar composed within the limitations of the Old Vic pit band, as per the list provided by Lilian Baylis in January 1923. The band played, essentially, one to a part, though there were two first violinists. Elgar took advantage of this by dividing the first violin part on occasion, though for much of the time the two first violinists play in unison. Now it is well nigh impossible for two violinists to play with total unanimity of intonation without at least a judicious application of vibrato, and so it proves in this performance. Not only does the listener have to adjust as the music moves from John Wilson's lush orchestral resources to the far sparer ones of Ben Palmer: one has to make allowances for the occasional passage when, with the best will in the world, the playing grates on the ear. And while Elgar was content to work within the limitations of the regular Old Vic band when scoring the music, he clearly envisaged it being played by a larger orchestra: indeed he consented to conduct only those performances in which the string section was enlarged, paying for the extra

players himself. As he wrote to Carice: ‘I have now four 1<sup>st</sup> violins, 2 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2 violas drums & a trombone! so I am to conduct’.

With so much goodwill going into the making of this disc, it seems more than a little churlish of me to make this criticism. I still value this disc highly, and what is a matter of some concern to me may be of little or no consequence to you. After all, the music’s the thing, and thanks to the dedication and generosity of Siva Oke and her team, we can at last hear the most substantial Elgar work from the 1920s, and a very moving and affecting one it is, too.

Martin Bird



BIS

BIS-1939

### **Symphony No. 1, *Cockaigne***

Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Sakari Oramo

In the August 2013 issue of the *Journal* the editor reviewed Sakari Oramo’s recording of the Second Symphony with more than a little enthusiasm, commenting that it was ‘in the quieter passages that [he heard] things [he’d] never heard before, and as much credit is due to the ability of the Stockholm players to listen to each other and produce magical sounds, and to the BIS engineers for capturing the results, as to the conductor’s skill in realising the possibilities of the printed page’. Having heard the CD myself, I share his enthusiasm.

Now comes the First Symphony and with it, regrettably, a sense of disappointment. Although both discs were recorded in the Stockholm Concert Hall, the recording team has changed completely, and one result is that the ‘magical sounds’ of the Second Symphony sessions have been replaced by a recording that is perhaps best described as ‘tubby’. I happened to start by listening to *Cockaigne*, not the most translucently scored piece, and it was very much ‘in your face’. By comparison with the Second Symphony the microphone placement seems much closer, and there is no sense of space around the sound.

Incidentally, the closeness of the recording brings out very clearly the *sforzando* stroke on the timpani in the finale five bars after [136] which, as Elgar pointed out as long ago as December 1908, was inserted in error by Novello’s engraver.

The great quality of Oramo’s performance of the Second Symphony was his ability to present a work I thought I knew quite well in a revelatory light. While adding nothing to Elgar’s score he somehow managed to find much that other conductors have missed. By contrast, in the First Symphony he seems intent on exaggerating Elgar’s intentions in a quite unnecessary way. One thinks of Elgar as marking every possible nuance in his scores. Having heard how Oramo pulls around the second movement I took a closer look at the score, and was surprised to find that it has but a single tempo indication (*Allegro molto*, minim = 69), with not a *rallentando* or *allargando* in sight as Elgar makes his transition to the *Adagio*. None is needed, as the effect of a dissipation of energy is achieved in other, more subtle, ways. Oramo sets

off at the suggested speed but at [77], just as the music should drive forward to its climax, slows down by a third in the space of four bars. By the end of the movement the music is ambling along at half Elgar's intended speed and the slow movement has, in effect, been going on for some considerable time before the actual *Adagio* is reached.

Despite there being many passages where Oramo and his players demonstrate why they were such a force in the Second Symphony, I cannot, in all honesty, recommend this issue as a truthful representation of Elgar's First.

Richard Wiley

**Elgar: Sonata for Violin and Piano**  
**Vaughan Williams: *The Lark Ascending***  
**Christian Carpenter: Sonata for Violin and Piano**  
Shulah Oliver, violin; Simon Marlow, piano



Shulah Oliver

VCE1013

I first became aware of Shulah Oliver in 2007 when she played Arthur Somervell's Violin Concerto with Paul Adrian Rooke and the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra, and I was impressed by her maturity and musicianship. Now Paul (and others) have sponsored this disc of English violin music which only reinforces those first impressions.

It was well recorded last year in the Hertfordshire church of St. Nicholas, Hinxworth, and the instrumental sound is lovely: immediate and well-balanced. Shulah's tone is lovely, too, rich and velvety, and her *portamento* style well-suited to the music.

The performance of the Elgar is on the leisurely side, deeply felt without ever letting the heart rule the head, and Shulah and her accompanist, Simon Marlow, play as one. This is certainly not a performance where the pianist takes on the role of supporting artist, but rather a shared conception of what Shulah rightly calls 'one of the great violin sonatas of its time'.

*The Lark Ascending* is heard in its original 1914 version for violin and piano – the more familiar version with orchestra came in 1920 – and if the poor bird seems more earthbound than usual, that is only because the downside of the immediacy of the recording is that it gives little sense of a spacious church acoustic.

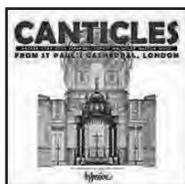
I must admit to having never come across the pianist and composer Christian Olive Carpenter before. Born in London in 1883, and the sister of Spencer Carpenter, sometime Dean of Exeter, she appeared frequently in London before the Great War, in recital and at the Queen's Hall promenade concerts, without ever exciting the critics. After the war she moved to Bath, where she became a bigger fish in a rather smaller pond: playing at the Pump House, broadcasting, teaching, and forming a social club for professional musicians. She was President of the local Music Lovers' Society, and in January 1940 organised an 'interesting musical competition, the winner of which was Mr. Wilfred Wade. He, with magnificent self-abnegation, refused the prize of a ¼lb. of butter, and after a further trial of skill Miss Pugsley was

pronounced the victor’.

*The Times*, in its only review of her music, felt that she ‘showed a gift for neat technique, but both the subjects and their treatment were entirely commonplace, and often suggested the drawing-room ballad’. Harsh words, and on the evidence of this sonata entirely undeserved. It is a most attractive piece.

The disc can be obtained from the Elgar Birthplace, and is well worth its modest price.

Martin Bird



Hyperion

CDA68058

**Archer:** *Benedicite*

**Gray:** *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* in F minor

**Roth:** *Jubilate*

**Stanford:** *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* in Bb

**Tippett:** *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* ‘Collegium Sancti Johanni Cantabrigiense’

**Walmisley:** *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* in D minor

**Walton:** *Coronation Te Deum*

**Wood:** *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* ‘Collegium Regale’

Simon Johnson (organ), St. Paul’s Cathedral Choir conducted by Andrew Carwood

Back in November 2010 I had the pleasure of reviewing a Hyperion disc, recorded in 1987 in St. Paul’s Cathedral, of settings of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* by six British composers. Now comes another collection of Canticles from, nominally, the same source. Nominally, because, or course, in the intervening years the personnel of the choir has changed and the Director of Music is now Andrew Carwood rather than John Scott.

The Elgar-related interest comes this time in the settings by Wood, Walton, Walmisley, Stanford and Gray.

Alan Gray succeeded Stanford as organist of Trinity College, Cambridge in 1892, a position he held until 1930. Elgar stayed with him in June 1901 when he went to Cambridge to conduct *Sea Pictures* in a CUMS concert. He had met Gray at the chorus rehearsal for the 1898 Leeds Musical Festival: Elgar rehearsing *Caractacus*, Gray *A Song of Redemption*. As Andrew Carwood points out in his informative booklet note, Elgar was unimpressed, telling Jaeger: ‘it makes me, an artist, sick to see that fool Gray allowed as long to rehearse his blasted rot as I am who produce – with all its many faults – an attempt at something like a “work”’. Carwood declares that ‘his *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* in F minor is, however, a masterpiece’. If this is a masterpiece, then I have every sympathy with Elgar for having to sit through *A Song of Redemption*!

Carwood also says, of Walton’s *Te Deum*: ‘It is a magnificent work ... full of antiphonal effects and punctuated by brass writing’. Indeed it is, but not in the version recorded here, which seems to be of the more modest arrangement

by Simon Preston with organ reduction by Mark Blatchly.

The settings by Charles Wood and Thomas Walmisley are common to both recordings. I said of Hyperion's earlier issue: 'The performances by John Scott and the St. Paul's choir are tremendous, full of vitality and passion. The recording manages to achieve clarity without sacrificing anything of the spacious cathedral acoustic.' I only wish I could say the same now. The recording is a little closer, which does reduce the impact of the cathedral acoustic somewhat, and in place of vitality and passion we have, for much of the time, plodding, almost stentorian, singing, with little sense of line or direction, especially from the men. Whether this is due to the fact that the twelve Vicars Choral of St. Paul's have been joined on this occasion by thirteen 'extras' I cannot say, but the result is there for all to hear.

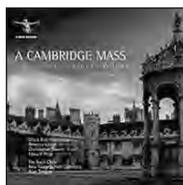
But we all hear things differently, and I think it fair to point out that in his review in *Gramophone*, Adrian Edwards said: 'This is choral singing at its finest; in every way, listening to this glorious CD is a heavenly experience'.

Martin Bird

### In brief ...

Readers may recall that in 2007, as well as masterminding the Society's Elgarian anniversary celebrations, Alan Tongue chanced upon Vaughan Williams' composition exercise for his Cambridge Doctorate in the University Library, and transcribed and edited it for performance. That exercise – *A Cambridge Mass* – was first performed at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, in March 2011, and a recording of the première has now been issued by Albion Records, the record label of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society (ALBCD020). Alan himself conducted The Bach Choir, the New Queen's Hall Orchestra and a fine team of soloists. He kindly arranged for a copy of the CD to be sent to me, and I can do no better than to quote from my email of thanks: 'Decided to sample the VW last evening, and sat riveted through the whole piece. An overwhelming feeling of triumph over the constraints of the Cambridge D.Mus requirements, which seem to encourage the writing of exercises rather than music. Thank God you rescued the thing, it's a super piece.' The CD also includes Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* in a performance that was rightly greeted with shouts of 'bravo'.

'Bravo', too, for George Parris, who in 2011, while a sixth-former, was awarded the Society's Certificate of Merit for mounting an Elgar Festival at his school. Since then he's formed The Carice Singers, an absolutely stunning group of highly talented young singers. I was fortunate enough to be invited to their recent London concert and launch of their new CD of Warlock's Choral Music (NAXOS 8.573227). The concert included some Elgar part-songs, conducted (with some pride – and impressive musicianship) from the recent ECE volume. Warlock is by no means easy to sing well – just achieving accurate chording would defeat 99% of choirs – and the CD



Albion Records

ALBCD020



NAXOS 8.573227

includes 25 of these taxing but rewarding pieces. But at the concert, as on the CD, the singers gave wonderfully polished and musical performances and so obviously enjoyed both their considerable achievement and each other's company. As one who comes from an earlier generation of semi-professional choirs (Louis Halsey and his singers, Roger Norrington and the Schütz Choir, John Eliot Gardiner and the Monteverdi Choir) I can only say that George and his Carice Singers are of similar quality and promise.



The Rev. William James Foxell (1857-1933) is a peripheral figure in the Elgar story. Headmaster of Amersham Grammar School from 1883 to 1886, he then moved to Canterbury Cathedral before becoming Rector of St Swithin's, Cannon Street, in 1903. He was Treasurer of the Union of Graduates in Music, of which Elgar was President, and lunched at Severn House on two occasions. I was in touch recently with his descendant, Peter Foxell, who is gradually assembling an archive of Foxell's music and recording it. Peter kindly sent me a selection of CDs containing string quintets, works for violin and piano, Mozart arrangements, and a whole raft of piano music from sonatas to salon pieces, including 'Soliloquies, Seven Pieces for Pianoforte Solo', composed in 1916 and 'dedicated by permission to Sir Edward Elgar, O.M., &c. &c.'. I suspect that the good Reverend would not have made great claims as to the profundity of his music, but all is well crafted. The vast majority was composed after 1910, although in style one could be forgiven for suggesting a date of half a century earlier. The players are the pianist Hugh Ockendon and the Andrew Laing String Quintet. Peter tells me that the recordings are available only as downloads, either of single tracks, or of virtual CDs. Members may be most interested in the *Soliloquies* (available on W.J. Foxell Music 8 – a Google search on 'Foxell' and 'Ockendon' will get you there), but tracks such as *There's rosemary, that's for remembrance*, and *Fünf Kleine Klavierstücke* (a criticism of atonalism) may also take your fancy.

Martin Bird

# LETTERS

## *Dream Children*

### *From Peter Nixon*

The incredible article on probable miscarriages and the origin of *Dream Children* was a major piece of work and alters our whole concept of the Elgar marriage. It is almost unbearably poignant and one hears the music in a totally new light.

### *From Wendy Hill*

Can I offer a different opinion about the article in the April *Journal*, Vol.18, No.4 – ‘Dream Children’?

I found the article distasteful, intrusive and highly personal to a degree that was prurient and almost offensive.

Does it add to our knowledge and appreciation of Elgar’s music? I think not.

What next? An article on Edward’s underwear? I hope not. Alice’s gynaecological history is a private, intimate subject and not suitable to be researched and to appear in a learned *Journal*. I see that the appreciative letters were written by male members of the Society. I wonder whether there are any female members of the Society who feel as I do? (but haven’t written to the *Journal*!!)

### *Editor’s note:*

When I received the first draft of Lynn’s article I readily admit that it frightened me, for I feared that Wendy’s reaction would be the predominant one. Not being in the business of deliberately offending members, I considered recommending it be submitted to a medical journal rather than a musical one.

Then I read it, and it seemed to me that the depth of research undertaken, and the conclusions drawn, did indeed warrant (in fact, demand) publication precisely because it added greatly to the human story behind Elgar’s music. That Elgar was an emotional man has never been in doubt: those emotions are part of his music and a greater understanding of them by the listener brings the possibility of a greater understanding of the music. As Elgar himself said of ‘Gerontius’, ‘I’ve written it out of my insides’.

The word that sprang to mind as I read it was not ‘intrusion’ but ‘compassion’. And I agree with the comment made by a member that it, ‘perhaps, could only have been written by a woman’.

It is a fact that all the comments published in August were from men: it is also a fact that of the 200 or so letters published in the *Journal* in the last fifteen years only six have been from women. I also think I’m right in saying that, for the first year of so of Lynn’s research, no man was privy to the precise nature of that research, precisely because of its sensitive nature.

As for an article on Elgar’s underwear: if one was submitted that convinced me that it added significantly to our knowledge then, yes, I would publish it. In the meantime readers will have to rest content with the summary of ‘the great man’s private garments’ contained in one of the standard biographies.

## RECORDING NOTES ...

Elgar's response to the First World War (or 'Great War' as he knew it) took several forms, but the first work he wrote in the shadow of the conflict was his Op.75. This was a dramatic recitation with orchestra of patriotic verses by the Belgian poet, Emil Cammaerts, and Elgar recorded it one hundred years ago on 29 January 1915 at Hayes. The speaker (in English) was Henry Ainley, who made other records for HMV such as 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (Tennyson) and even Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Bells'! The work is slightly cut in Elgar's recording (but the text is complete) and it was issued as 12" 78 D177 (and also as two single sides). The music may also be performed with no speaker at all as a kind of dramatic interlude. Its title – *Carillon* – refers to the bell-towers of Belgium on which tunes may be played by the carillonneur, who traditionally has to 'punch' a sort of keyboard. Tuned tubular bells represent the bells in this recording.

Elgar followed up *Carillon* by composing *Une Voix dans le Désert* and *Le Drapeau Belge*, somewhat similar in style, but neither had any great success. His recording of *Carillon* remained in the HMV No.2 (Historic) Catalogue until the Second World War and my own immaculate copy represents one of the few occasions when I acquired something for my collection from the original owner. He was Alan Webb, sometime curator of the Birthplace, who had known Elgar. He showed me round the cottage, where he and his wife lived in two little rooms; I was then just a young student.

Revisiting the defiant jingoism of *Carillon* more than forty years later is, however, a different matter. The assassination in 1914 of a member of the Austro-Hungarian royal family and his wife was scarcely of immediate concern to Elgar – Home Rule for Ireland was a more pressing political crisis at that time – but once the armies began to move across Europe there seemed to be a momentum that nothing could stop except the mud of Flanders. At home, it was all 'Gallant little Belgium' versus 'Prussian Bullies' and 'Boche Frightfulness' as Germany sought to renew her 1870 victories against France, France stood her ground and unlucky Belgium was in the way.

In April 1915, Elgar joined the Hampstead Volunteer Reserve and worked on *The Spirit of England*. He also took *Carillon* on tour with the L.S.O. and heard it cheered every night. Elgar had heard his music cheered in Germany and he had many German friends. We can only guess at his thoughts.

Michael Plant

## 100 YEARS AGO ...

At the beginning of September there was 'still little news [of the war] – Very anxious', with 'Canon fixed onto buildings in London ready for aeroplanes &c.' On the 5<sup>th</sup> they 'should have gone to Madresfield as planned for Festival'. Elgar, instead, was busy with his Special Constable duties ' & may have to go out in the night, any night'. On the 8<sup>th</sup> Alice wrote: 'It wd. have been 'Gerontius' tonight at Worcester Fest – but for Hun Kaiser'.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> they 'Heard of destruction of Reims Cathedral – Much upset. Felt must go & see if Westminster Abbey was there so E. & A. went'. Next day Elgar went to stay with his sister, Pollie, returning after only three days, 'Too opprest with the war to stay away'.

At the beginning of October Alice went to the 'Emergency Corps to ask if cd. teach Soldiers french – Was asked if she wd. take a class that minute almost! at Chelsea Barracks'. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Elgar conducted at an Albert Hall concert organised by Clara Butt in aid of Queen Mary's 'Work for Women' Fund, appearing 'by permission of Chief Inspector King, of the Hampstead Special Constables'. 'E's splendid Roll Call & at end The King's Way & Land of Hope & Glory ... C. Butt sang the King's Way splendidly.'

The novelist and playwright Hall Caine had asked Elgar repeatedly for a contribution to a patriotic anthology, *King Albert's Book*, that he was compiling to raise money for the Belgium Relief Fund. At the third time of asking Elgar consented, and on 10 November was 'thinking of his wonderful Carillon Music', a setting of Emile Cammaerts' poem *Après Anvers*. The following day he went again to stay with Pollie, returning to Severn House, having finished *Carillon*, on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Alice, meanwhile, had turned to poetry, writing *August 4 1914. A Retrospect ...*

*Carillon* was premiered on 7 December at Queen's Hall, with a heavily pregnant Mrs. Cammaerts (Tita Brand) reciting her husband's poem: 'in order to conceal this fact an enormous bank of roses was built on the platform over which her head and shoulders appeared rather in the manner of a Punch and Judy show', wrote Rosa Burley. The *Daily Telegraph* reported 'uproar at the end!'

On 10 December Alice gave a 'Concert for Belgians' at Severn House: 'result £36.10.0 – for artists & Belgians'. *Carillon* was repeated on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 'sounded greater than ever'. Christmas was spent quietly at Severn House: Rosa Burley was staying and Windflower came to tea. Alice summed up the close of the year in the following words. 'Year ends in great anxieties but with invaluable consciousness that England has a great, holy Cause – May God keep her.'

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