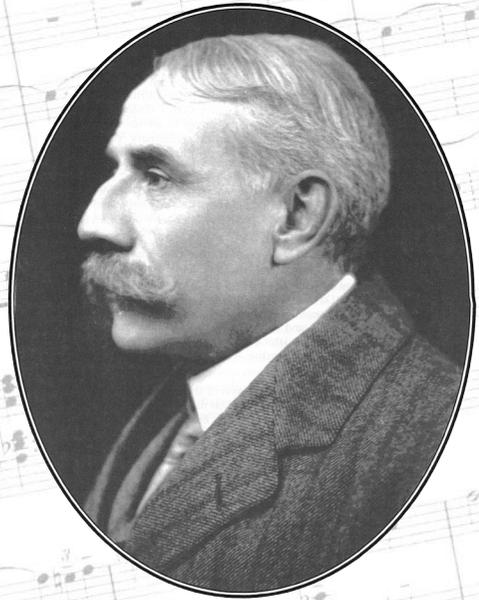


The Society

*Elgar*

*JOURNAL*



April 2019 Vol. 21, No. 4



# The Elgar Society Journal

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April 2019 Vol. 21, No. 4

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*Front Cover: Hugh Blair (Bennet & Son, Worcester) and Edward Elgar (Raymond Monk Collection)*

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## Hugh Blair: Worcester's Forgotten Organist

### Kevin Allen

*Hugh Blair (1864-1932), a versatile and innovative executant, conductor, and composer, was Organist of Worcester Cathedral and Conductor of the Festival Choral Society during the 1890s, until a scandal forced him to leave the city and work in London for the remainder of his career. He forged a close relationship with Elgar, and worked together with him to mount an ambitious and pioneering series of choral and orchestral concerts whose eclectic programmes revolutionised Worcester's musical atmosphere and provided the composer, gradually recovering from his earlier London failure, with a valuable feeding ground. Blair used his position to intervene significantly in Elgar's development, commissioning works and ensuring their first performances. He may be said to have launched Elgar's career by promoting one item in particular, the cantata 'The Black Knight,' which first made the composer's name among the Midlands choral societies.*



*On settling in London, Blair was able for a short time to continue developmental work as Borough Organist and Conductor for Battersea, while retaining the post of Organist and Choirmaster of Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone, for many years. On Elgar's move to Hampstead in 1912 the close family-style friendship of Forli days was resumed and Blair became a frequent visitor to Severn House for music, meals and billiards. This article, a lightly edited version of a talk first given at the Worcester Three Choirs Festival, 2017, focuses on Blair's earlier life in Worcester.*

No occasion could be more appropriate than a Worcester Three Choirs Festival for an opportunity of blowing the trumpet, or should I say pulling out all the stops, for the subject of my current research on the Worcester musician and good friend of Elgar, Hugh Blair. As a young man Blair was organist of Worcester Cathedral in the 1890s, where he pursued an energetic and successful policy of musical progress and reform. But he was dismissed by the authorities after only two years. At first I thought this might be a story of a brilliant young man with new ideas up against an entrenched conservative establishment, but it wasn't so simple as that and I went on to discover something of a tragedy, for Blair was his own worst enemy and his fatal flaw was drink. He worked hard, and came to depend on it. Hardened toppers know that it's not necessarily a question of how much you drink, rather one of how their drinking is managed. With Blair, the habit gradually got out of control so out of control that the Dean and Chapter had no alternative but to dismiss him after he was found insensible in the organ loft one Christmas day, unable to accompany the afternoon services.

The story has lost nothing in the telling. I gather that generations of Worcester choristers have been reared on the legend of Blair suddenly passing out and collapsing on to the organ console producing a hideous dissonant chord like something out of 'Phantom of the Opera.' If there is anything that can be said in his defence, he may not have been the only organist to have over-indulged. I've heard it said that drink might be the organist's occupational hazard, hidden away up there in the organ loft with not much else to do to pass the time during sermon. There's a story of the organist who passed the time to such an extent that he was found more or less upside down trying to operate the pedals with his hands and the keyboards with his feet. Percy Young has pointed out that the 18<sup>th</sup> Century at Worcester and Gloucester Cathedrals was 'played in by two notorious drunks,' Jeffries and Cherington. Even Elgar's own organist father was known for nipping out of St. George's Worcester during sermon, for a 'quick one' in the Hop Market hotel.

Today we recognise alcoholism as an illness and treat it as such. In 1897 when Blair had to leave his home town of Worcester for good, it was a scandal to be hushed up. Today it seems more tragedy than scandal, all the more so as Blair's hard fall followed a very high rise and years of dedicated hard work by a highly talented musician with a progressive vision who elevated Worcester's musical culture as never before and nourished a musical genius in the process; a forgotten inheritance on which I shall try to shine some light.

I have called Blair Worcester's forgotten organist although I have to admit that's not quite true. Lovers of church music will be familiar with his magnificent evening canticles in B minor, 'Blair in B minor,' although you may not know of his many other compositions. And if you have read any of the standard biographies of Elgar you will also know that Blair is also not quite forgotten as an important friend of the composer and as midwife to some of his early works. This creative involvement with Elgar came about through Blair's extraordinarily successful work as conductor of the Worcester Festival Choral Society, one aspect of his career that I think really has been forgotten. So I think it is high time for a new look at Hugh Blair as Elgar's creative partner, as a composer, as a conductor, but more than that, as a pioneering leader of music in his community, as a progressive musician in advance of his time, and as a man of wide culture, something I suggest he inherited from his family background.

Hugh Blair was the son of a widely respected Worcester clergyman who brought a committed and informed interest in education and social improvement to his parish work, like so many enlightened Victorians. Away from the pulpit he taught Latin and Science classes, contributed informed letters to the newspapers, and campaigned and fund-raised for slum clearance. Most notably he founded and directed Worcester's famous college for the blind, largely it seems out of family money. Blair's mother was a Yorkshire farmer's daughter of literary inclinations who could claim connections by marriage with the popular novelist Harrison Ainsworth. Young Hugh Blair therefore grew up in a cultivated household where his musical talent was recognised and encouraged in particular through lessons with the Cathedral organist, begun when he was 14. But Blair was in some ways an unconventional man, and his upbringing was not as conventional as it may sound. I have been told there is no official record of him having attended the King's School, then known as the Cathedral School, as you might expect. He may have been partly educated at home, and he may have spent time at the Blind College as his father encouraged sighted helpers. But in a later newspaper interview, Blair revealed that his education had been interrupted by frequent and lengthy stays with his mother's relatives in Yorkshire. He added that his scientific interests, probably inherited from his father, had led him to delight in anything of a mechanical nature, resulting in an informed interest in organ building. Possibly he was able to spend time at Nicholsons, the famous organ builders on the doorstep in Worcester.

### Cambridge and Stanford

Those trips to Yorkshire seemed not to interfere with the organ lessons. Within a year of beginning them Blair was able to take part in Cathedral services, and at the age of 17, he became an articled pupil of the then organist, William Done. Two years after that, Blair went up to Christ's College Cambridge not just as a student, but as a professional as it were – being immediately appointed to the vacant post of College organist. His Cambridge career was a successful one. As you had to in those days, he studied for a Bachelor of Arts degree before being allowed to take a B.Mus., and later gained a Doctorate for his biblical cantata *Deborah and Barak*. But there was no dedicated music faculty at Cambridge during Blair's time there. He studied privately with George Garrett, the church musician and organist to the University. But I imagine that the most important influence on the young Blair at Cambridge would have been Charles Stanford, then at his youthful and brilliant best. We hear so much of Stanford's worst side over his fallings out with Elgar, Parry, and others, so it is good to be able to see him in a more positive light and in a context that was new to me.



**William Done**  
(Bennet & Son, Worcester)

If you'll bear with me, I think it's worth a little diversion to look at an unfamiliar side of Stanford as a musical reformer who I am sure made a long-lasting impact on Hugh Blair as a student. Stanford had matriculated as a choral scholar at Queen's ten years before Blair's arrival and it did not take him long to get to the top of the Cambridge musical tree. Within three years he had been appointed organist of Trinity College and conductor of the Cambridge University Music Society, the famous CUMS. Stanford found this a moribund body and became determined to breathe new life into it. He enlarged the Society by breaking its ban on women singers, and initiated an ambitious programme of two or three major choral and orchestral concerts every year supplemented by chamber concerts and recitals. Stanford deliberately chose the repertoire to include the less familiar and the new, championing the then 'modern' music of such European composers as Brahms, Schumann, Grieg, Spohr and Rubinstein alongside the standard Baroque and Classical repertoire. Notably, Stanford led CUMS in the first English performances of Schumann's *Scenes from Faust*, and the *Alto Rhapsody* and First Symphony of Brahms, known for a long time afterwards in fact as the *Cambridge Symphony*. He also made sure to promote works by the new emerging school of English composers and contributed to the rediscovery of earlier figures by finding some room for the music of the Elizabethans.

Stanford's reforming spirit did not confine itself to repertoire: quality of performance was another of his concerns. Having done a great deal to improve and polish the singing of the CUMS choir, he turned his eye on raising the standards of its essential partner but weak link, the orchestra, which consisted basically of amateur players bolstered by paid professionals as necessary. Stanford's answer to the challenge of improving orchestral playing was to deliberately encourage his choristers and singers to learn orchestral instruments, hoping that their musical background would give them a good start. Hugh Blair was later said to have practical working knowledge of all the string and brass instruments and he seems to have taken up the French horn at Cambridge successfully enough to take his place in various Worcester orchestras later.

The musical mediocrity that Stanford found at Cambridge was in fact to be found in many

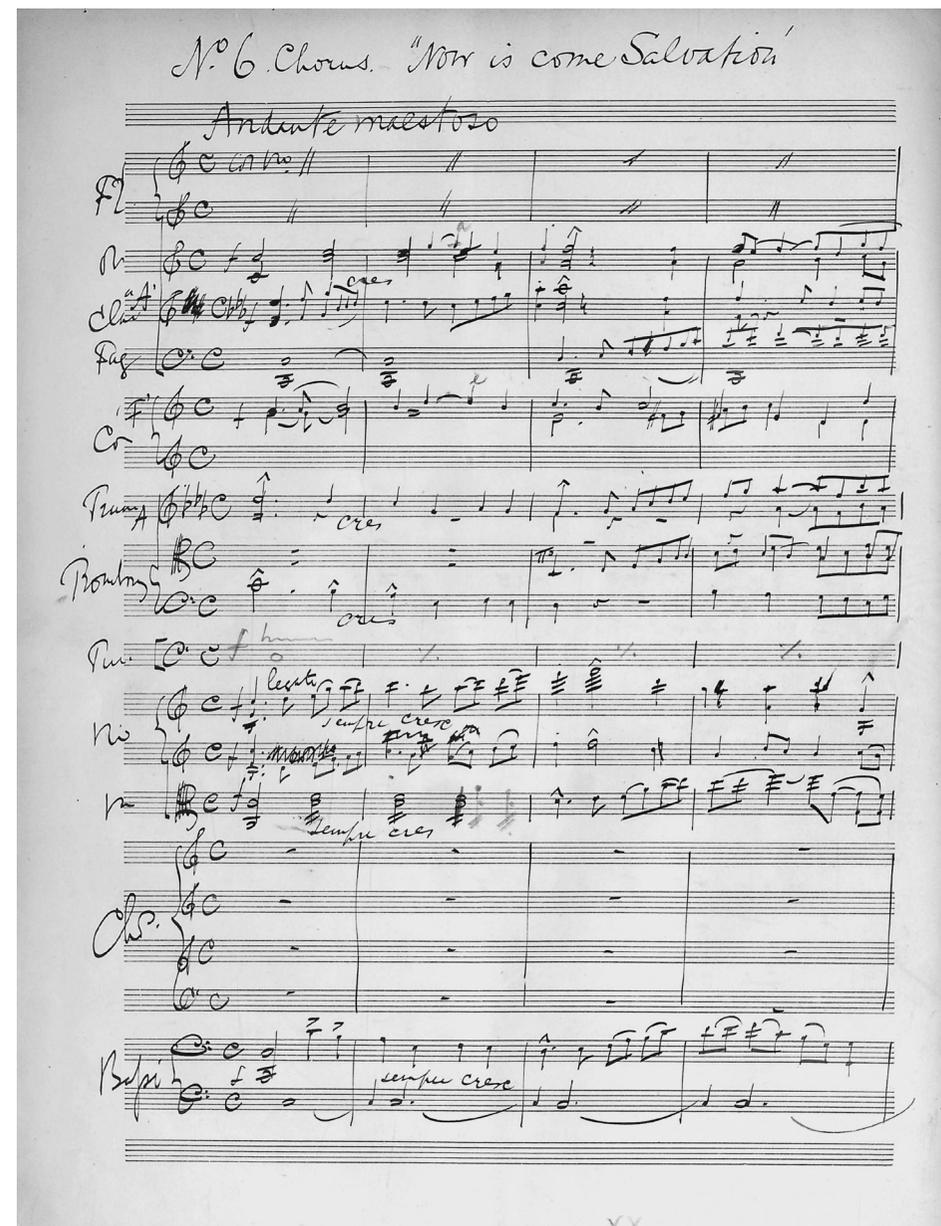
other centres and the orchestra problem was a national one. Stanford addressed it in a lengthy letter to the *Musical Times* outlining his ideas and suggesting that much of the responsibility for progress lay with those leaders of music in their communities, church and cathedral organists, many of them notoriously inexperienced conductors with little or no first-hand knowledge of orchestral instruments. Stanford argued that military bandmasters might be well qualified to build up local orchestras by teaching wind and brass instruments, but strings were the heart of the orchestra and improving string playing offered the greater challenge. The violin was of course central. Here Stanford wrote as follows:-

It will be almost a matter of necessity to induce some good player to take the lead in teaching. A fair number of pupils for the violin for accompaniment lessons is sufficient to ensure the residence in any district of a fair player, who would also lead the orchestra and instruct the strings at separate rehearsals. The scheme deserves a trial at the hands of our cathedral bodies and our provincial societies.

It was exactly what Elgar did and I often wonder what he might have felt had he known that his rôle in Worcester's music had been prophesied by his later arch-enemy. But there can be little doubt that these ideas of Stanford's provided so much of the background to what he and Hugh Blair would achieve.

When Blair came down from Cambridge, William Done made sure that he was very soon appointed assistant organist at the Cathedral: a first step up the ladder and a chance for Blair to develop his composing with ready-made performers and audience to hand. In fact shortly after his return to Worcester, Blair produced the work by which he is best known, that Evening Service in B minor. Unfortunately its popularity has led to him being seen as one of the 'one work' composers, but the British Library catalogue lists about another 200 works by him, the vast majority of which never see the light of day. The list includes orchestral music, choral works major and minor, liturgical music, organ music, piano and other instrumental works, and arrangements of all kinds. As far as I can see, about half a dozen of his smaller church works have been reprinted but the rest of his output remains virtually unknown. The introductory music to this talk was Blair's Organ Sonata in G Major, known as the Short Sonata, one of the few works of his available on disc. For the record, during his Worcester years and among many smaller pieces, Blair the composer produced a *Jubilate Deo* for the 1890 Festival, a *Harvest Cantata* in 1892, a *Te Deum* for the 1893 Festival, and in 1894 an Advent Cantata, *Blessed are They*, largely orchestrated by Elgar, one indication among many of collaboration and friendship.

It is clear from the local newspapers that Worcester's new multi-talented, energetic assistant organist soon began making a real impact on Worcester in many ways both inside and outside the Cathedral. He mounted a series of organ recitals and began to be very busy conducting, playing, accompanying, singing and composing. There seemed to be no organisation or charity that failed to engage his fund-raising support as piano or organ soloist, accompanist and singer. His repertoire extended from Chopin preludes to plantation songs and included his own compositions, on one occasion a piano piece called *Ballet Music* which the local paper described as being 'skilfully played and eliciting great applause'. One effect of all this charity work was that it took Blair into the community, enabling him to build further on the contacts he must have had in Worcester society. These contacts surely helped with one of his specific responsibilities at the Cathedral, the Voluntary Choir and its Sunday evening services. These services became Blair's pride and joy. He cherished these services and did much to enhance them.



Page from Elgar's unpublished orchestration of Blair's *Advent Cantata*  
(RCM/Elgar Will Trust)

## Elgar

Blair was not the only keen progressive musician in Worcester of course. When Blair came down from Cambridge in 1886, Edward Elgar was already 29 and his name and the family shop would surely have been known to Blair for a long time. I daresay Elgar Brothers tuned the Reverend Blair's piano and supplied his son's organ music. By this time Elgar had long been Worcester's musical 'jack of all trades', earning his living in all kinds of ways, educating and developing himself as a composer, studying music as best he could, and having to take himself to London to hear the orchestras and the latest music that provincial Worcester could not provide. Understandably, he was keen to foster more and better music at home as it were, to develop his immediate musical environment and enrich himself artistically at the same time.

This is most clearly seen in his involvement with a body known as the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society, set up with the aim of cultivating instrumental music by forming a band capable of assisting at concerts. Keen young Elgar had been appointed leader and instructor and in his enthusiasm instigated twice-weekly practices and a senior and a junior branch in order to better progress players. He was able to build up a good string section but it was not until after almost two years of careful training on his part that the society gave its first concert. A local review noted that evidently the society had gone through a thorough course of practice before venturing on the performance, and noted too that the whole thing was undertaken without professional assistance, something that would become an issue. Elgar had high ambitions for the society and I suspect that he may well have pushed for a repertoire wider than the standard works, to include music by more contemporary figures. But the idea did not go down well. A local newspaper wrote of one concert which had begun with Handel and Mozart -

Gounod's overture to *Mireille* which was played with remarkable spirit, seemed to carry the audience into a different region of sound altogether, and the march by Liszt marked a still wider departure. In the concluding minuet from Haydn the audience were brought back to the older and perhaps truer lines of musical composition.

It did not augur well for local acceptance, but Elgar was determined on progress and even began to write the programme notes for the concerts himself in the hope of cultivating a better informed audience. Two years after that concert, he took over the conductorship of the society, and with the reins now fully in his hands, he announced plans for a 'special high class concert' supported by such additional professional aid as was necessary to make a full orchestra. Amateurs evidently could not or would not cope with the kind of music Elgar wanted to explore, particularly the European repertoire from which he felt he had so much to learn. That 'high class' concert duly went ahead, featuring works by several modern Europeans alongside more familiar music by Schubert and



### Concert with the participation of Elgar and Blair (Sherridge Papers)

Mendelssohn. It was pronounced a success at the time but behind the scenes it evidently marked the crossing of a line. The Worcester amateurs did not want to go in the same direction as Elgar and resented the importation of professionals. The society began to fold. Within a year Elgar was writing to a friend 'I fear our orchestral society is going - to pot. people leaving; etc.' That 'etc' seems to me to speak volumes of upset and bitter disappointment on Elgar's part, for with the end of his ambitions for the society went the end of some of his ambitions for Worcester and for himself. His anger and disillusion emerged again in a later letter in which he vented his spleen on Worcester's amateurs and their musical thinking.

I fear the field here is too small to expect any enlargement of the society. The average taste in music is extremely low - the majority of amateurs are satisfied in playing an ordinary march tune or some such thing and I fear tis useless asking them to devote their energies to something higher and consequently more difficult.

### A Long Apprenticeship

Back to Blair. His return to Worcester had been in good time for its next major musical event, the 1887 Three Choirs Festival. Here again musical standards might give progressive musicians much cause for concern. As we know, these festivals were notorious for less than expert conductors, lack of adequate rehearsal time, mediocre repertoire and the unpopular importation of singers from Leeds and elsewhere. The Worcester organist William Done ought certainly to have been an experienced conductor, having presided at every Worcester Festival since 1845, but now at the age of 73 he sensibly decided to share the work with Lee Williams of Gloucester. Even so, if you look at the newspaper reviews you might be forgiven for thinking that 1887 was a particularly bad year for the Worcester Festival. There were many complaints about both orchestra and chorus. The *Times*' critic put his finger on the nub of the problem, the conductor, and wondered what could be done. 'When a vacancy occurs,' he wrote, 'an organist should be appointed who, besides being a clever performer on his instrument, is also a thorough musician and an experienced conductor. Where to find a man combining these various capacities is a different question.'

No doubt Hugh Blair had his own answer to that, although it would be some years before he could do anything about it. The problem was partly due to the system, and partly due to William Done himself, ageing, sadly becoming hard of hearing but apparently in no desperate hurry to retire. In his day he had been a formidable organist, appointed all those years before in preference to the unpredictable Samuel Sebastian Wesley. Done proved a conscientious rather than a charismatic or dynamic figure and several Worcester choral societies seem to have come and gone under his direction. His reputation was more as a gifted kindly teacher who produced several talented organists, including of course young Blair himself, energetic and full of fresh ideas and now understandably keen to take over from his old master. The question of Done's retirement was the crux, but when it came up he drove a hard bargain and was prepared to go only on his own terms and stiff terms they were. Done insisted on retaining the official title of organist, on retaining his rent-free occupation of the Organist's house, 8 College Yard, and on retaining too his full salary and the key to the Cathedral so he could continue to teach articulated pupils. Given his many decades of conscientious service, some might see meeting these terms as the least the Dean and Chapter could do, while others might say that the powers that be were evidently determined to give Blair a chance at any price. It certainly left him in a difficult position. He was declared 'organist-in-charge,' with

all the day-to-day responsibility of the Cathedral services but with none of the appropriate status or salary. The 1891 census shows him as lodging with a plumber in Edgar Street, while Done continued to enjoy the spacious organist's house.

It was a situation that in fact continued until Done's death. It could not have been easy for either party and Blair had to wait six years to achieve the full title of organist, which of course makes his brief occupation of the post all the sadder.

### *A Choral Society Reborn*

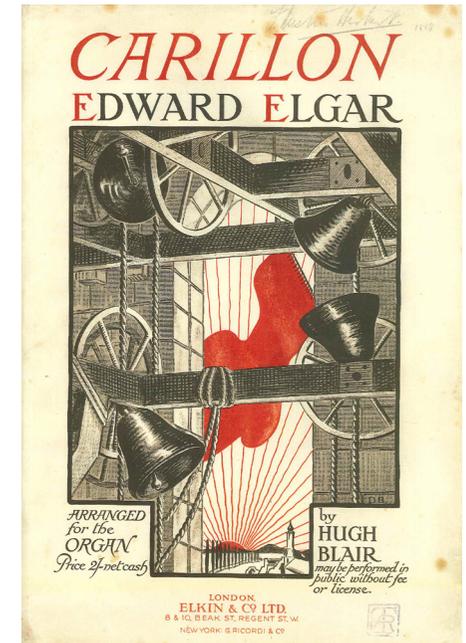
Meanwhile, Blair made the most of whatever scope he had for taking initiatives. I suggest it was he who took the lead in reconstituting the Worcester Festival Choral Society, the body that was essentially a training ground for the Festival. Done had conducted it under various titles over the years but allowed it to fall by the wayside. Now the Dean and Chapter were happy to support a revived society and pay off its inherited deficit. Even here William Done was officially in charge, being appointed honorary conductor, although it was Blair as assistant conductor who actually planned, rehearsed and directed the majority of the concerts. I like to think his influence was very much behind the new society's aims as they were stated in the local press. These made clear that it was not only a question of furnishing a chorus for the Festivals, but of something wider and potentially more meaningful. Here we see Blair's breadth of vision: the new body was first of all intended to promote the study and practice of music, and then give concerts and provide assistance in what were known as the special services of the Cathedral.

To take the last one first, these special services had been one of William Done's quiet innovations. They took place at Christmas and during Holy Week and featured appropriate extracts from the Passion music of Bach and Handel. Blair would develop them to include Advent and Harvest Festival services, and Sunday evening services, with members of the Festival Choral Society bolstering the Voluntary Choir and choristers, and further enhanced them by the introduction of as much orchestral accompaniment as possible. Blair was totally committed to these special services and they were one of his undoubted successes. They proved popular and drew enlarged congregations and fuller collection plates but, even so, instrumental players could prove expensive and the Dean and Chapter were sometimes tempted to economise particularly over the Sunday evening services. Some years into Blair's work he heard rumours that they were to be discontinued. There was evidently no consultation or discussion in those hierarchical days and Blair felt he had to put a protest to the Dean and Chapter in writing. The letter is one of the earliest of his that has been preserved and offers insight into his pride in his work, his philosophy and his temperament. He took care to strive for a suitably deferential tone, while standing on his professional dignity and at the same time being open about his feelings in what we might see as a modern kind of way.

Without presuming to intrude, unasked, my professional opinion, I should consider myself wanting in zeal for the advance of the musical standard in the cathedral, were I to refrain from volunteering, with the deepest respect, an earnest expression of hope that the Dean and Chapter will not finally decide to do away with the great orchestral nave evensongs. From a musician's point of view they have always been well done and what is more, are the outcome of a free will offering of professors and amateurs alike in this city. They are most invaluable incentives to constant progress by the voluntary choir, the efficiency and advance of which is a work that lies very near my heart. To stand still is to retrograde, and to retrograde is inevitably to sink back again into the abyss from which the unceasing toil and joint labour of five years has raised it – heart's work as I have said, but which I confess has made exceptional demands on me.

Executors to the late G. Jakeman.  
**WORCESTER FESTIVAL CHORAL SOCIETY.**  
**ORCHESTRAL BRANCH.**  
**THE INSTRUMENTAL REHEARSALS** for the next Concert (November 24th, 1891,) will be held in the Public Hall, on Thursday evenings, at 7 o'clock. The Programme will include:—For Orchestra alone: *Symphony, Gade; Suite, Massenet.* For Chorus and Orchestra: "The Battle of the Baltic," *Stanford*; selections from "Faust," *Guonod*; March and Chorus from "The Bride," *Mackenzie.*  
 Applications for membership may be addressed to Mr. Hugh Blair (conductor of the society), the College; to Mr. Edward Elgar (conductor of the Orchestral Branch), Forl, Malvern; or to Mr. J. W. Somerton (Hon. Sec.), 49, London-road.  
 Concert Tickets and plan of room at Mr. E. J. Spark's, 54, High-street.

**WORCESTER FESTIVAL CHORAL SOCIETY.**  
**CONCERT,**  
**PUBLIC HALL, TUESDAY, DEC. 4th, 1894.**  
**HUGH BLAIR'S ADVENT CANTATA**  
 (First time of performance),  
**PARRY'S "Blest Pair of Sirens,"**  
**STANFORD'S "Three Holy Children,"**  
**RAFF'S Lenore Symphony.**  
 Tickets, 4s., 2s. 6d., 1s., at Spark's, 54, High street.



Hugh Blair's organ arrangement of Elgar's *Carillon* (Arthur Reynolds' Archive) and newspaper announcements of Blair concerts in *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 7 November 1891 and 1 December 1894 (*Berrow's Worcester Journal*).

Blair's plea evidently carried some weight and in the event the Sunday Evensongs continued successfully.

His cultivation of what he referred to as the professors and amateurs, the wider musical community, paid off handsomely in the pursuit of the second of the new choral society's stated aims, the giving of concerts. Blair's work as the mastermind of these Worcester concerts was an important achievement, leading as it did to his close involvement with Elgar. He took over the new Society after William Done had conducted the first two concerts and, from then on, made the most of this opportunity to fulfil a progressive agenda very much along Stanford's lines. During the rest of the seven years that remained to him in Worcester, Hugh Blair personally mounted some eighteen concerts comprising a repertoire of over a hundred works. Their programmes repay close study and time will not allow me to go through them all, but I will try to illustrate their range by looking at the works performed by form, period, national school, and by composer.

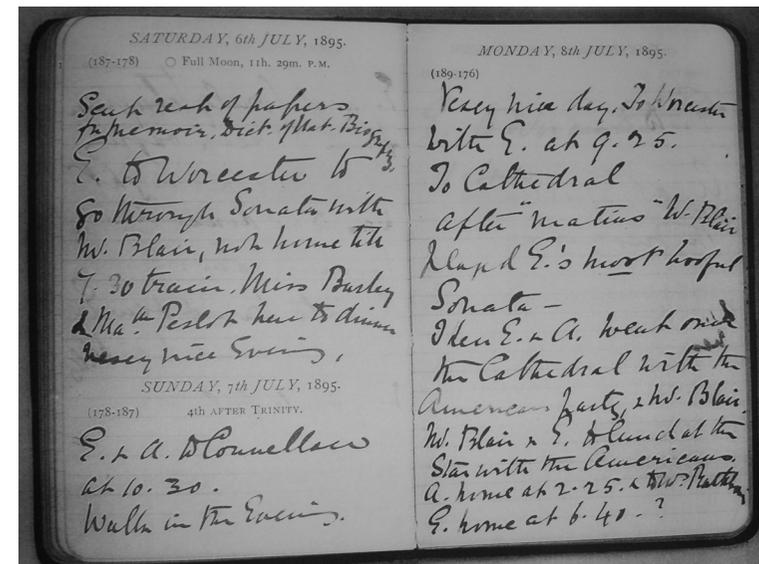
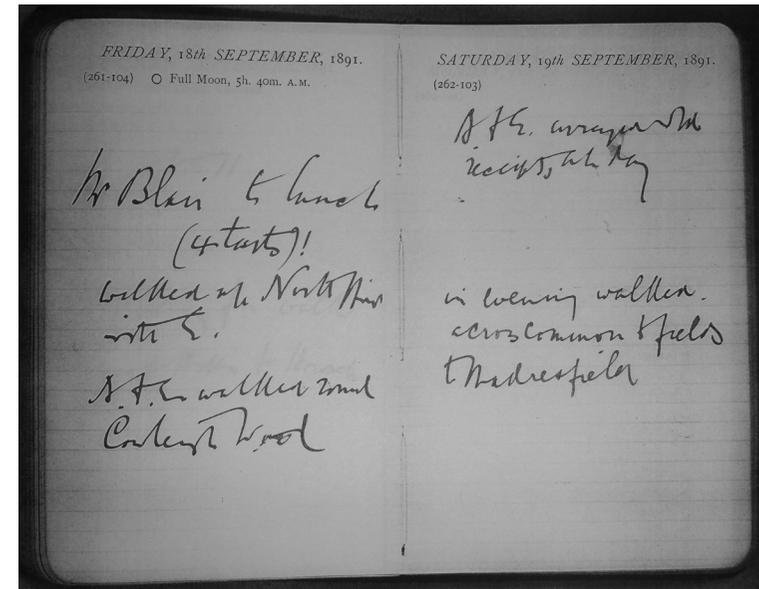
Blair presented vocal music of all kinds, cantatas, oratorios, symphonies, concertos and extracts from opera, ballet and incidental music. His repertoire stretched through the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods to the modern, and he mounted works from virtually

all the national schools of European music – English, German, French, Russian, Italian, Danish, Czech and Hungarian. At the same time, Blair was careful to take his audience with him and not to neglect the established classics. But, in an age when some provincial choral societies never went much beyond Handel and Mendelssohn, Anglicised composers you might almost say, Blair looked outward to Europe and performed works by Auber, Berlioz, Brahms, Dvořák, Gounod, Schumann, Massenet, Rubinstein, Gade, Goldmark, Raff, Wagner, Rossini, Donizetti and Leoncavallo. *Pagliacci* in Victorian Worcester! That is not to say he neglected English composers for it clearly emerges that, just like Stanford, Blair was determined to promote the emerging home school, performing works by Cowen, Mackenzie, Sullivan, Stanford and Parry, as well as of course by Elgar. It's worth noting too, that Blair was sufficiently interested in the early music revival to include music by Lassus, Gibbons, Wilbye and Walmisley. This kind of approach was quite new in Worcester and raised the city's musical culture to new levels. I would almost be prepared to bet that Blair's programmes were in advance of many other provincial societies of the time in variety and scope and it says a great deal for Blair's leadership that he was able to do all that he did, and take both performers and audience with him, often mustering forces of up to 150, and playing to full audiences in Worcester's Public Hall.

In his masterminding of these programmes, variety was clearly one of Blair's concerns and no two concerts were exactly alike. Sometimes he might feature a single work like *Judith* or *Israel in Egypt*, while at other times there might be a sort of mixed evening such as the concert of 18th April 1893, which included Auber's *Exhibition March*, Gibbons' *The Silver Swan*, Mendelssohn's *Capriccio in B Minor* for piano and orchestra, Elgar's *The Black Knight*, Schumann's Fourth Symphony, a choral piece by Lassus, another choral piece by Cowen, and the ballet music from Rubinstein's opera *Feramos*. But that wasn't all, even in those days of long programmes. Something of Blair's zeal emerges from a review of that concert which states that *Gypsy Life* (a choral work by Schumann), two of the Rubinstein pieces and the finale to Act One of *Lohengrin* had had to be cut that evening!

#### 'Pulling Together And Making Things Lively'

By the time of the rebirth of the Festival Choral Society, Blair and Elgar must have been well known to each other, if only by reputation, as progressive musicians and it would seem that Elgar was first choice to lead the orchestra for Blair's brave new world of music. Before long an official orchestral branch of the society was developed and Elgar was put in charge of it. It was a welcome new opening enabling him to forget the small-minded attitudes he had found in the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society. Blair had no hesitation in enlisting professionals to improve standards of performance and Elgar was surely freshly motivated. There is every evidence that he worked with the like-minded Blair to devise those pioneering concert programmes, explore new repertoire and enrich himself creatively in the process. 'Blair of the cathedral and I are pulling together and making things lively here,' Elgar famously wrote. The partnership soon developed into a close friendship, almost a family friendship. Blair's name occurs more and more frequently in Alice Elgar's diary in the early to mid-1890s. He often came to Forl for weekends, although he was usually off by the 9.30 train on the Sunday morning for the Cathedral. But several times Blair stayed for extended breaks of three or four days and on one occasion he, Edward and Alice all joined with two of the handsome, musical Fitton sisters for a leisurely carriage excursion round the Malvern Hills – I wonder if a bit of match-making was going on. But Blair might seem the typical confirmed bachelor, devoted only to his work. It certainly seems the Elgars tried to spoil him and he

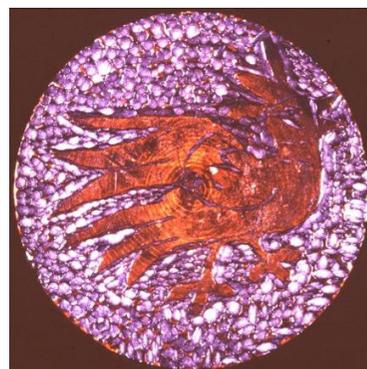


Alice Elgar's diary in the early to mid-1890s with comments about 'Blair – 4 tarts' and Elgar's organ sonata. (Elgar Will Trust)

might have found himself better fed at Forli than in his Edgar Street lodgings, as on one occasion Alice noted that he consumed no less than 4 tarts at dinner. Sometimes Elgar roped him in for a game of golf but the substance of those visits was music and I suggest Blair was one of those few people with whom Elgar would talk technicalities. The two men were meeting so frequently at this time as to make correspondence virtually unnecessary but there is one letter from Blair to Elgar extant from this period, written on Boxing Day 1892, which tells us something of Blair's world and his relationship with the Elgars. 'There is still time,' Blair wrote, 'to give you my best and hearty wishes for the coming year. Given, as I trust will be, a continuation of good health, to you there can be little else than happiness in the enjoyment of your home life and the pursuit of your art.' Blair sounds rather lonely and he went on to confess anxieties over his mother's health and considerations relating to his brothers and sisters. He continued, 'At the close of the year I am very anxious to thank you and Mrs Elgar for your kindness during its course, by far the happiest hours I have spent have been at your house and I only regret that my duty to the Cathedral has prevented me availing myself even more of your many invitations. I can't quite say when I shall be free of the Cathedral work even for a short time, every minute I may say is booked, afterwards I hope to be less engaged and then we can plot for our next efforts.'

That plotting was appropriately symbolised when Blair stayed over at Forli one Guy Fawkes night. Elgar thought it a suitable time to pick up his pokerwork hobby and decorate a small round stamp box with Blair's name around the outside surrounded by various filigree embellishments. On the lid he engraved a bird, a cockerel in full 'cock-a-doodle-do' mode, a private joke symbolising their joint wake up call to Worcester's music.

If there is one concert more than any other that symbolises that wake up call for me, it is one that took place in November 1891 featuring music by Blair himself, Stanford, Gounod, Brahms and Mackenzie, alongside the first symphony of the Dane Niels Gade and a four-movement Suite, *Scènes Pittoresques* by the Frenchman Jules Massenet. I have no idea if these two works were included at Elgar's direct suggestion but he certainly thought enough of them to want to provide programme notes for them himself. One of the pleasures of this Blair research has been in getting to know and enjoy so much music that I might otherwise have overlooked and I had never heard



Elgar made only two known pokerwork stamp boxes. The first, made for Alice and now at The Firs, shows a rabbit on the cover. The second, made for Hugh Blair has a cockerel on its cover. (Arthur Reynolds' Archive)

the Gade symphony before. I can recommend it and, for what it's worth, I could point out that, like Elgar's first, it is what used to be called a 'motto' symphony based on a march-like theme.

Elgar's admiration for French music is well known; he was once heard to say that he preferred good Delibes to bad Brahms. His notes for the Massenet work concentrated on the brilliance of the French school of orchestration, and emphasized 'the secret lying in the fact that polyphony as practised by the German school is incompatible with orchestration in the French sense of the word, the best effects being gained where the music is practically only treble and bass, the result being that one, or at most two, instruments stand out alone'. This very point has been made by many commentators about Elgar's own music. The second movement of that Massenet suite is an *Air de Ballet*, incidentally the title of one of Elgar's own pieces, and in his notes Elgar pointed out the effectiveness of a cello counter-melody, one of his own fingerprints.

The most important fruits of the Blair-Elgar collaboration are of course to be found in the music Elgar composed as a result of it. Every would-be composer needs performances above anything else and Blair as conductor of the Worcester Festival Choral Society had the power to virtually commission works and arrange for their all-important first performances. He did this for three of Elgar's early works: the cantata *The Black Knight* of 1893, the music for organ strings and brass known as *Sursum Corda* of 1894, and the Organ Sonata of 1895. In fostering these works Blair gave enormous scope for Elgar's creative development just when he was ready for it. In every one of Blair's interventions the composer rose to the occasion. Elgar was stuck over the *Black Knight* until Blair promised to give it a performance. 'If you will finish it I will perform it' Blair is supposed to have said. It emerged successfully as Elgar's first work of any length for chorus and orchestra, and it established his reputation in the Midlands, quickly leading to performances in Wolverhampton, Birmingham and elsewhere. Today we see it as only the first and least of a series of gradually greater and greater choral works but it caused a sensation at the time. The Organ Sonata allowed Elgar to rise to the challenge of designing a fully developed first movement in sonata form, while the *Sursum Corda*, composed for the visit of the Duke of York to Worcester, allowed him to explore his public, ceremonial vein for the first time. Neither did Blair's practical support of Elgar end there, of course – let's remember that it was the Worcester Festival Choral Society, trained by Blair, that gave the first performance of *Songs from the Bavarian Highlands*, that joined with the Hereford and Gloucester Festival contingents to give the first performance of *The Light of Life*, and which brought *King Olaf* to Worcester, giving its fifth performance in May 1897. It is difficult to imagine where Elgar's career might have been without all this input from Blair and his resources. Quite possibly, his breakthrough could be even further delayed and he might have had to plough on as an increasingly embittered teacher and composer of partsongs and violin pieces, remembered just for *Sevillana*, *Salut d'Amour* and *Froissart*. Blair was the man who lifted Elgar out of that rut and launched his career and, although we know this from all the books, we tend to take it for granted while we should be shouting it from the rooftops a bit more.

#### 'I Have Enough Enemies'

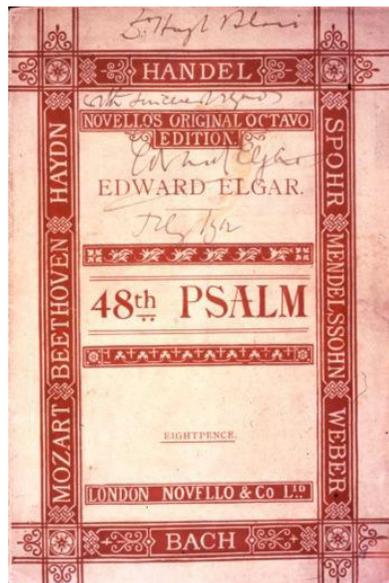
Unfortunately, that *King Olaf* performance of early 1897 was the last thing that Blair was able to do for Elgar in Worcester. By this time it seems his drinking had taken hold. There is a story of how shocked the good citizens of Worcester were on hearing gales of laughter emerging from a hostelry near the Cathedral where Blair and the Lay Clerks would repair after Sunday service. With the benefit of hindsight it is possible to see other suggestive small signs of erratic behaviour – a rehearsal cancelled with no notice, an examining appointment not kept, several non-arrivals at

Forli, some say the bad first performance of the Elgar organ sonata which Blair gave.

When Blair had finally been officially appointed organist in 1895, his drinking was enough of a known problem for him to be given a caution. The notorious collapse at the organ came on Christmas Day that year, and there were several such incidents during 1896. The Precentor formally raised the issue with the Dean and Chapter in November and suggested Blair be given three admonitions – ‘three strikes and you’re out’. What happened next is not fully clear, and I feel sure that some relevant documents are missing and that I haven’t got the full story. But it seems that Blair knew what might be coming and tried to jump before he was pushed. In the June of 1897 he wrote to the Dean and Chapter to offer three months’ notice of his resignation as per his contract, on the grounds that he was about to marry, and this would mean living away from Worcester, although in fact he married a local Worcester lady from the Dorell family, part-proprietors of the High Street emporium Russell and Dorell. People say he married money. The couple were in fact married on the day his resignation would have been received, and married very quietly in a village church outside Worcester with no music or bridesmaids. They left for a honeymoon in the Channel Islands and afterwards Blair returned to the Cathedral intending to work out the remainder of his notice. So far so good; but one month into that period of notice, the Act Book of the Dean and Chapter tells us that ‘it was resolved and ordered that the organist Mr Blair having been for the third time reported by the Precentor for continued neglect of the duties of his office and place and for general irregularity of life, be hereby suspended from the office and its emoluments’.

In other words, despite Blair already having submitted his resignation by the book, he was nevertheless sacked ‘on the spot’ with no entitlement to salary. He both jumped, and was pushed. Naturally Blair protested but the best he could do was to write to the Chapter Clerk to ask the Dean and Chapter to keep the matter confidential. He continued, ‘I feel sure I am not asking too much of your good nature or theirs – I have enough enemies who would rejoice in my complete ruin.’ It was a desperate but realistic plea. Too much publicity might mean that he would never work again.

As luck would have it, that year’s Festival Choral Society AGM was due within days. No doubt it was a meeting that everybody felt they could do without in the circumstances. Neither Blair nor Elgar attended and it is noticeable that several of the leading musical clergy sent apologies. Blair’s letter of resignation as conductor was read out, loyally followed by one from Elgar. Blair wrote of his ‘great regret’ at severing his connection with the society, while Elgar’s letter offered his resignation as leader of the orchestral branch, on the grounds that his future movements would be so uncertain that he could not promise to continue. These were of course formal times and this was a formal meeting. Blair was reported as expressing nothing beyond that ‘great regret’ although we



**The first edition of the octavo vocal score of *Great is the Lord (48th Psalm)*, op. 67, published by Novello in 1912. Inscribed ‘for Hugh Blair with sincere regards Edward Elgar, July, 1912’, with markings in Elgar’s hand throughout the text. (Arthur Reynolds’ Archive)**

can imagine he was heartbroken to resign his conductorship after all he had achieved. Elgar went a little further, and reading between the lines I think we can gauge his feelings. *Berrow’s Worcester Journal* reported that ‘Mr Elgar said he had been connected with the society from boyhood, and expressed his keen interest in and sympathy with its work.’ I see that as really an acknowledgement of the extent to which he was aware of how much the Festival Choral Society had contributed to his development.

### ‘Greeted With Cheers’

Blair spent the rest of his career in the perhaps more cosmopolitan atmosphere of London and never sought to return to Worcester although he was not forgotten there. It is good to know that Atkins programmed Blair’s doctoral cantata *Deborah and Barak* for the 1902 Worcester Festival, and good to know that Blair was genuinely missed by the people he had worked with. A report of a Voluntary Choir dinner stated

The popularity of the late organist Mr Hugh Blair was strikingly shown. When his name was read out among those who had apologised for absence, the applause was most enthusiastic, and was kept up for fully a minute, while every mention of his name by subsequent speakers – and the occasions were many – was greeted with cheers.

So let’s echo those cheers for Hugh Blair, a man ahead of his time. Today we can see him as a forerunner of the modern Cathedral organist, who is expected to be an all-round musician, not just an organist and choir trainer but a capable conductor, composer and a person of wide culture, a true leader of musical life in his community. Blair was all these and more, for he was also visionary and selfless enough to lay himself out for a brother musician whose special qualities he recognised as being greater than his own.

In conclusion, I can only plead that it is high time we fully recognised Blair’s achievement and made some amends for his shabby treatment all those years ago. I hope that the book I am writing will do something to revive interest in him and his sadly neglected music. I’d like to see his name where it deserves to be, on a plaque in Worcester Cathedral, alongside those of Elgar and Atkins, and I’d like to see more of his music being performed and recorded. As a composer he is ripe for rediscovery, and as a man he deserves to be freed from the stigma that has always accompanied him. At one time it would have been said of Hugh Blair that he was a man with a past – I very much hope that before too much longer he will become a man with a future.

[I am grateful to Dr David Morrison of the Library of Worcester Cathedral for access to various documents, and to Arthur Reynolds and Adrian Partington for their interest and support.]

*Kevin Allen has written about several of Elgar’s closest friends and supporters, notably August Jaeger (‘Portrait of Nimrod’) and Winifred Norbury and her family (‘Gracious Ladies’). His biography of Hugh Blair is forthcoming.*

Sept 21: 1904  
Dear Sir:  
I understand that a  
Conductor is to be appointed  
to the Handel Society: my  
recommendation is that Mr. Blair  
be the man. I had the  
pleasure to be connected  
with his work in Concerts.

AMUSEMENTS  
ORDERED  
for some years both at the festival  
I was frequently at the  
Choral Society's Concerts.  
His interesting work  
admirably carried out  
his own pleasure to  
take part in performances  
under his direction. His  
great time to be directed  
the

The Battersea Concerts, improve  
steadily under his able  
guidance of the Council towards  
music.  
I hope you will be  
in with a letter to  
feel strongly that to have  
could be most admirably  
conducted for me  
Believe me  
Yours faithfully  
Edward Elgar.  
P.S. - A.C. Reynolds.

**Elgar's letter of recommendation of 21 September 1904 from Plas Gwyn, Hereford, to Dr. Walter Griffith (Arthur Reynolds' Archive):**

'Dear Sir:

I understand that a Conductor is to be appointed to the Handel Society: may I recommend Mr. Hugh Blair for this post. I had the pleasure to be connected with his work in Worcester for some years both at the festivals & more frequently at the Choral Society's Concerts. All his undertakings were admirably carried out & it was a pleasure to take part in performances under his direction. Since that time he has directed the Battersea Concerts, unfortunately ended by the attitude of the Council towards music.

I apologise for troubling you with a letter but I feel strongly that Mr. Blair could be a most admirable conductor for your Society.

Believe me  
Yours faithfully  
Edward Elgar'

'However, it tells its own story, and needs no explanation.'  
Elgar and Schumann, Uhland and Longfellow, and *The Black Knight*

**Burkhard Sauerwald**

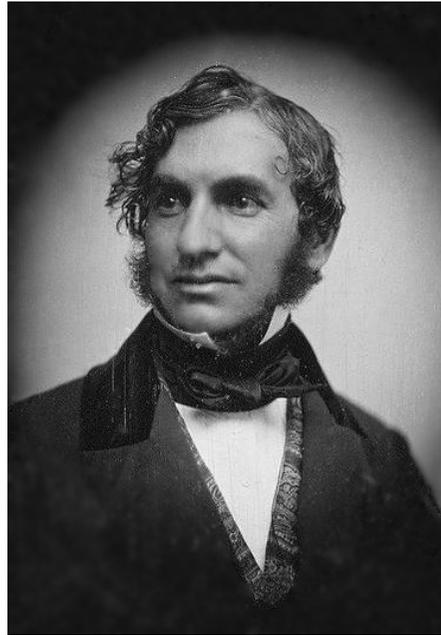
Defining the genre choral ballad (*Chorballade*) properly is a difficult task. Works of different character are classified here, having little else in common except that a ballad is set to music by means of a chorus. Although Edward Elgar as the composer (*symphony for chorus and orchestra*) and the publisher Novello (*cantata*) characterised the composition *The Black Knight* (1893) differently, it could be productive to take the history and context of the choral ballad into consideration. This perspective was suggested previously by Percy Marshall Young without discussing it in detail:

Among the forgotten works of nineteenth-century Germany are the choral ballads of Mendelssohn, Marschner, Schumann, David, Wolf, Humperdinck and others who sought to domesticate the mysteries of the romantic movement. Elgar, in *The Black Knight*, took up, where the Germans left off.<sup>1</sup>

This should be of larger interest because Robert Schumann had constituted the genre choral ballad by setting ballads by the German poet Ludwig Uhland in the years 1851–53. And for *The Black Knight*, Elgar also chose an Uhland ballad (*Der schwarze Ritter*, 1806), which was translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow for his prose romance *Hyperion* (1839) into English. Comparing Elgar's compositional approach with other Uhland settings of 19th century music, the difficulties of setting the specific poetic language in Uhland's poems and ballads can come into view.<sup>2</sup>

Quite recently, in 2014, Richard Smith published an article on *The Black Knight* in *The Elgar Society Journal*.<sup>3</sup> Whereas Smith examines sources around the work's genesis and first performances, here questions of genre and perspectives on the Uhland-/Longfellow-ballad and its setting by Elgar will be discussed.

- 1 Percy Marshall Young, *Elgar O.M. A Study of a Musician* (London/New York: White Lion 1973), 298.
- 2 Cf. Burkhard Sauerwald, *Ludwig Uhland und seine Komponisten. Zum Verhältnis von Musik und Politik in Werken von Conradin Kreutzer; Friedrich Silcher; Carl Loewe und Robert Schumann* (= Dortmunder Schriften zur Musikpädagogik und Musikwissenschaft 1; Berlin: LIT 2015), 29ff.
- 3 Richard Smith "'A sort of symphony in four divisions': The Black Knight and its first performances", *The Elgar Society Journal* 18,5 (August 2014), 4–20.



Ludwig Uhland (1787 – 1862), author of *Der schwarze Ritter* (Editor's archive), and the translator Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 – 1882) (Arthur Reynolds' Archive); Elgar's dedication of *The Black Knight*: 'To my friend, Hugh Blair, M.A., Mus. Bac., Cantab.'

### *The Black Knight and his links to the origin of the choral ballad*

Already the première of *The Black Knight* in Worcester established a link to Robert Schumann: In this concert, Elgar's opus 25 was combined with a performance of Schumann's Symphony No. 4 in d-minor. However, it is more interesting to consider which compositional solutions Elgar found for the problem of setting a ballad in general: According to Johann Wolfgang Goethe's oft-quoted dictum, the ballad is the 'Ur-Ei' ('the original egg') of poetry, because it consists of lyric, epic, and dramatic elements. Setting this literary mixture to music posed a challenge to composers, especially to those who intended to compose choir music. As inventor of the choral ballad, Schumann shores up the dramatic aspects of the ballads: vocal soloists are intended to take the parts of direct speech, and poets were assigned by Schumann to modify and to enlarge the original ballad text with the objective of dramatization. For example, Richard Pohl completed this task for the libretto of Schumann's *Des Sängers Fluch* (op. 139, 1851/52).

This is the main difference from Schumann's choral ballads. Elgar forgoes dramatization and uses the original ballad text by Uhland/Longfellow as libretto – aside from repeating some of the verses. Unlike Schumann, Elgar did not include additional poems in order to illustrate intradiegetic

music i.e. music that plays a role in narratives by furnishing background to the action. No soloists are needed; Elgar's choir takes both narrative verses and direct speech, while Schumann uses (e.g. in *Des Sängers Fluch*) an alto as narrator and other soloists for the different characters of the dramatic direct speech. By this Elgar refrains from the dramaturgic opportunity to use the choir as a *turba*-choir (literally meaning "crowd," but meaning any passage in which more than one speaker speaks simultaneously) or as a moral authority (as *vox populi*, for example). However, these self-imposed restrictions do not result in a composition of overwhelming boredom. Florian Csizmadia describes Elgar's compositional main decision as a simple technique of leitmotifs, whereby he finds a solution for the non-dramatic choral ballad. The black knight as a person and also his actions are characterized by leitmotifs, which are presented by the orchestra. So the orchestra does not only provide a commentary, but interacts also with the narrative structure.<sup>4</sup>

Another restriction is chosen by both Elgar and Schumann: having amateur choirs in mind, the choir parts presents 'no great difficulty to the performers'<sup>5</sup>, while the orchestra is required to act on a high level. Initially Elgar wrote more demanding choir parts, but later revised the composition: 'Several exceptional difficulties in the vocal parts, chiefly occurring in the second scene, have been removed and the work is now practicable for smaller choral societies.'<sup>6</sup>

The reason for using the choir that way lies in thoughts about the target group, the numerous English amateur choirs, and their performing practice. Schumann also had amateur choirs in mind, but for political considerations around the German revolution of 1848/49: Giving these (often politically active) amateur choirs the possibility to participate in performances of high-level artificial compositions had to be seen as an analogy to political participation, which the liberals and democrats demanded. These political implications are necessary for a meaningful analysis of Schumann's choral ballads, and also the political context of the Uhland ballads used by Schumann.<sup>7</sup> Because of spatial and temporal distance, these political aspects don't become an issue when we consider Elgar's *The Black Knight*, although the Uhland poem could be read as a *memento mori* for the ruler (the monarch), and thus could be interpreted politically. A further interpretation, that the death of his children is the justified punishment for the king's hybris,<sup>8</sup> would be of even more political relevance, comparable with those Uhland poems Schumann chose for his choral ballads.

Another main factor for the reception of *The Black Knight* is another choral ballad composed by Schumann, namely *Das Glück von Edenhall* (op. 143, 1853, lyrics by Uhland, reworked by Richard Hasenclever). Elgar's *The Black Knight*

was quickly taken up by English choral societies, who were already familiar with Uhland's "Luck of Edenhall" in a well-known translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The work was published in

- 4 Cf. Florian Csizmadia, *Leitmotivik und verwandte Techniken in den Chorwerken von Edward Elgar. Analysen und Kontexte* (Berlin: Dr. Köster, 2017), 202.
- 5 Elgar to Novello, 30 September 1892. Cf. Jerrold Northrop Moore (Ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers – Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 12-3.
- 6 Note published in the Second Edition of *The Black Knight* (9 March 1898). Cf. Smith, 'A sort of Symphony', 18.
- 7 Cf. Sauerwald, *Uhland und seine Komponisten*, 335ff. The poet Ludwig Uhland was a liberal and democratic politician in the context of the revolution of 1848/49, so that the reception of his poems was influenced by his political activity.
- 8 Georg Funk, *Erläuterungen zu Uhlands Gedichten. Neue Folge (= Dr. Wilhelm Königs Erläuterungen zu den Klassikern 159/60)*; Leipzig: Beyer 1910), 32–35.

vocal score by Novello in 1875 and again, with a simplified piano part, in 1895.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, *The Black Knight* was not the first Uhland/Longfellow-libretto that was sung by English choristers.

### **Bashing Longfellow**

The Uhland ballads *Das Glück von Edenhall* and *Der Schwarze Ritter* had been translated by Longfellow, whose works were very popular and had often been considered as the most influential introduction of English speaking readers to German literature. Longfellow's fame during the 19th century is undoubted, as Dana Gioia explains: Longfellow

enjoyed a type of fame almost impossible to imagine by contemporary standards. His books [...] sold so consistently that he eventually became the most popular living author in any genre in nineteenth-century America. His readers spanned every social class [...]. A vast, appreciative audience read, reread, and memorized his poems. [...] Longfellow's fame was not limited to the United States. He was the first American poet to achieve an international reputation. England hailed him as the New World's first great bard. His admirers included Charles Dickens, William Gladstone, John Ruskin, and Anthony Trollope as well as the British royal family [...]. Three years after his death Longfellow's bust was unveiled in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, the first and only time an American poet has received this honor. [...] His poetry exercised a broad cultural influence that today seems more typical of movies or popular music than anything we might imagine possible for poetry.<sup>10</sup>

It is not surprising that Longfellow became a favourite author for Ann Elgar and later for Elgar himself. The passion for poetry Ann Elgar shared with many other working-class readers of her time. Both mother and son were inspired by Longfellow's language and characters.<sup>11</sup> In particular, his prose romance *Hyperion* had special impact:

In literature, it is useful to consider Elgar's favourite author, and his mother's – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The novel *Hyperion* was a treasured inheritance from his mother, and it was *Hyperion* that Elgar gave as a gift late in life to his last female friend.<sup>12</sup>

Looking at the Elgar critics, Longfellow's version of *The Black Knight* is disapproved of the most by them. The following table lists some of these verdicts. It is remarkable that points of critique are seldom formulated concretely.

9 Bradford Robinson, 'Preface to *Das Glück von Edenhall* Op. 143' (2005). [https://repertoire-explorer.musikmpf.de/de/produkt/schumann-robort-27/, retrieved 30 January 2019].

10 Dana Gioia, 'Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism', in Jay Parini, *The Columbia history of American poetry* (Columbia University Press 1993), 64–96, here 64f.

11 Byron Adams, 'Elgar and the Persistence of Memory', in Byron Adams (Ed.), *Edward Elgar and his World* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 59–95, here: 63ff.

12 Leon Botstein, 'Transcending the Enigmas of Biography. The Cultural Context of Sir Edward Elgar's Career', in: Byron Adams (Ed.), *Edward Elgar and his World* (Princeton University Press 2007), 365–405, here: 372.

Ernest Newman (1906) '[*The Black Knight*] is set to a ballad of Uhland — “Der Schwarze Ritter” — that has been translated into broken-backed, spavined verse by Longfellow. [...] The English verse, as already hinted, is not of a very high order, but its deficiencies are hardly noticeable through the music; while the ballad as a whole, with its quick dramatic narrative and its broad contrasts of mood is admirably adopted to a musical setting.’<sup>13</sup>

Basil Maine (1933) ““The Black Knight” was no more favoured by the critics than “Froissart” had been. Their chief and reiterated complaint was that the words of the text were unnecessarily repeated. It cannot be pretended that Longfellow's poem is good enough in itself to be worthy of repetition at any point, but the composer's purpose here was not to draw attention to the poem by repeating words and phrases, but rather to make the verses subservient at every point to the demands of the music.’<sup>14</sup>

Basil Maine (1933) ‘To say the least, the English version is unconvincing; and at no point it is calculated to inspire a composer to give of his best.’<sup>15</sup>

Basil Maine (1933) ‘But the scene [“The arch of heaven grew black...”, B.S.] is so vividly imagined by the composer, that the music is able to present it and surround it with an appropriate atmosphere in spite of the poor support of the libretto.’<sup>16</sup>

Percy Marshall Young (1973) ‘The legend of The Black Knight was told by Uhland, a poet of particular interest to Alice Elgar. Instead of a translation by her Elgar used that of Longfellow, and a poor one it is.’<sup>17</sup>

Robin Holloway (2005) ‘the more “professional” trash’<sup>18</sup>

Byron Adams (2007) ‘for Longfellow's book is an odd hybrid production that might have puzzled any native German.’<sup>19</sup>

13 Ernest Newman, *Elgar. The music of the masters* (New York: Brentano's, 1906), 10f.

14 Basil Maine, *Elgar. His Life and Works* (London: G. Bell & Sons 1933), vol. I: His Life, 61.

15 Basil Maine, *Elgar. His Life and Works* (London: G. Bell & Sons 1933), vol. II: His Works, 9.

16 *Ibid.*, 11.

17 Young, *Elgar O.M.*, 298.

18 Robin Holloway, ‘The Early Choral Works’, in Daniel M. Grimley/Julian Rushton (Edd.): *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge University Press 2005), 63–80, here: 64.

19 Byron Adams, ‘Elgar and the Persistence of Memory’, in Byron Adams (Ed.), *Edward Elgar and his World* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 59–95, here: 65.

In his prose romance *Hyperion*, which contains the ballad *The Black Knight*, Longfellow quotes more than 25 German-speaking authors, apart from Uhland e.g. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Heinrich Heine or today unknown poets like Johann Gaudenz von Salis-Seewis. The book can be seen not only as a romance and a travelogue, but also as a subjective critique of contemporary German poetry, in which Longfellow's concern especially with German romanticism is evident.<sup>20</sup>

Longfellow points out Uhland's importance amongst the German poets (through Paul Flemming, the novel's main character):

“What books have we here for afternoon reading?” said Flemming, taking a volume from the parlour table, when they had returned from the dining-room. “O, it is Uhland's Poems. Have you read any thing of his? He and Tieck are the best living poets of Germany. They dispute the palm of superiority.”<sup>21</sup>

This judgement is not only Longfellow's personal preference, for Uhland (beside Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Ferdinand Freiligrath) belongs to the German poets whom he appreciated most.<sup>22</sup> This correlates with the widespread opinion in Germany, where Uhland's poems were highly popular. Uhland's impact and effect in the German speaking regions is hardly to be underestimated. He was often rated as third amongst the best German poets (after Goethe and Friedrich Schiller) – but this success did not last in the 20th century. Today, Uhland is noted neither in general public nor by critics and literary scholars, who usually forget or ignore Uhland and his work.<sup>23</sup> Longfellow suffers the same fate. Helga Eßmann's description of Longfellow's history of reception could be the same for Uhland:

His singular popularity can be taken as a sign of his success as cultural mediator and literary instigator though the critical orthodoxies of the last eighty years or so tend to downgrade and obliterate almost all of his achievements. To do so is to misrepresent [...] the one literary personality who was most highly regarded throughout the nineteenth century by the literary life of his time.<sup>24</sup>

And Leon Botstein, who takes a closer look at Longfellow's influence on Elgar, compares Longfellow with Giacomo Meyerbeer:

Longfellow was taken seriously in his lifetime as a learned and serious writer, just as Meyerbeer, despite his detractors, was widely admired by discerning contemporaries, including Liszt. Both Longfellow and Meyerbeer, possessed a nontrivial craft for which we have lost the emotional and critical capacity of appreciation.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the cited verdicts on the quality of *The Black Knight's* libretto (see above) are remarkably

20 Cf. Frederick Burwick, 'Longfellow and German Romanticism', in *Comparative Literature Studies* 7,1 (1970), 12–42, here: 13.

21 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hyperion* vol. II (New York: Samuel Colman 1839), 64.

22 Helga Eßmann, 'Literary "Universality": Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and American National Literature', in Armin Paul Frank (Ed.), *The internationality of national literatures in either America*. Vol. 1: Cases and problems (Göttingen: Wallstein 1999), 85–106, here: 92.

23 Cf. Sauerwald, *Uhland und seine Komponisten*, 23ff. and 246ff.

24 Eßmann, 'Literary "Universality"', 101.

25 Botstein, 'Transcending the Enigmas of Biography', 380.

negative and aim at Longfellow's translation. But perhaps it is Uhland, whose poetic and linguistic peculiarities are the real reason for these opinions? So Longfellow as translator comes into focus.<sup>26</sup>

One of these peculiarities which were adopted by Longfellow was criticized early. Uhland's leaving out the personal pronoun ('Am a Prince of mighty sway', in order to create archaism) displeased an anonymous author of the *North American Review* as far back as 1840: It is 'too foreign to the English idiom to be defensible'.<sup>27</sup> This issue does not affect the Elgar composition because Elgar added always the 'I' in the libretto of *The Black Knight*. Another example for criticising details of Longfellow's translation is this view on the verse metre: 'Content is for the most part closely followed, but the effect is somewhat offset by an excess of masculine rhymes, while the German text has a preponderance of the feminine [...]'.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that Longfellow's 'half-scholarly/half-poetic method of translation, that attempts to bring over the original text as poetry into English',<sup>29</sup> requires compromises.

But perhaps the real problem is 'the artful artlessness of Uhland's "art" ballad',<sup>30</sup> which is adopted or (according to Helga Eßmann) even intensified in Longfellow's Uhland translations.<sup>31</sup> Although there are countless settings of Uhland poems (in German) in the 19th century, these poems often defy the musical setting in detail. Because of his simple, often folk-song-like language, Uhland's works are frequently not really taken seriously. Further, Uhland's poetic approach can be described with terms like objectivization and distancing. A ballad like *Der schwarze Ritter* can be seen as an example of Uhland creating historic distance, not only elaborating medieval motifs but also by using archaic words or grammatical features. These aspects are reasons for critics to see Uhland as old-fashioned and can be seen as crucial for Uhland's history of reception.

## Résumé

Is the quality of the libretto lessening the worth of Elgar's composition? Here, different perspectives arise from the considerations above.

- Contrasting the negative verdicts (see above) the Uhland-Longfellow libretto is to be appreciated because of its own specific qualities. The key elements and the spirit of Uhland's adoption of medieval language were adopted by Longfellow successfully, as Eßmann points out.<sup>32</sup> Also the story and content of *The Black Knight* can be received with positive criticism, e.g. Rose Whitmore: '[...] the almost post-modern nihilism of the poem's plot provides more than enough emotional conflict for symphonic content'.<sup>33</sup> Certainly it is not easy to analyse

26 Considerations on Longfellow as translator see Eßmann, 'Literary "Universality"', passim; Christoph Irmischer, *Longfellow Redux* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2006), 218-273.

27 Quote after Irmischer, *Longfellow Redux*, 225.

28 Carl Hammer, 'Longfellow's Lyrics "from the German"', in Waldo F. McNeir (Ed.), *Studies in Comparative Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1962) 155–172, here: 167.

29 Gioia, 'Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism', 90f, original emphasis.

30 Eßmann, 'Literary "Universality"', 96.

31 Cf. ibidem.

32 Eßmann, 'Literary "Universality"', 96.

33 Rose J. Whitmore, Edward Elgar: *Sonata in G major for Organ, op. 28 and Symphonic Idealism* (University of Washington 2013, Dissertation), 34.

this poem – also for Paul Flemming, who stops in *Hyperion* further considerations about it by declaring: ‘However, it tells its own story, and needs no explanation.’<sup>34</sup>

- The historic view on Elgar’s composition focuses on tracing the libretto’s attraction for Elgar (leaving modernistic and anachronistic views on Uhland and Longfellow aside). Longfellow’s *Hyperion* was appreciated by Elgar in general (see above), but also specific aspects of the poem *The Black Knight* are important. There is the ‘inherent love of Chivalry in Elgar’ (Maine 1933a, S. 60), similar to Uhland. The archaic language chosen by Uhland and Longfellow was no problem for Elgar, as his ‘youthful interest in writers of earlier centuries [...] resonated throughout his work’.<sup>35</sup> There is the confessional issue: Although Uhland and Longfellow were protestants, both were attracted by catholic rites and tradition, which can be seen in the medieval motif. For Elgar – as a catholic living in diaspora – these aspects were very appealing.
- Regarding *Elgar setting Longfellow*, he is obviously not the typical composer. Perhaps H. Earle Johnson classifies the Longfellow composers in a too simplistic manner: ‘His lines were frequently set, as he well knew, by inferiors, by a few equals – notably in the larger poems – but by no superiors.’<sup>36</sup> And: ‘Composers were of necessity conservative, even when most professional.’<sup>37</sup> It is clear, that Elgar as an artist and *The Black Knight* as a work are much more complex and Johnson’s observations are not relevant in this case.
- Regarding *Elgar setting Uhland*, the composer himself points towards a problem many composers had with Uhland libretti: On his manuscript, the 1892 vocal score sketch, Elgar wrote: ‘Music by Edward Elgar if he can.’<sup>38</sup> Uhland’s poetry is not really easy to set. Aspects as the surprisingly objective language, the simplicity and the archaisms are obstacles for composers. Elgar found both aesthetically convincing and interesting solutions for creating a ‘distinctly objective-sounding’<sup>39</sup> large scale work with Uhland/Longfellow’s *The Black Knight*, which can be seen as an independent contribution to the history of the choral ballad genre and (modifying Young’s considerations above<sup>40</sup>) a modernisation of the (German) romantic project.
- To modern readers, Uhland’s passion for medieval motifs seems old-fashioned. Hereby, Elgar is not *per se* a reactionary artist by choosing this poet. His preference for poets like Longfellow (and Uhland) can be explained with his literary socialisation and corresponds to his specific historical awareness – *The Black Knight* is not his only libretto with historic connections or with a clear orientation towards the past.

34 Longfellow, *Hyperion* vol. II, 67f.

35 Adams, ‘Persistence of memory’, 69.

36 H. Earle Johnson: ‘Longfellow and Music’, in *The American Music Research Center Journal*, 7 (1997), Special Issue, 7–32, here 21.

37 *Ibid.*, 27.

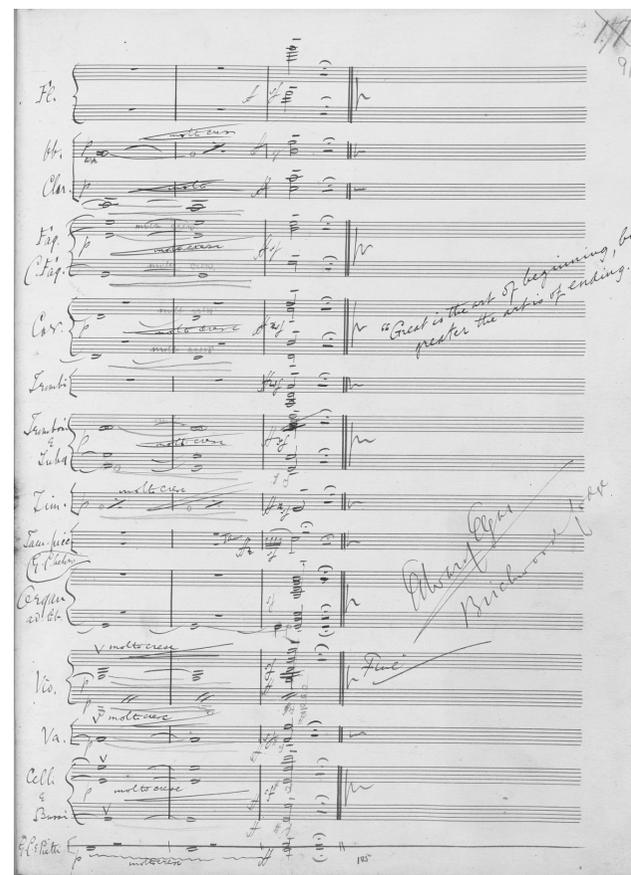
38 Quoted after Smith, ‘A sort of Symphony’, 7.

39 Botstein, ‘Transcending the Enigmas of biography’ 380.

40 See Footnote 1.

Elgar deals with a seemingly old-fashioned text and enables its modern reception; the result is popular enough to be intelligible for the audience. But Elgar also uses congenially elaborate musical language, so *The Black Knight* cannot be regarded as kitsch or as the setting of a reactionary second-class libretto. But perhaps Elgar’s *The Black Knight*, if it is played more often, ‘tells its own story and needs no explanation’.

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Elgar was fascinated by Longfellow’s poetry. This also can be seen in one of the composer’s key works, the *Variations* (‘Enigma’, 1899). At the end of the autograph, Elgar quotes from Longfellow’s ‘Elegiac Verse’ (1882): ‘Great is the art of beginning, but greater the art of ending.’ (British Library)

## The Life of Jesus in the works of Arthur Sullivan and Edward Elgar

### Meinhard Saremba

In his famous 1888 speech in the Town Hall in Birmingham, Britain's most important 19<sup>th</sup> century composer, Arthur Sullivan, recalled the music history of his country since the time of King Alfred, when 'music was pursued [...] diligently and enthusiastically in England'. However, he commented critically that religious and political struggles, practical science and 'the enthusiasm with which commerce was pursued [...] for nearly 200 years, made us lose that high position, and threw us into the hands of the illustrious foreigners, Handel, Haydn, Spohr, Mendelssohn'. According to him the main problem was that 'we were content to buy our music, while we were making churches, steam-engines, railways, cotton-mills, constitutions, anti-Corn-Law Leagues, and Caucuses'. Close to the end of the century he had the impression that 'the condition of things is changing' and that Britain is at least 'at the entry of the Promised Land'.<sup>1</sup> Arthur Sullivan himself made major contributions to the oratorio tradition which up to that time had been dominated by the above-mentioned foreigners. Almost two decades after Sullivan's death, Hubert Parry said in 1918: 'The English public is curious – it can only recognise one composer at a time. Once it was Sullivan. Now it is Elgar.'<sup>2</sup> It is not at random that precisely these two names are mentioned by a major exponent of the then English music establishment: modern English music history began in 1862 with Arthur Sullivan's incidental music for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with which the composer created a link to Henry Purcell's *Tempest* music of 1695. Sullivan's pioneering work and fundamental achievements paved the way for Edward Elgar.<sup>3</sup> The elder composer realised that his commitment on a broad scale – responsibility for the Leeds Festival for eighteen years, writing orchestral works and dramatic cantatas (inspired by Liszt and Berlioz) and composing operas from one-act pieces to those on a grand scale – was vital to create the basis of a high-quality English

1 Sullivan's programmatic speech 'About Music' of 19th October 1888 in Birmingham was published in book form in Arthur Lawrence, *Sir Arthur Sullivan: Life Story, Letters, and Reminiscences* (London: James Bowden, 1899), 261-287, and later in Albert Gier / Meinhard Saremba / Benedict Taylor (eds.), *SullivanPerspektiven I – Arthur Sullivans Opern, dramatische Kantaten, Orchester- und Sakralmusik*, (Essen: Oldib-Verlag, 2012), 21-34.

2 Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 21.

3 More detailed information about the relationship of the two composers is provided in: Meinhard Saremba, "'... unconnected with the schools' – Edward Elgar and Arthur Sullivan", in *The Elgar Society Journal*, vol. 17, No. 4 (April 2012), 4-23.

music repertoire.<sup>4</sup> Elgar had revealed more than once that he possessed the necessary dramatic potential for the stage. If he had not been a late bloomer, who attracted notice only when he was around 40, he might have written something like *King Olaf* or *Caractacus* for the Royal English Opera House near the intersection of Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road (now London's Palace Theatre) as a successor to Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* in the early 1890s. Due to circumstances, his development took another direction towards choral and orchestral music. In this genre Sullivan's oratorios and dramatic cantatas such as *The Prodigal Son*, *The Light of the World*, *The Martyr of Antioch* and *The Golden Legend* played an important role in showing the way.



Elgar and Sullivan conducting their own works.

4 See Meinhard Saremba, 'Ein Champion für die Königsklasse – Arthur Sullivan, das viktorianische Musiktheater und die englische Oper', in Antje Tumat / Meinhard Saremba / Benedict Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven III – Arthur Sullivans Musiktheater, Kammermusik, Chor- und Orchesterwerke* (Essen: Oldib-Verlag, 2017), 33-103 [a shortened version in English in the forthcoming book about the Sullivan symposium in Harrogate 2018, edited by Ian Smith, in preparation]; M. Saremba, 'Popular misconceptions of Gilbert and Sullivan', in David Eden / M. Saremba (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gilbert and Sullivan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 59 f., and concerning the reception of Sullivan's achievements see M. Saremba, 'In the Purgatory of Tradition – Arthur Sullivan and the English Musical Renaissance', in Christa Brüstle / Guido Heldt (eds.), *Music as a Bridge – German-British Musical Relationships*, (Hildesheim. Olms, 2005), 33-71, and (more detailed) in M. Saremba, 'Das Problem Sullivan – Anmerkungen zu einem europäischen Komponisten', in Ulrich Tadday (ed.), *Arthur Sullivan* (München: Edition Text & Kritik, 2011), 41-68.

### ***The Sullivan-Elgar connection***

Elgar always had a positive attitude towards Sullivan, who was 15 years his senior. This is proved not least by Elgar's daughter Carice who wrote: 'My father always spoke with great feeling and respect for Sullivan, and admired *The Golden Legend*. He was also very fond of the overture *Di Ballo*.<sup>5</sup> The two musicians met briefly in 1889 in London but it was not until 1898, when Elgar had made great progress as a composer, that Sullivan took a stand for ensuring the success of Elgar's new cantata *Caractacus*, which was performed at the Leeds Festival (where Sullivan was the artistic director). 'There is much in the Festival that gives me pleasure and satisfaction', Sullivan wrote to Elgar, 'and perhaps the greatest delight is in being able to help and forward the interests of a brother musician no matter in how small a degree.'<sup>6</sup> A year later Sullivan even accepted the invitation to become an honorary member of Elgar's Worcestershire Philharmonic Society.

Elgar was still an adolescent when Sullivan's artistic career began. It is very likely that the twelve-year-old Edward attended the première of *The Prodigal Son* together with his relatives on 8th September 1869 in Worcester.<sup>7</sup> After all, his father (second violins) and his uncle Henry (violas) were playing in the Festival Orchestra under the composer's baton and the Festival programme is inscribed 'My first festival'. As a young man Elgar could study the scores of several works for chorus and orchestra by Sullivan as they were published in the same year as the première: *The Prodigal Son* (1869 by Boosey), *The Light of the World* (1873 by Cramer), *Festival Te Deum* (1872 by Novello), *The Martyr of Antioch* (1880 by Chappell), *The Golden Legend* (1886 by Novello) and the so-called *Boer War Te Deum* (premiered posthumously and published in 1902). Edward Elgar himself is known to have played in performances of *The Light of the World*, *The Golden Legend* and *The Prodigal Son* in Worcester, Birmingham and Hereford.

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**Typed transcript of Elgar's letter to Sullivan, 1 October 1898** [see page 31; EBM letter 9628 / Morgan Library and Museum – Pierpont Library, Gilbert and Sullivan Collection--Letters (GSLET) 76070].

According to Martin Bird it was made in 1926 by Herbert Sullivan and sent to Elgar to get permission to publish it in his biography. Elgar scribbled on the bottom of the copy: 'With kind regards / Believe me to be / Yours very sincerely'.

Sir Arthur's nephew Herbert Sullivan wrote to Elgar from Norton, Dartmouth, on 13 December 1926:

'Dear Sir Edward,  
Newman Flower and I have written a Life of my late uncle, Sir Arthur Sullivan, and we desire to include the letter, copy of which is enclosed, therein. Would you give us permission to do this?

Yours very sincerely  
Herbert Sullivan'

Elgar's draft reply from Napleton Grange, Kempsey, Worcester, on 29 December 1926:

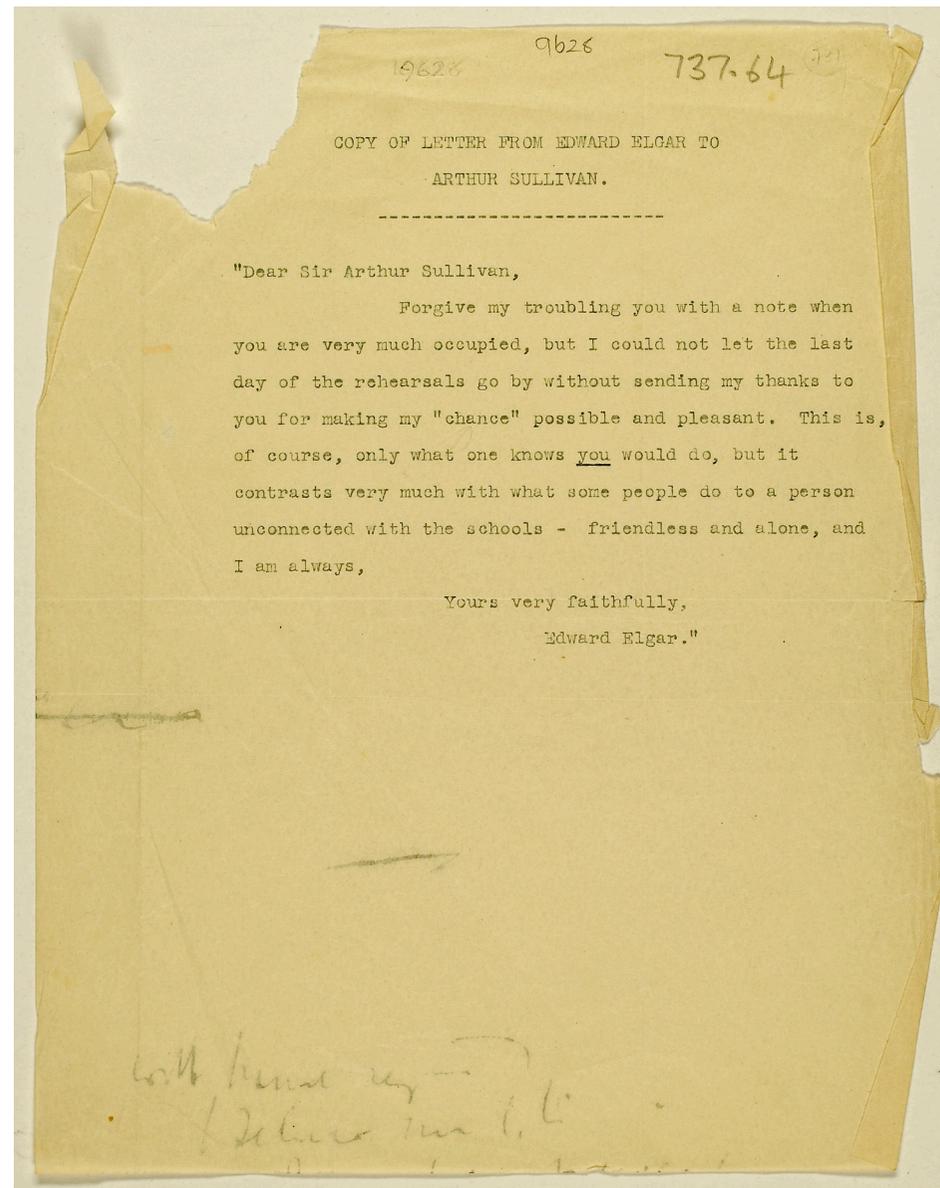
'Dear Mr. Herbert Sullivan:  
Many thanks for your letter of the 13th: I do not think it wd. be advisable to print the letter unless the whole of the circumstances under which it was written were given & a recital of these wd. be tiresome. Sir Arthur was not at all well during the rehearsals for the Leeds Festival of 1898 & it is to the London rehearsals that my note refers. I had urged him to rest which I went through 'Caractacus'; but he remained & made notes of anything which struck him in that most charming self-sacrificing way which was always his.' (provided and transcribed by Martin Bird)

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5 Carice Elgar-Blake in a letter to Leslie Bailey; quoted in Leslie Bailey, *The Gilbert and Sullivan Book* (London: Cassell, 1952), 266.

6 Elgar Birthplace Museum, letter 10343 and letter 2846.

7 Elgar's brother-in-law, Charles Pipe, noted that to this music festival 'my uncle subscribed generously and gave tickets to his friends' (see *Memoirs in Berrow's Worcester Journal*, serialised in 1976).



Letter from Sullivan to Elgar, 22 January 1899:

'Dear Mr. Elgar, Your kind letter is ever before me on my table, and every day, I put off answering it until tomorrow – that fatal tomorrow. However, today has arrived at last, and so I take the opportunity to thank you most sincerely for your kind words & good wishes. I return them heartily to you and Mrs. Elgar. I gather from various sources that the Leeds Festival of '98 was a great success, but I have heard nothing officially from the Committee. The Yorkshire people think that if they pay you for their service, that is enough – there is no necessity to say 'Thank you'. However, there is much in the Festival that gives me pleasure and satisfaction, and perhaps the greatest delight is in being able to help and forwards the interests of a brother musician no matter in how small a degree. I am yours sincerely, Arthur Sullivan / P.S. A very scratchy pen.'

(EBM letter 10343)

10343  
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS  
FINAFORE LONDON

22 Jan: 1899  
1, QUEENS MANSIONS,  
VICTORIA STREET. S.W.

Dear Mr Elgar.

Your kind letter is ever before me on my table, and every day, I put off answering it until tomorrow – that fatal tomorrow. However, today has arrived at last, and so I take the opportunity to thank you most sincerely for your kind words & good wishes.

I return them heartily to you and Mrs. Elgar. I gather from various sources that the Leeds Festival of '98 was a great success, but I have heard nothing officially from the Committee.

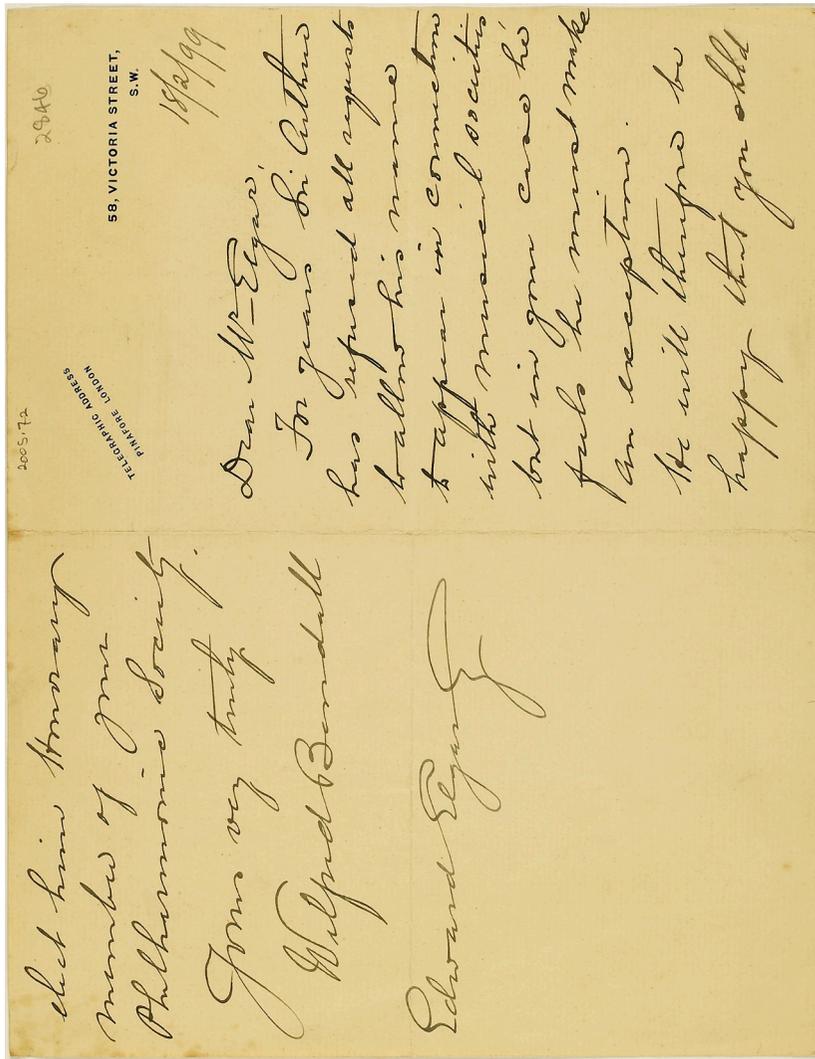
The Yorkshire people think that if they pay you for your services, that is enough – there is no necessity to say "Thank you".

However, there is much in the Festival that gives me pleasure and satisfaction, and perhaps the greatest delight is in being able to help and forward the interests of a brother musician no matter in how small a degree.

I am yours sincerely

Arthur Sullivan.

P.S.  
A very scratchy pen.



Elgar had invited Sullivan to be an honorary member of his Worcestershire Philharmonic Society. Wilfred Bendall, Sullivan's secretary, replied for Sir Arthur, who was ill, on 18 February 1899: 'Dear Mr. Elgar, for years Sir Arthur has refused all requests to allow his name to appear in connection with musical societies but in your case he feels he must make an exception. He will therefore be happy that you should elect him Honorary member of your Philharmonic Society. Yours very truly, Wilfred Bendall.' (EBM letter 2876)

### Religious background

Elgar had to deal with several problems when, as a Catholic, he wrote oratorios like *The Light of Life*, *The Dream of Gerontius*, *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. Sullivan's affiliation to the Church of England made many things easier for him. As his family came from the far west of Ireland one might expect him to be as Catholic as Elgar. However, Sullivan's grandmother, Mary Sullivan, came from Bandon, County Cork, which was then a severely Protestant town surrounded by a Catholic countryside. If Mary Sullivan came from Bandon she would certainly have been a Protestant, i.e. Anglican, and she would equally certainly have married another Protestant, meaning that the Sullivans were Protestants all along. At the beginning of his career Arthur Sullivan made concessions to expectations with *The Prodigal Son* (1869) and *The Light of the World* (1873).<sup>8</sup> However, his big works for chorus and orchestra such as *The Martyr of Antioch* (1880) and *The Golden Legend* (1886) indicate an increasingly secular bias.<sup>9</sup> While it is possible to regard *The Golden Legend* – concerning its duration and conception as dramatic cantata – as a formal model for *King Olaf* (1896) and *Caractacus* (1898), as a Catholic Elgar steadily tried to adapt to his Anglican surroundings. He complained to Delius a year before his death that writing oratorios had been 'the penalty of my English environment'.<sup>10</sup>

However, personally Sullivan and Elgar stood apart from (organised) religion in later life. After all, as baptised Christians they had no problems in creating grand musical portraits of Jewish people like Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* or Mary Magdalene and (sometimes) Judas who appear in Sullivan's *The Light of the World* as well as Elgar's *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. According to the eminent Sullivan biographer Arthur Jacobs there is absolutely no clue for Sullivan's religious orientation. 'He conformed to the normal practice of someone who was brought up in the Chapel Royal and was brought up in a conventional home', Jacobs said in an interview. 'He would have considered it to be very odd not to have been able, as someone who mixed in royal and official circles, to take part in official church celebrations and so on. He set biblical texts but there is no evidence that he had any personal fervour. It is rather odd that even towards the end of his life, and even when he knew he was dying or about to die that he did not seek what we would call spiritual or church consolation. I think that is probably quite common in Victorian times again. You are expected to conform, not to rock the boat, but you were not expected necessarily to have, if you could not have, a deep conviction of your own.'<sup>11</sup> Elgar, who had still been a devoted Catholic in

- 8 See the analysis in Richard Silverman, 'Heeding Britain's command – Sullivan turns to the Oratorio: Arthur Sullivan's *The Prodigal Son*', in Albert Gier / Meinhard Saremba / Benedict Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven II – Arthur Sullivans Bühnenwerke, Oratorien, Schauspielmusik und Lieder* (Essen: Oldib-Verlag, 2014), 153-177, Martin T. Yates, 'The *Light of the World* shines through', in Tumat / Saremba / Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven III* (2017), 265-298.
- 9 See Benedict Taylor, 'The *Golden Legend*: An Analytical and Critical Reappraisal', Gier / Saremba / Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven I*, 183-228, and Florian Csizmadia, 'The *Martyr of Antioch* – Sullivans "Sacred Musical Drama" zwischen Oratorium, dramatischer Kantate und Sakraloper', in Gier / Saremba / Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven II* (2014), 207-224
- 10 Eric Fenby, *Delius as I Knew Him* (London: Bell & Sons 1936), 124.
- 11 BBC interview, broadcast in 1992 at the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sullivan's birth. In addition see David Eden, 'Sullivan's Christianity', in *Sir Arthur Sullivan Society Magazine*, No. 41 (autumn 1995), 22-28. There are different opinions as to how religious Sullivan really was. For a more detailed discussion see also Ian Bradley, *Lost Chords and Christian Soldiers – The Sacred Music of Arthur Sullivan* (London: SCM Press 2013), as well as the essays by Ian Bradley and William Parry in Gier / Saremba / Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven I* (2012), 131-146 and 147-160, and Benedict Taylor, *Arthur Sullivan: A Musical Reappraisal* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

the 1890s, later kept aloof from religion, when he seemed to have become an Agnostic. 'I always said God was against art and I still believe it', he stated briefly after the disastrous première of *The Dream of Gerontius* in October 1900 in Birmingham. 'I have allowed my heart to open once – it is now shut against every religious feeling and every soft, gentle impulse for ever.'<sup>12</sup>

### Great successes

A piece like Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* was a provocation in an Anglican setting. This is why the work had difficulties in the United Kingdom but was a huge success at the Lower Rhine Festival in 1901. The conductor Henry Wood reported of the Düsseldorf performance of *Der Traum des Gerontius*, that he had 'never seen an audience so excited nor a composer so spontaneously acclaimed; certainly not an Englishman – unless, perhaps, Sullivan after the first performance of *The Golden Legend*'.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the musical qualities of Elgar's oratorio and its performance it must have been a major advantage for him in the Catholic Rhineland that he was a Catholic himself (in fact the first major Catholic composer in Britain since William Byrd, 300 years previously) and *Der Traum des Gerontius* a piece deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. After all, the source is Cardinal Henry Newman, a former Anglican clergyman who converted to the Catholic belief in 1845 at the age of 44 and was able to make a career in the Catholic Church. While the work was praised in Germany, acceptance of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* was slow to come within the Anglican world. The people in charge of the Three Choirs Festival in Elgar's home town still insisted in 1902 that for presenting the work in an Anglican cathedral words like 'Maria' had to be substituted with 'Jesus', 'Lord' with 'Saviour' and to refer only to 'souls' instead of 'souls in Purgatory'. The idea of a purgatory, a place for the purification of the soul after death, is common in the Catholic belief, but not in the Anglican. Nevertheless, today the Anglican cathedral in Worcester takes pride in having the 'Elgar window', which was installed a year after the composer's death. It features several scenes from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Elgar, who some years before had been advised to change a projected title like *Lux Christi* to *The Light of Life* and to stay away from a Latin text, hardly seems to have bothered about theological quibbles. Already at the time of the première of this oratorio he no longer attended mass regularly. Arthur Sullivan, too, was far from standing out due to any deep religiousness. Lucifer and his spirits in the prologue of *The Golden Legend* might easily have been a model for Elgar's depiction of the demons which harass the soul of Gerontius. Already at the beginning of *The Dream of Gerontius* Elgar makes a reference to Sullivan's *chef d'œuvre*, when the lament of the dying Gerontius reminds us of the sufferings of Prince Henry (see fig. 1).<sup>14</sup>

In spite of their indifference to institutionalised religion, both composers had a sense of moments of spiritual fulfilment. Their works are also an appeal to human dignity and the Christian virtue of 'caritas', charity, as can be seen in *The Golden Legend* and *The Light of Life*. It stands to reason that several of Elgar's works for soloists, choir and orchestra were a substitute for

12 Letter from Elgar to Jaeger, 9th October 1900, EBM letter 9528.

13 Henry Wood, *My Life of Music*, London 1938, 324 ff.

14 More examples in Richard Silverman, 'Stilelemente von Sullivans Musik und deren Interpretation', in Ulrich Tadday (ed.), *Arthur Sullivan* (München: Edition Text & Kritik, 2011), 97.

fig. 1a, Sullivan, *The Golden Legend*, scene 1

fig. 1b, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, opening scene

'grand' opera, just as they had been for Berlioz or Sullivan. Examples might be *King Olaf* (1896)<sup>15</sup> and *Caractacus* (1898),<sup>16</sup> as well as the first two parts of the unfinished trilogy about the rise of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> This project had to some extent been modelled after Wagner's tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* but it was inspired musically mainly by English oratorios in the vein of Macfarren, Bennett and Mackenzie,<sup>18</sup> and got its thematic and stylistic inspiration from Sullivan's most comprehensive oratorio *The Light of the World* (1873), his fellow-composer whose achievements had been one of the driving forces for his ideas.<sup>19</sup>

After the première of *The Light of the World* critics praised Sullivan's instrumentation. In the review of *The Observer* it is mentioned that 'the orchestra is handled throughout in a manner which only one who is fully acquainted with each instrument, its individual capabilities, and its effect in combination, is able to appreciate. The instrumentation is never obtrusive, but is always delicate and expressive, while many orchestral passages are notable for the beauty of the scoring.'<sup>20</sup> While Sullivan was also praised for his vocal writing, Elgar impressed the listeners with his writing for the orchestra. A reviewer remarked that 'one still feels that the composer has more sympathy with his instruments than with his voices'.<sup>21</sup> That in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Sullivan was the only imaginable comparative example is revealed in the 1899 review of *The Guardian* which claimed Elgar as 'the most eminent master of orchestral effect which our country has produced, with the possible exception of Sir Arthur Sullivan'.<sup>22</sup>

### Inspiration and modern conception

One of the most important connections between Sullivan and Elgar is that both wrote works about the life of Jesus. Sullivan's *The Light of the World* (1873) is unique while Elgar's *The Light of Life* (1896) is a kind of prologue for his oratorio trilogy about Christendom of which he only finished *The Apostles* (1903) and *The Kingdom* (1906). Elgar was 16 years old when *The Light of the World*

15 King Olaf was the first Christian King of Norway (968-1000) who brought his faith to the Orkney Islands and married Gyda of Ireland.

16 Caractacus is a British military leader who opposed the Roman intruders in the first century. Unfortunately he was not successful: the Romans defeated Caractacus in 51 A.D.

17 Elgar completed *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, while *The Last Judgement* never got further than a few sketches which Elgar produced sporadically until 1920.

18 See Florian Csizmadia, *Leitmotivik und verwandte Techniken in den Chorwerken von Edward Elgar: Analysen und Kontexte* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Köster, 2017).

19 In 1891 Elgar did not have the artistic potential to write a contribution for the Royal English Opera House and when he was able to do it Carte had already withdrawn from the project because of its unprofitability. However, in 1906 W.S. Gilbert proposed writing an opera with Elgar, and in 1909 Thomas Beecham asked him to write an opera for his English Opera Season at Covent Garden. Neither proposal came to anything and Beecham revived *Ivanhoe* in 1910, when it was conducted by Percy Pitt.

20 Lawrence, *Arthur Sullivan*, 103 f.

21 Michael Kennedy, 'Elgar's *The Light of Life*', Chandos CHAN 9208, 5.

22 Quoted after Julian Rushton, *Elgar: Enigma Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), 79 f. Concerning appropriate performances see Roger Norrington, 'Sullivan's Orchestral Sound World', in Gier / Saremba / Taylor (eds.), *SullivanPerspektiven I* (2012), 87-94, and Ben Palmer, 'The sound of Elgar's orchestra – a study of early twentieth-century orchestral performance practice', *The Elgar Society Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (April 2015), 4-14.

was premièred at the music festival in Birmingham on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1873. Even if he did not travel the 22 miles from Worcester, Elgar had several opportunities to listen to the new oratorio in one of the many performances in England. In addition, the vocal score was published in the same year by J.B. Cramer & Co. Eventually, Elgar performed in *The Light of the World* as a violinist in October 1886. It stands to reason to assume that Sullivan's oratorio was important for Elgar's conception.

From their childhood on, both artists were acquainted with the Bible because their education must have left its marks on them. As a Chapel Royal chorister Sullivan internalised sacred music from the days of his childhood, while Elgar played the organ in Worcester's Catholic St George's Church as a teenager. Their interest in Jesus and his disciples was less theological than personal. Elgar recorded that he was deeply impressed by a remark of one of his school teachers who said:

The Apostles were very young men and very poor. Perhaps, before the descent of the Holy Ghost, they were no cleverer than some of you here.<sup>23</sup>

This attitude was the starting point for Elgar's *Apostles* project, which – like Sullivan's oratorio – was commissioned by the Birmingham Festival. Sullivan emphasized in his preface to *The Light of the World*:

In this Oratorio the intention has not been to convey the spiritual idea of the Saviour as in the *Messiah*, or to recount the sufferings of Christ, as in the 'Passionsmusik', but to set forth the human aspect of the life of our Lord on Earth, exemplifying it by some of the actual incidents in his career, which bear specially upon His attributes of Preacher, Healer and Prophet.<sup>24</sup>

Sullivan admired Beethoven's oratorio *Christus am Ölberge* (1803) which became well-known in England as *The Mount of Olives*.<sup>25</sup> In his preface to *The Prodigal Son* (1869) Sullivan had already declared that a 'knowledge of human nature' is also necessary for the creation of religious subjects.<sup>26</sup> Now he dared something that had been avoided in the English oratorio because it was not regarded as a decent approach: in *The Light of the World* he presented Jesus as a person who is actively represented on the concert platform.<sup>27</sup> Later Elgar took up this operatic approach. In the same way as Sullivan's, his protagonists, according to his own words, are 'clothed with music by me',<sup>28</sup> Elgar fitted out 'every personality' with a 'musical dress' as if he wanted them to appear on a theatrical stage.<sup>29</sup>

Both Sullivan's *The Light of the World* and Elgar's *The Apostles* – a work which according

23 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 52.

24 Robin Gordon-Powell (ed.), *Arthur Sullivan: The Light of the World* (Full Score), volume 1 (London: The Amber Ring, 2018), xxi.

25 See Meinhard Saremba, 'Sullivan und Beethoven', *Sullivan-Journal*, 13 (July 2015), 52-58, and Pierre Degott, 'From Beethoven to Elgar: the representation of Christ on the English oratorio scene', *The Elgar Society Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (December 2017), 4-24.

26 Robin Gordon-Powell (ed.), *Arthur Sullivan: The Prodigal Son* (Full Score), (London: The Amber Ring, 2003), vii.

27 See Barbara Mohn, *Das englische Oratorium im 19. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 132.

28 Arthur Jacobs, *Arthur Sullivan: A Victorian Musician* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), 288.

29 Robert J. Buckley, *Sir Edward Elgar*, London 1905, 75.

to Elgar 'is complete in itself & may well stand alone'<sup>30</sup> – were inspired by pictures. The stimulus for the title of Sullivan's work came from a painting by the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt: "The Light of the World", painted between 1853 and 1856. Sullivan had a reproduction of it in his study.<sup>31</sup> It depicts Jesus with a burning lantern, knocking at a door. The starting point for this picture was a quotation from Revelations (chapter 3, verse 20): 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.'

Under the influence of this complex work, Elgar's first oratorio *The Light of Life* (1896) emerged where Jesus also proclaims: 'As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world'. It can be regarded as an anticipation of the planned trilogy, because some themes are not dissimilar to those in *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*.<sup>32</sup> As with Sullivan's *The Light of the World* just as with many others of Sullivan's compositions, Elgar not only had the opportunity to study the work in his father's music shop soon after its immediate publication but he also knew the work inside out as a performer. The rather similar titles of the oratorios are not only related to a quotation from the Gospel of St. John but also to Hunt's painting. While *The Light of the World* portrays a very Protestant image of Jesus' appeal to the Christian conscience, Elgar's "Light" immediately depicts a single episode from the Gospel of St. John. Elgar focuses on the healing of a blind man through Jesus (John chapter 9, verse 5); Sullivan's oratorio is more than twice as long and depicts different stages from the life of Jesus (Bethlehem, Nazareth, Lazarus, Jerusalem, the sepulchre).

The expressive passage 'Behold, a Stranger's at the door' had already entered into church music in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the verses of the Presbyterian Joseph Grigg. They were set to music for service several times. The best known versions are the melody 'Zephyr' by the American William Batchelder Bradbury, who had studied in Leipzig ten years before Sullivan, and 'Troyte's Chant' by the Englishman Arthur Dyke Acland or Troyte,<sup>33</sup> which was also used for Grigg's text. Consequently Arthur Sullivan and William Holman Hunt were acquainted with the topic. Hunt said that he painted the picture – 'unworthy though I was', as he said – almost 'by Divine command, and not simply as a good Subject'.<sup>34</sup> Later he explained the meaning of the symbols in the picture:

30 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 410. The reason for Elgar's remark that *The Apostles* may stand alone might also be that at this stage the composer wanted to avoid the impression that the intended trilogy was not finished, or fragmentary.

31 See the picture in Walter J. Wells, *Souvenir of Sir Arthur Sullivan*, London 1901, 89. There are various versions of Hunt's "The Light of the World" (oil on canvas, 49.8 x 26.1 cm) in Manchester, Oxford, Toronto and Minneapolis. For details about Sullivan's connections to the Pre-Raphaelites see Meinhard Saremba, 'Viktorianische Avantgarde – Das Leben malen und vertonen: Arthur Sullivan und die Präraffaeliten', part 1 in *Sullivan-Journal*, 15 (June 2016), 2-32, and part 2 in *Sullivan-Journal*, 16 (December 2016), 1-72. [Several of the journals are now available online on <http://www.sullivan-forschung.de/html/a2-journal.html>] Concerning the connection to Elgar see Meinhard Saremba, 'Präraffaelitische Klangwelten und Chiaroscuro', in Gier / Saremba / Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven II* (2014), 179-199. Elgar was also impressed by the Pre-Raphaelites, see Geoffrey Hodgkins, "'E's favourite picture" – Elgar and the Pre-Raphaelites', in *The Elgar Society Journal*, vol. 10, No. 6 (November 1998), 285-300.

32 For a detailed analysis see Charles Edward McGuire, *Elgar's Oratorios – The Creation of an Epic Narrative*, Aldershot 2002.

33 Acland changed his name to Troyte in 1852 for legal reasons when he inherited the property of his relative Reverend Edward Berkeley Troyte.

34 C. Forbes, 'Images of Christ In Nineteenth-Century British Paintings in The Forbes Magazine Collection', in *Magazine Antiques*, December 2001.



Both composers were inspired by paintings: Sullivan by William Holman Hunt's (1827-1910) "The Light of the World" and Elgar by Ivan Kramskoi's (1837-1887) "Christ in the Wilderness".

The door represents the ‘door of the human soul’ which is ‘fast barred’. It can only be opened from inside to let in the ‘light of peace, the hope of salvation’ and the ‘light of conscience’.<sup>35</sup>

Sullivan depicts the “light of the world” in his music, too, when he radiates a vivid sound effect from the woodwind and especially the strings on a high pitch at ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer’ (John chapter 16, verse 33) in Jesus’ solo ‘Daughters of Jerusalem’ in the second part or in the Lazarus scene. When ‘the light of this world’ is mentioned explicitly – as in Jesus’ solo ‘Are there not twelve hours in the day’ – Sullivan uses the woodwind only.

Like the Pre-Raphaelites, Sullivan did not use an opulent, dense baroque chiaroscuro style, but lucid, transparent (acoustic) colours. He was once characterised quite appropriately as a ‘Pre-Raphaelite composer’<sup>36</sup> as he – quite similar to the group of artists with which he had contact – rejected the prevailing trends towards greater opulence and increasingly aligned himself to the clearer structures and tone colours of times past. Painters and musicians in other countries also looked for more filigreed means of expression. The Nazarene movement in Germany and the exponents of the *Purismo* in Italy were influenced by artists of the Italian *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* in order to reach a lighter, less cluttered style – which was also put on paper in the aesthetics of the German Romantics and in the manifesto *Del purismo nelle arti* which was published in 1842/43. Composers like Mendelssohn were influenced by Bach, and Verdi by Palestrina. ‘Let’s go back to the old ways: it will be a progress’, was the motto of the Italian because ‘we, the descendants of Palestrina, commit a musical crime in imitating Wagner, and what we are doing is useless, not to say harmful’.<sup>37</sup>

Arthur Sullivan drew his own conclusions:

Palestrina (from 1550 to 1600) no doubt wrote more nobly than any of his contemporaries, including our own Tallis and Byrd; but it is not too much to say that the English predecessors of Tallis and Byrd – Edwards, Redford, Shepperd, Tye, White, Johnson, and Marbecke, who date from 1500 to 1550, were much in advance of any of the predecessors of Palestrina on the Continent. For they were their equals in science, and they far surpassed them in the tunefulness and what I may call the common sense of their music. Their compositions display a “sweet reasonableness”, a human feeling, a suitability to the words, and a determination to be something more than a mere scientific and mechanical puzzle, which few, if any, of the Continental composers before 1550 can be said to exhibit.<sup>38</sup>

Sullivan’s models for the intended reduction of means were composers such as John Dunstable, John Dowland and Orlando Gibbons; because – according to Sullivan –

[these artists] live not alone by reason of their science, their pure part-writing and rich harmonies, but by the stream of beautiful melody which flows through all their works – melody which is ear-haunting even to our modern and jaded natures, and which had no parallel elsewhere.<sup>39</sup>

35 W. H. Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, volume 1, London 1905, 341 f.

36 William Parry in ‘Der englische Komponist Arthur Sullivan’, part 3 [of 5], first broadcast SWR, 1st July 2005. Sullivan was in touch with the circle of Pre-Raphaelite artists. John Everett Millais painted his portrait which can now be seen in the National Gallery in London, and Edward Burne-Jones created the costumes and the scenery for Carr’s drama *King Arthur* with Sullivan’s incidental music.

37 Letter to Franco Faccio in 1889; quoted in: Anselm Gerhard / Uwe Schweikert (eds.), *Verdi-Handbuch*, Stuttgart/Weimar 2001, 538.

38 Arthur Sullivan, ‘About Music’; see Lawrence, *Arthur Sullivan*, 268 f.

39 *Ibid.*, 269 f.

While the composers of former centuries resonate in Sullivan’s melodious and intuitive vocal style, his mastery of the orchestra in *The Light of the World* is influenced by his models Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann.

Where necessary, Elgar used the orchestral means of the late 19th century. Accordingly he used opulent gestures for an epic piece like *The Apostles*. During his work Elgar was inspired by an engraving of an oil painting<sup>40</sup> which was in his study while he composed. It is the painting “Christ in the Wilderness” (original “Христос в пустыне”, 1872) by the Russian 19th century artist Ivan Nikolayevich Kramskoi. It shows Jesus Christ sitting on a block of stone in a bleak rocky landscape, looking down sadly with tightly folded hands. ‘It is my ideal picture of a Lonely Christ as I have *tried* (and tried hard) to realise the character’, the composer wrote to David Ffrangcon-Davies, who was to sing the role of Jesus, in 1903.<sup>41</sup>

As in Sullivan’s work this role is conceived for a bass-baritone. While the Apostles only make an occasional appearance in Sullivan’s oratorio, Elgar expanded their importance so that eventually they even gave his work its title. Elgar wrote that his wish was ‘to look at things more from the poor man’s (fisherfolk etc.) point of view than from our more fully informed standing place’,<sup>42</sup> whereby he adopted a new perspective of the historical narrative. However, in the field of dramatic sacred music Sullivan had already been ahead of his times with *The Light of the World*. What had been suggested in *The Prodigal Son* became increasingly evident: Sullivan focused less on the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of the New Testament than on the realistic aspects. His concept set new standards concerning the appreciation of the Saviour who was regarded by many as a godlike and supramundane figure. Sullivan’s approach, to place special emphasis on the human side of Jesus, is mirrored not only in paintings like Millais’ “Christ in the House of his Parents” (1850) but also in the sweeping changes that took place in the 19th century perspective on the biblical lore. The perception of science led to new insights about the origin of man and his status in the universe. Sullivan benefited from technological developments and kept himself up-to-date. He was surely aware of a work like *Ecce Homo* (Behold the man) which was published anonymously in 1860.<sup>43</sup> This was one of the first writings that contributed significantly to the understanding of the Bible. People increasingly made a distinction between the Christ of faith and the historical Christ.<sup>44</sup> That Sullivan expressly declared he wanted to focus on ‘the human aspect of the life of Our Lord on Earth, exemplifying it by some of the actual incidents in his career’<sup>45</sup> and not presenting a hagiographic transfiguration, makes the approach of *The Light of the World* groundbreaking. With this Sullivan varied significantly from Louis Spohr’s oratorio *Des Heilands letzte Stunden* (1834/35, which was also successful in England) or Liszt’s oratorio *Christus* written between 1862 and 1866, but not premièred until May 1873,<sup>46</sup> in Weimar. John Stainer’s popular

40 The original is in the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow (oil on canvas, 180 cm × 210 cm).

41 Leon Botstein, ‘Transcending the Enigmas of Biography, The Cultural Context of Edward Elgar’s Biography’, in Byron Adams (ed.), *Edward Elgar and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 398.

42 Keith Elcombe, ‘Introduction to *The Apostles*’, in ‘Elgar, *The Apostles*’, Chandos 8875/6, 6 f.

43 This publication does not have any connection to Nietzsche’s book *Ecce Homo*.

44 See Meinhard Sarembe: ‘Prärafaelitische Klangwelten und Chiaroscuro’, in Gier / Sarembe / Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven II* (2014), 186.

45 Preface to the vocal score of *The Light of the World*, London 1873.

46 Liszt’s oratorio *Christus* was not premièred in England until 1934 but it might very well be possible that the vocal score, published in 1872, was well-known among musicians.

oratorio *The Crucifixion* (1887) for soloists, choir and organ – conceived as a “meditation” – is closer to the conventional “Passionsmusik”.

Of course, thirty years later Elgar had to find a different approach. His point of reference is Robert Ottley’s *Aspects of the Old Testament* published in 1897. Here the Bible is treated as a piece of literature and not from the historical or theological perspective. In Elgar’s oratorio, Judas is a radical follower of the Zealots who goes too far with his agenda – an interpretation which was inspired by Archbishop Richard Whateley’s *Lectures on the Characters of Our Lord’s Apostles* published in 1893. ‘Judas was the clever, man of the world type’, Elgar wrote in a letter to Thomas Dunhill. ‘I have made him [...] a man with brains.’<sup>47</sup> Elgar’s opinion was: ‘To my mind Judas’ crime or sin was despair; not only the betrayal.’<sup>48</sup> Sullivan’s oratorio already mentions the ‘sickness to death’ which, according to the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, is desperation. As early as 1849 the Dane had dealt with this existential problem in his book *The Sickness Unto Death* from a Christian perspective.

In Sullivan’s work Judas and the other Apostles do not play a distinctive role. They appear briefly in the Lazarus scene and in the finale. In addition they sing the quintet ‘Doubtless thou art our Father’ in the first part (Isaiah chapter 63, verse 16). This is due to the different dramaturgical concepts. When compiling the texts from the Bible, both composers looked for support. Sullivan’s friend George Grove gave advice for *The Light of the World* which added a more secular approach to the topic. Grove, the first principal of the Royal College of Music from 1883 until 1894, was well-versed in the Bible as he had compiled a complete index of each occurrence of every proper name in the Bible in 1854 and contributed to William Smith’s *Bible Dictionary* in 1863. Apart from that he was a co-founder of the ‘Palestine Exploration Fund’ and, while Sullivan composed his oratorio, Grove organised concerts at the Crystal Palace in London. From 1873 he worked on his *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* for which Sullivan contributed some entries in the first edition.

Elgar compiled his texts from the New Testament and the Apocrypha. He was assisted by Canon Charles Gorton who ensured that, if possible, shorter dialogues were also based on biblical texts.<sup>49</sup> Elgar’s work is about one third shorter than Sullivan’s but it also has a comparable episodic structure. Sullivan’s oratorio depicts various stations from the life of Jesus (Bethlehem, Nazareth, Lazarus, Jerusalem, the sepulchre) with which the older composer influenced the concept of Elgar’s daring project of musical works about Christianity, to which one must certainly add *The Light of Life*. Elgar focuses on Jesus healing the blind, which is mentioned in Sullivan’s oratorio several times (John, chapter 9 to 10) this being one of Jesus’ most spectacular miracles apart from the raising of Lazarus. In choosing his topic Sullivan built on the ‘religious drama’ *Lazarus oder die Feier der Auferstehung* by Franz Schubert<sup>50</sup> of which only fragments survived. They were

47 Thomas Dunhill, *Sir Edward Elgar*, London 1938, p. 200. Dunhill also published the book *Sullivan’s Comic Operas*, London 1928.

48 Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, Oxford 1987, 192.

49 See Charles Edward McGuire, *Elgar’s Oratorios*, Aldershot 2002, 200 ff.

50 Concerning Sullivan and Schubert see Meinhard Saremba: “Prärafaelitische Klangwelten und Chiaroscuro”, in Gier / Saremba / Taylor (eds.), *Sullivan-Perspektiven II* (2014), 188 f., and the essays by Till Gerrit Waidelich in *Sullivan-Journal* No. 11 (June 2014) and No. 13 (June 2015). Mendelssohn’s oratorio *Christus* remained a fragment, much more so than Schubert’s *Lazarus* so that it cannot be taken into consideration here. The ‘recitatives and choruses from the unfinished oratorio *Christus*’ were published in 1876 by Mendelssohn’s friend Julius Rietz who was Sullivan’s teacher for composition in Leipzig.

premiered posthumously by the ‘Wiener Singverein’ in 1863. These fragments competed with the 1873 oratorio *The Raising of Lazarus*, one of the major works of Sullivan’s friend John Francis Barnett.<sup>51</sup>

### Design and structure

Just as Sullivan treated Jesus as a human being, so Elgar shaped Jesus and the Apostles as ordinary fellow-citizens. Basically *The Light of the World* and *The Light of Life / The Apostles* respectively look at the primal ground of Christianity:

- the beginnings with the birth of Jesus (Sullivan)  
or the vocation of the Apostles (Elgar),
- the teachings with Jesus’ parables (Sullivan)  
or the Sermon on the Mount (Elgar),
- the miracles (Lazarus in Sullivan’s work  
and the healing of the blind in Elgar’s),
- the betrayal,
- the suffering and the death of Jesus,
- the proceedings at the sepulchre,
- elevation and ascension.

Both *The Light of the World* and *The Apostles* have two parts. In both works Jesus’ last days and the consequences are depicted in the second part. Elgar was mainly interested in the Apostles’ relationship with Jesus while Sullivan took care of Jesus’ relation to man. He came into the world like everybody else, is in need of protection (flight to Egypt) – in scenes which do not have an equivalent in Elgar’s works – but soon afterwards he emerges as a matured personality with miracles and sermons. Sullivan shows the beginnings by including the birth of Jesus and his initiation in the synagogue, whereas Elgar starts with the calling of the Apostles. It is reasonable to assume that the synagogue scene in Sullivan’s oratorio was also inspired by one of Hunt’s paintings: “The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple” (1854-55).

Sullivan shows Jesus as a preceptor by telling parables. Elgar picks this idea up by including parts of the Sermon on the Mount. The thaumaturgical Jesus – his working of miracles – is represented by the raising of Lazarus, which is not actually depicted, musically, in performance. Maybe Sullivan wanted to avoid the dilemma of a resurrection of the body to keep open room for various interpretive approaches, for example that it could have been a mental death and spiritual resurrection. This would match with Jesus’ words ‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory’ (John chapter 11, verse 4) because ‘if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him’ (John chapter 11, verse 10).

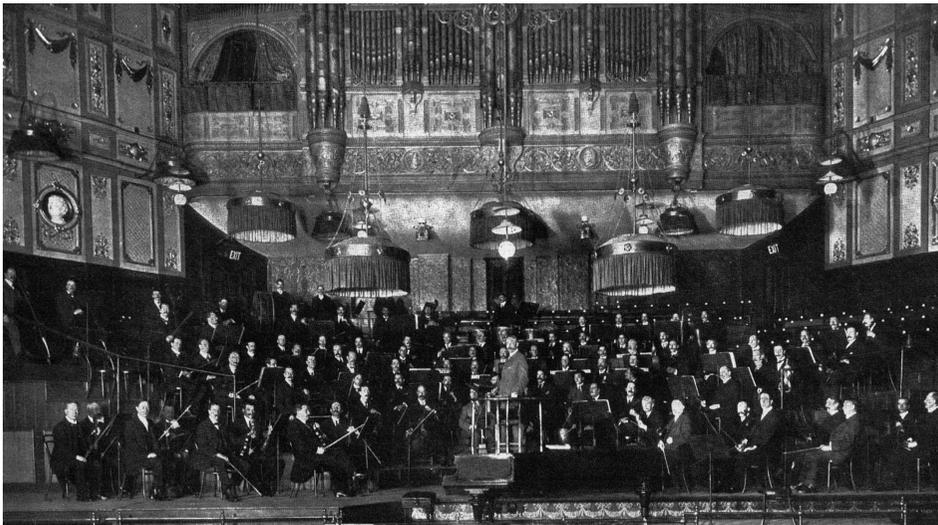
Both composers describe the betrayal and the sufferings of Jesus as well as his elevation and ascension. For a genuine dramatic artist the structure of *The Light of the World* has an operatic style. Elgar aimed at similar effects, which is shown in remarks such as ‘the Apostles must stand out as the living characters’ (italics by Elgar).<sup>52</sup> Sullivan’s *The Light of the World* showed the way towards

51 Concerning Sullivan’s friendship with John Francis Barnett see Meinhard Saremba, “Zwischen Tradition und ‚Zukunftsmusik‘ (Teil 2) – Sullivans Studienjahre und das Kulturleben in Leipzig”, in *Sullivan-Journal* No.10, 24-26.

52 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 380.



Arthur Sullivan at an orchestral rehearsal in Dublin in April 1894. (Sir Arthur Sullivan Society)



Edward Elgar and the London Symphony Orchestra at Queen's Hall in 1912. (Arthur Reynolds' Archive)

a more theatrical approach to topics from the New Testament. A genre of 'sacred' operas or operas with an overtly religious bias was subsequently developed by Rutland Boughton with *Bethlehem* (1924) and Vaughan Williams with *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1951) based on John Bunyan's allegory.

### *Concealed harmony – melody and sound*

Some passages in Elgar's work seem to be a reference towards Sullivan's oratorio. Both *The Light of the World* and *The Apostles* (as well as *The Light of Life*) begin with a solemn orchestral introduction – Sullivan indicates 'Andante maestoso', Elgar 'Lento' with the addition 'solemne' – and an extensive choral prologue, 'There shall come forth a rod' (Sullivan) or 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me' (Elgar). Although Sullivan's orchestral prelude to *The Light of the World* is shorter, its solemn character may well have influenced Elgar's meditative introduction (in *The Light of Life* Elgar calls the 'Moderato' introduction explicitly a 'Meditation'). To set the opening scenes, Elgar uses the keys of B $\flat$  (*The Light of Life*) and A $\flat$  (*The Apostles*) while Sullivan uses E $\flat$ . Sometimes both composers use the same wording. In the opening chorus Sullivan and Elgar emphasize, with slight shifts of stress, key terms such as 'spirit' or 'Lord' with long *p* or even *ppp* note values (see fig. 2).

**Andante maestoso**

*dim.* ***p***

Tenor

and the spi - rit of the Lord, shall rest up - on him

Bass

*dim.* ***p***

and the spi - rit of the Lord, shall rest up - on him

Fig. 2a, Sullivan, *The Light of the World*, opening chorus

***ppp***

The Spi - rit of the Lord is up - on me, —

***ppp***

The Spi - rit of the Lord is up - on me, —

***ppp***

The Spi - rit of the Lord is up - on me, —

***ppp***

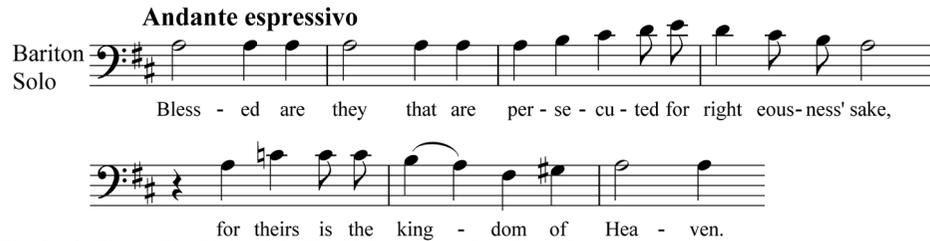
The Spi - rit of the Lord is up - on me, —

Fig. 2b, Elgar, *The Apostles*, opening chorus

Both musicians depict Jesus as a teacher who tells parables (especially Sullivan) or use parts of the Sermon of the Mount. We find the sentence ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew chapter 5, verse 10) in both oratorios where it is accentuated with an upswing impetus (see fig. 3).

**Andante espressivo**

Bariton Solo

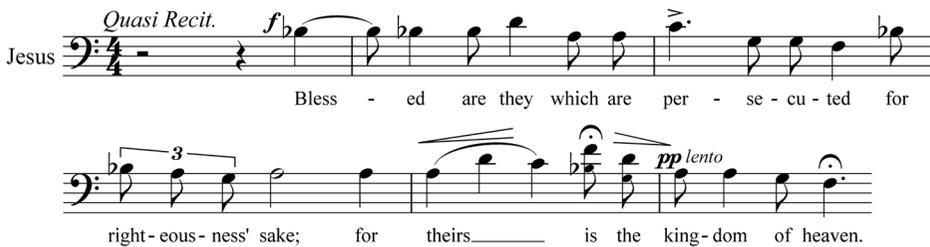


Bless - ed are they that are per - se - cu - ted for right eous-ness' sake,  
for theirs is the king - dom of Hea - ven.

Fig. 3a, Sullivan, *The Light of the World*, Jesus preaches (No. 16)

Jesus

*Quasi Recit.* *f*



Bless - ed are they which are per - se - cu - ted for  
right-eous-ness' sake; for theirs\_\_\_\_\_ is the king-dom of heaven.

*pp* *lento*

Fig. 3b, Elgar, *The Apostles*, Jesus preaches ('By the Wayside')

Both Sullivan and Elgar let the chorus sing about Jesus' thaumaturgic feats with an urging gesture (see fig. 4).

On Easter morning, when the women are asked why they are seeking the risen Lord among the dead, they hear an angel with an emphatic alto solo ('con energia' is the instruction at the *forte* 'Awake!' at the beginning of the scene), while Elgar distributes the text, with an echo-like effect, to the female members of the chorus (see fig. 5).

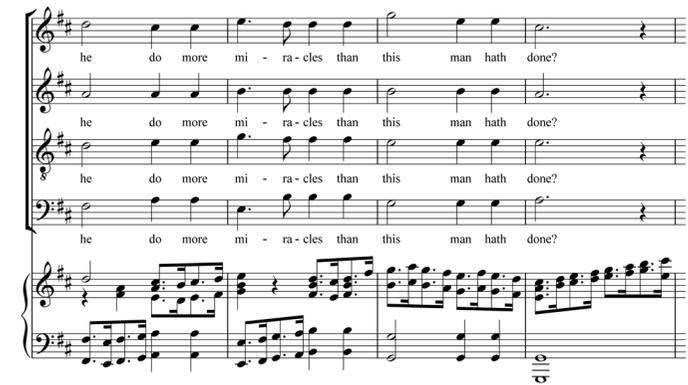
Sullivan's oratorio ends with the fugal chorus 'Him hath God exalted' and at least in *The Light of Life* Elgar, too, cannot do without a fugue after the man born blind has received his eyesight. 'I thought a fugue would be expected of me', Elgar mentioned in an interview. 'The British public would hardly tolerate oratorio without a fugue. So I tried to give them one. Not a "barn-door" fugue, but one with an independent accompaniment. There's a bit of a canon, too, and in short, I hope there's enough counterpoint to give the real British religious respectability!'<sup>53</sup>

53 Howard E. Smither: *A History of the Oratorio*, volume 4, The University of North Carolina Press 2000, 291.

**Allegro moderato**



When Christ com - eth will  
When Christ com - eth will  
When Christ com - eth will  
When Christ com - eth will



he do more mi - ra - cles than this man hath done?  
he do more mi - ra - cles than this man hath done?  
he do more mi - ra - cles than this man hath done?  
he do more mi - ra - cles than this man hath done?

Fig. 4a, Sullivan, *The Light of the World*, chorus (No. 31)



For this Man do-eth ma-ny mi - ra cles.  
For this Man do-eth ma-ny mi - ra cles.  
For this Man do-eth ma-ny mi - ra cles.

*p* *cresc. molto*

Fig. 4b, Elgar, *The Apostles*, chorus of Chief Priests and Pharisees ('The Betrayal')

Alt-solo  
(Ein Engel)

*a tempo*

Why seek ye the liv - ing a - mong the dead?

*P*

He is not here, he is ri - sen as he said.

*f*

*cresc.*

Fig. 5a, Sullivan, *The Light of the World*, angel after the resurrection

### Dramaturgical differences

In spite of many similarities some key moments reveal striking differences because of dramaturgical reasons. Both composers thematise the prediction of Jesus' suffering and death. For this Elgar chooses indirect speech with the help of a tenor narrator in 'The Betrayal' at the beginning of the second part. Sullivan has the protagonist announce his end himself at the beginning of 'The Way to Jerusalem' close to the finale of the first part, where Jesus indicates that 'everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled' (Luke chapter 18, verse 31).

Elgar shows Judas' betrayal in a short scene because the Apostles as the protagonists of his work could witness it, whereas in Sullivan's oratorio the chorus members describe what had happened. Sullivan also employs the chorus for depicting Jesus' suffering and death, while in the 'Golgotha' scene Elgar has the orchestra 'speak' in a passage with muted strings for which the score indicates 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' (My God, my God, why did you abandon me?). In the final scene Sullivan uses a fugue as a symbol for perfection and the entity of God, while Elgar writes an almost mystical hymn for the enlightened Apostles.

Of course, with a gap of thirty years between these works the musical language differs enormously. In setting the text Elgar seems to be less interested in a natural way of speaking, in contrast to Sullivan whose setting appears to be quite straightforward. Elgar's orchestra is much more opulent than Sullivan's. In the temple scene in the first part ('The dawn') he even uses unusual instruments such as the shofar – a ritual instrument of ancient origin, made of a horn, traditionally that of a ram, used for Jewish religious purposes. Sullivan uses a more transparent, perspicuous orchestral language which, in spite of a large instrumental apparatus – including organ, ophicleide, harp, bass clarinet and double bassoon – never seems to be overloaded.<sup>54</sup>

54 See recommended essays in footnote 22 and Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999).

*Allegretto. ♩ = 104.*

*mf semplice*

TUTTI.

*mf semplice* *dim.*

Sopran

Why seek ye the liv - ing a - mong the dead?

Alt

*mf*

S.

TUTTI.

*p* *semplice*

He is not here,

*cresc.*

A.

He is not here, but is

*p* *cresc.*

S.

*p cresc.* *mf*

but is ris - en, but is ris - en,

A.

*mf* *p*

ris - en, but is ris - en. Be - hold.

Fig. 5b, Elgar, *The Apostles*, angels after the resurrection

### *Sins and forgiveness*

Aspects such as despair and guilt are essential for both composers. Due to the difference in emphasis, Judas – who is hardly important for Sullivan – features prominently in Elgar’s oratorio. However, as a paragon for sin and forgiveness, Mary Magdalene is a central figure for Sullivan and Elgar alike. She embodies human weaknesses and the endeavour for faith in a perfect way. Her ‘Woe is me’ has a descending musical gesture in both oratorios but is much more haunting in Sullivan’s where she repeats the words. In her great solos ‘Where have they laid him?’ (in ‘At the Sepulchre’ in the second part of *The Light of the World*) and ‘O Lord Almighty’ (in ‘In the Tower of Magdala’ in the first part of *The Apostles*) the agonies of her soul are emphatically delineated. In Sullivan’s work she mourns the loss of her ‘lover and friend’ with climactic intensity. Elgar’s Mary Magdalene is, like Sullivan’s, mainly accompanied by woodwind and strings. She asks the Lord for the forgiveness of her sins while the music expressively illustrates her inner torment.

### *Some remarks on the interpretation*

Both oratorios by Sullivan and Elgar were appreciated in their time. This success may be due not least to the fact that the individually shaped characters infused the events with an emotional passion which resembled a stage plot. Listening to recordings of soloists who worked together with Sullivan and Elgar and artists such as Malcolm Sargent or John Barbirolli, who grew up with the music practice at the turn of the century, makes clear what people must have been fascinated by in performances of these works. Good examples are Barbirolli’s 1927 recording of ‘The night is calm’ from Sullivan’s dramatic cantata *The Golden Legend* (with Florence Austral and the chorus and orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden) and Sargent’s 1945 recording of Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* with the bass Dennis Noble who sang Lucifer three years earlier in a performance of *The Golden Legend* in the Royal Albert Hall in London. They reveal that the ideal was not a restrained, solemn, stiff and reverent oratorio-style but a dramatic, gripping attitude. A convincing interpretation of Sullivan’s *The Light of the World* and Elgar’s *The Apostles* is only possible when the soloists bring their characters to life like opera singers and sing the texts, not in a cantata-like intoning way, but full of emphasis and passion. Concerning the orchestra, Verdi’s motto should be the guideline: ‘It is better to sin with vivacity than crawling along.’<sup>55</sup> According to his preface to the vocal score Sullivan wanted to dissociate his work from the august ‘Passionsmusik’ and the churchiness of *Messiah*. His brave realisation of this concept generated Elgar’s awareness for the dramatic potential of Jesus Christ’s life story. Consequently 19<sup>th</sup> century English oratorios can only be realised in an appropriate way when Sullivan’s claim is accomplished that the orchestras play with a ‘degree of light and shade’ (which they have attained in Germany), with a ‘perfection’ of sound (as the Continental ones) and the great ‘power and tone’ (of the English orchestras).<sup>56</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The exploration and analysis of the cantatas and oratorios written by the leading British composers between the 1860s and 1930s is just in the early stages. It is an interesting feature how both Sullivan and Elgar were concerned about the possibilities and the future developments. Sullivan – who wrote his most progressive, experimental and expressive music with his depiction of the daemonic

55 Werner Otto (ed.), *Giuseppe Verdi – Briefe* (Berlin: Henschel, 1983), 41.

56 Lawrence, *Arthur Sullivan*, 43.

in the Prologue of *The Golden Legend* – mentioned in a letter:

There are times to me when the music would be more beautiful and more complete without notes. I suppose it is that the diatonic and chromatic scales are so limited. How often I have longed to be free of fixed intervals. More especially in the prologue to the *Golden Legend*, I felt myself hampered by having to express all I wanted to say by voice and instruments of limited means, and definite unchangeable quality.<sup>57</sup>

In a presidential speech to the Union of Graduates in Music in May 1914, Edward Elgar expressed his ideas about new developments. He recalled his lecture on ‘The Future for English Music’ at Birmingham in 1904 when he mentioned at the beginning he ‘dealt with the question of modern harmonies, suggesting what the music of the future might be’:

I suggested that it would tend in the direction adopted by composers you have had very much before you in the last few months – that the main development would be chromatic harmony and strange blending of keys, especially in the matter of orchestration – that it was vulgar to twist our scale, which was good enough for Beethoven and Brahms and Bach, and make it do the monkey tricks I foretold would be forthcoming. I had no belief that the modern ear would become, or desire to become, more refined – everything is designed to brutalise it. The more subtle refinement is not yet with us and can only come by the use of a scale more minutely divided than our own; this would educate the ear to something finer than we have yet heard.<sup>58</sup>

To what extent the works of these two composers are an expression of their time, the ‘music of the future’ or – as Elgar put it – show whether they are ‘conservators of what is the necessary basis of music’<sup>59</sup> can be a task for future research. Also interesting could be, for example, comparisons between works such as Sullivan’s two Te Deums and Elgar’s church music or ‘For The Fallen’ as well as the conditions and requirements of performances (seating of the orchestra, size of the chorus, platform planning, performing style etc.). It is much to be hoped that the new editions of reliable scores, professional recordings and new publications (see footnotes) may inspire future research.

[The author would like to thank Florian Csizmadia, David Eden, Robin Gordon-Powell, Steven Halls and Benedict Taylor for their valuable suggestions and constructive comments. The music examples were provided by Robin Gordon-Powell.]

*Meinhard Saremba has written and lectured widely on British composers and music of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, e. g. ‘Elgar, Britten & Co. – Eine Geschichte der britischen Musik in zwölf Portraits’ (Zurich/St. Gallen 1994), he is also the co-editor of ‘The Cambridge Companion to Gilbert and Sullivan’ (Cambridge 2009) and ‘Sullivan-Perspektiven’ (three volumes, Essen 2012, 2014 and 2017), and co-author and translator of books on Sullivan (Munich 2011), Elgar (Munich 2013), Britten (Munich 2015) and Vaughan Williams (2018) in the German musicological series ‘Musik-Konzepte’.*

57 H. Saxe Wyndham, *Arthur Seymour Sullivan* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926), 208.

58 Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 663.

59 Ibid., 664.

BEAU BRUMMEL by BERTRAM P. MATTHEWS	
FULL PLAYSCRIPT	
Foreword	Page 1
Cast as order of appearance	Page 11
ACT 1	Page 11
ACT 2	Page 11
ACT 3	Scene 1 Page 11
	Scene 2 Page 11
ACT 4	Page 11
FOREWORD by Robert Kay	
The play Beau Brummel from the original edition. It was written by Bertram P. Matthews in 1928 in a consultation with the actor-manager Gerald Lawrence.	

## BOOK REVIEWS

Ledbury:  
Acuta Music, 2019  
87 pp

**Bertram P. Matthews: *Beau Brummel* (full playscript)**  
<http://www.acutamusic.co.uk/beau-brummel-mdash-elgarssquos-lost-masterpiece.html>

In the *Elgar Society Journal* issues of December 2011 and April 2016 the indefatigable Robert Kay wrote about Bertram Matthews' play, *Beau Brummel*, which was produced in Birmingham in 1928 by Gerald Lawrence, with incidental music by Elgar.

The majority of the music has been missing since the early 1930s, only the Minuet surviving, as it was, somewhat fortuitously, removed from the score and went into private hands.

The script of the play, too, seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth, for it was never published. Robert has managed to track down the script, 'which survives in a single typewritten copy submitted to the Office of the Lord Chamberlain for censorship approval prior to production. This official copy currently resides in the British Library under the reference LCP 1928/34.' He has transcribed and published it in full, 'no alterations having been made other than minor improvements to punctuation and stage directions'.

It is good to have the opportunity to read Matthews' play – I readily admit that until now I had: a) enjoyed the Minuet; b) regretted that the rest of the music was lost; and c) never given the text of the play a moment's thought!

As far as the incidental music is concerned, however, the availability of the script merely tantalises. There is no indication of where music may have been used, other than at Brummel's line 'The violins! They wait for me . . . they want me to lead the Minuet. [*stands erect. Strings in orchestra are softly played.*]' which appears at the very end of the play. The full score of the Minuet has a speech cue marked: 'Do not let me spoil your pleasure'. This line, however, is uttered by the Regent towards the end of Act 2, just halfway through the play.

No matter: such things are sent to tease us, and we can only be grateful that Robert's efforts have got us one stage – and a significant stage – further in the ongoing saga of *Beau Brummel*.

We have another reason to be grateful to Robert, and that is for undertaking this exercise as a labour of love, and making the script available, free of charge, as a downloadable and printable pdf file (it is only available in this format). It may be located at the website address given above: those who fear for their sanity in trying to type it in with unerring accuracy will find it easier to google 'acuta beau' which should bring up the desired link at the head of the search results.

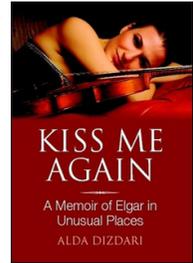
Martin Bird

## Alda Dizdari: *Kiss me again – A Memoir of Elgar in unusual places*

This is an unusual treat, being an account of the Albanian violinist's performances of Elgar's Violin Concerto in Oxford, Tirana (Albania), Bacau (Moldavia), Oradea, Timisoara and Sibiu (Romania). As Elgar was more or less unknown in all these East European places, the progress of the Violin Concerto into the ears and hearts of the orchestras and audiences is fascinating initially just for the practical details, joys and drawbacks of a virtuoso's life of travel, rehearsals and performances but then even more so as Alda Dizdari talks us through her relationship with the players and listeners – one almost feels envious of their experiencing this marvellous work for the first time. However, the slim book (only 114 pages) fits in even more. Dizdari gives a sketch of her life: her youthful education in Albania and then Romania, where the language and people were entirely foreign to her (although she never tells us why she put herself through this alienating experience), her composer father and more grounded mother all set in the context of a Russian satellite dictatorship. It is an experience – historical, familial, social and political – that is completely outside the ken, I expect, of most of us in the Elgar Society but it is clear that her response to Elgar's music, and the Concerto in particular, is as passionately held by her as it is by every one of us. This relationship with the work, lyrically described, evolves and is tempered by the people and players she meets and the places she visits. These last are important and constitute the final strand of the book, a travelogue that reminds the readers of, or introduces them to, places far from the usual tourist haunts. She has a good eye for details of the townscapes, and the feelings the places and their peoples evoke are described and sometimes criticised with warmth and affection without being mawkish. The element I most enjoyed, however, was her implicit comparison made between Elgar's creative responses to the English countryside and her synthesising through his music her pride in and love for Albania and her relationship with the European landscapes through which she travels.

Despite its come-hither title, some occasional linguistic and typographical slips and the obligatory cover photograph of this beautiful woman and her violin, I came to appreciate that the description on the back cover "A compelling love letter to Elgar, to music and to life" actually described the book's contents. My only regret was that, on the very day I read it, I had had to miss her performance of the concerto in London and thereby lost the chance to meet her, but the book remains a good proxy means of knowing this proud and passionate Elgarian.

Steven Halls



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## CD REVIEWS



Hyperion  
CDA 68254

### Elgar: *Caractacus*, op. 35

Roland Wood (Caractacus), Elizabeth Llewellyn (Eigen), Elgan Llŷr Thomas (Orbin), Christopher Purves (Arch-Druid), Alastair Miles (Claudius)  
Huddersfield Choral Society  
Orchestra of Opera North  
Martyn Brabbins

Let me be honest from the start – I love *Caractacus*. Anyone who still wonders at the mastery and expertise shown in the *Enigma Variations* need look no further than this, the previous opus number, and I would add *King Olaf* and many pages in the previous choral works, to see that Elgar's genius was flaring well before the *Variations*. Written for the Leeds Festival of 1898, the subject matter, of a British chieftain's last stand on the Malvern Hills against the Roman invaders, was bound to appeal to Elgar. The fact that we now know it wasn't on the Malvern Hills at all is neither here nor there. Elgar moved to his isolated cottage at Birchwood while composing the work, and he could draw inspiration from the sight of the British Camp there. The libretto was concocted by a Malvern neighbour, Henry Arbuthnot Acworth, and in it Caractacus seeks assurance from the Arch-Druid about his forthcoming battle against the Romans. The Arch-Druid, a bit of a fathead, urges the chieftain into battle, despite the omens and bard Orbin warning him against it. Orbin is in love with Eigen, Caractacus's daughter, and when he is banished they take their leave in a rapturous love duet, the only one in Elgar's output. Caractacus and his forces are duly routed, and are carted off to Rome to be exhibited and slain. But the Roman emperor Claudius, moved by Caractacus's plea for clemency, pardons them, despite the baying of the mob, and allows them to reside in Rome. Then we have the final patriotic chorus – more of that anon.

So what of the present recording? There have been two complete recordings before this – Charles Groves and his Liverpool forces (HMV) in the 1970s, and Richard Hickox with the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus (Chandos) in the 1990s. The Groves version has not, I believe, been put on to CD, so the real point of comparison is with the Chandos version. Hyperion is an excellent recording company, the estimable Andrew Keener is Recording Producer, and conductor Martyn Brabbins is an excellent Elgarian. So what could possibly go wrong? Well, not a lot, really, but I do have some criticisms which lead me still to have a preference for the Chandos version. In the opening chorus I felt that the choir sopranos sounded more distant than the other voices, and also that the orchestral top strings sounded a little thin, so that some of the magical orchestral commentary was lost. When I put on the Chandos CD I noticed a much more vivid focus in both choir and orchestra, making the music sound both more exciting and purposeful. While everyone

acknowledges Elgar's wizardry as an orchestrator, I sometimes think we are in danger of forgetting that his choral writing is also so innovative and colourful, and there are plenty of examples of it in this work. Incidentally, doesn't that curiously downward loping theme that opens the work have a foretaste of the main theme of *Falstaff*?

Part Two, in the sacred grove with druids and bards, has an atmosphere quite unlike anything else in Elgar's works. Christopher Purves sings the Arch-Druid, a fine, steady and commanding voice, and the chorus seem more alive now and enjoying their mysterious harmonies. Elgar uses a small gong to send a muted wash of colour over proceedings to add to the mysticism of the oaths being taken. It is a pity, then, that it is almost totally inaudible, apart from a tiny crescendo just before Fig. 6. Orbin, the bard, is sung by the young tenor Elgan Llŷr Thomas. He has a pleasant voice and uses it sensibly and musically, despite the often cruel tessitura of the vocal writing, but I miss the ardour and passion of Arthur Davies on the Chandos set. This whole scene has quite a dramatic and operatic feel to it. In fact discussions about turning *Caractacus* into an opera were discussed, but Jaeger wisely scotched the idea. Caractacus's song 'Leap to the Light' gallops along at a headlong pace, although Roland Wood, the excellent Caractacus, manages to keep up and make the words intelligible.

There is a good deal of lyrical pastoral writing in the work, appropriate for the setting in Elgar's beloved Malvern countryside. This fresh, open air atmosphere was largely to disappear from his works as increasing fame and pressure took their toll. Part Three is headed 'The Forest near the Severn' and begins with the well-known 'Woodland Interlude', and Orbin, who is about to set off to battle, meets Eigen in this wooded glade. Their passionate duet, where they swear their love and hope to meet in a better land, is one of the most moving passages in the work. On Chandos, Judith Howarth has a fresh, clear and suitably youthful voice, but I'm afraid on this new recording I find Elizabeth Llewellyn a disappointment. Her heavier, darker tones are not always free of a distracting vibrato, and her top notes can become squally.

Scene Four, 'The Malvern Hills' sees the female chorus, now sounding full and in excellent voice, worrying about the rumours of battle. Their fears are justified as Caractacus and his defeated forces enter. The men's chorus, again sounding excellent, bound with exhilarating effect through the stormy chorus telling of the battle. This leads to one of the high points in all Elgar's vocal music, Caractacus's 'Lament' for his fallen soldiers. In a rather wayward 7/4 rhythm this reaches heights of noble passion and deep feeling, and Roland Wood rises to the challenge.

Part Five, by the River Severn, sees a bard and female chorus watch the captive Britons embarking for Rome, and, in a superb piece of orchestral writing, the key changes from a dark D minor, through gradually mounting excitement, to a bright C major as Part Six continues without a break into the Triumphal Procession as the captives are led into Rome. This brazen march, ablaze with brass and percussion, finds the excellent Opera North Orchestra on top form. The mob want Caractacus and the British captives slain, but the

Roman emperor Claudius is moved by his pleading for clemency for Eigen, Orbin and the others. It is indeed a moving plea, the music of the 'Woodland Interlude' wafting through the air as he remembers his beloved woodlands at home in Worcestershire. Claudius is sung with great authority and majestic tones by Alastair Miles, who takes the same part in the Chandos recording. There is another moving and quietly rapt ensemble as Caractacus, Eigen, Orbin and Claudius reflect that they have lost their freedom, but at least will live their lives out in Rome. This sinks to a peaceful C major close, and I have seen it argued that the work should have finished there. But that would have deprived us of a wonderful final chorus, over which much ink has been spilled and words of worry and angst uttered. The librettist wrote the words at a time when Britain was at the height of its Imperial power with its Empire reaching across the globe. It is doubtful if anyone alive then would have questioned the sentiments that it was a benign rule presiding over grateful peoples. But although such sentiments sit ill with our present thinking, is anyone really worried these days by them? As a product of their time, are they any worse than the paean to Holy German Art at the end of *Die Meistersinger*, or the sycophantic drivel in Purcell's Royal Odes? In any case, it is the music which matters – if we did away with daft words and improbable plots we would lose most of our operas. But fortunately Elgar could rise to the challenge, as did Wagner and Purcell, and when that great final tune is rolled out – and although hinted at at various points he has kept us waiting a long time for it – it brings the work to one of the composer's most jubilant endings (and when one thinks of the First Symphony, or the Te Deum and Benedictus, that's quite a claim!).

The two CDs come priced as one and there are full texts and readable informative notes by Andrew Neill, but I could have done without that awful front cover picture of the booklet. Could not something more attractive have been found? So, if you already have the Chandos recording, stick to it. If you haven't then, despite my occasional criticisms, Martyn Brabbins delivers a well-conducted account of the score. What I would urge is that all Elgarians ought to have at least one copy of this moving and exciting work in their collection.

Barry Collett

### Sullivan: *The Light of the World*

Natalya Romaniw (soprano); Eleanor Dennis (soprano); Kitty Whately (mezzo-soprano); Robert Murray (tenor); Ben McAteer (baritone); Neal Davies (bass)

Kinder Children's Choir, BBC Symphony Chorus

BBC Concert Orchestra

John Andrews



Dutton Epoch

2CDLX 7356

Here is a most unexpected but very welcome issue from Dutton. You don't need me to tell you that the 'serious' side of Sir Arthur is completely overshadowed today by the Savoy operas written by what an early version of spell-checker insisted was that inimitable duo of Giblets and Sausages.

*The Light of the World* was written for the Birmingham Musical Festival of 1873, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity of hearing it. Reviewing the first performance, conducted by Sullivan himself, *The Times* called it 'a work destined to live, we feel convinced'; and the General Committee of the Festival believed it was 'destined to take a permanent place amongst the great works of its class'.

Yet by the turn of the century it had all but disappeared from view: *The Times* does not mention a single performance after the 1890s. One can but ask the question: Why?

Well, one reason must be the cost of putting it on. The Birmingham Festival traditionally engaged a team of eight soloists for the week: four star names, and four lesser lights. That's what Mendelssohn wrote for in *Elijah*; though the B team is invariably dispensed with in *Elijah* today and its work given to the chorus. Elgar had the advantage in 1900 of being the B composer in his first Birmingham Festival: *Gerontius* – a half-programme requiring but three soloists. He had moved up the rankings by 1903 – and produced *The Apostles*, or rather two-thirds of it, requiring forces on the scale of Sullivan's. Now performances of *The Apostles* are hardly a weekly occurrence: what promoter dare risk putting on a forgotten oratorio by the composer of *The Mikado*?

To some extent Birmingham's 'four star names' – the soprano Thérèse Tietjens, the mezzo Zelia Trebelli, the tenor Sims Reeves and the bass Charles Santley – had placed Sullivan between a rock and a hard place. The ladies especially were opera stars with international reputations, and Sullivan presumably tailored their arias, for want of a better word, to suit their capabilities and reputations – not the easiest thing when setting an essentially contemplative libretto (by George Grove, of *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and Royal College of Music fame).

His potential for discomfort was increased by Birmingham's expectations being firmly of the English oratorio tradition – a tradition upheld by those very English composers Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn! And don't forget that in 1873 *Elijah* was less than thirty years old.

Yet, to my ears at least, Sullivan hurdled his obstacles with some panache and produced an outstanding example of the English, or at least the Victorian,

oratorio – and one written by an Englishman to boot. In structure it is more akin to the Bach of the Passions, centred around some quite beautiful writing for the character of Jesus. The orchestration is a delight throughout, some of the solos most impressive – and I would single out ‘In Rama There was a Voice Heard’ as simply stunning: the solo soprano weaving her lament above the chorus. Birmingham expected a mixture a simple choruses and good old fugues, which Sullivan provided in abundance, though it must be admitted that the fugues do become somewhat tedious.

I heard the oratorio in two sessions. I was totally gripped by the first part, but a week later felt Sullivan was going through the motions a bit in the second part – introduced by a six-minute overture that, though fine enough, just seemed to have been stuck at the beginning to give the audience a chance to settle. Thinking it was more likely my mood, I then heard the first part again; but, no, it wasn’t me, Guv.

Which brings me back to the question of why the work has not stood the test of time. I was very surprised to find that, in amongst the praise, the critic of the *Birmingham Post* sounded a note of caution.

No-one could fail to be otherwise than favourably impressed by the grace, dignity, and character which pervade every movement, the excellence of the choral writing, and the felicity of a great deal of the instrumentation, but we must confess that the oratorio as a whole scarcely fulfils our expectations ... Mendelssohn, Gounod, Spohr, and even Haydn, meet us in spirit and idiom, if not actually in subject matter, at every turn ... Mr. Sullivan, we are afraid, has scarcely allowed himself time to do justice to his undeniably great powers, the marks of this haste being more particularly apparent in the accompaniments, many of which are of a very conventional pattern. On the other hand, the independent instrumental movements and especially the Bethany overture, are distinguished, no less for melodic beauty than for fancy and ingenuity; and from the samples of his workmanship we can quite understand how admirable a work the composer might have produced if all the influences – subject, time, and mood had been propitious.

It is fascinating to me to see a contemporary critic expressing what, a hundred years later, was to be the general opinion of the locally-produced Victorian oratorio – the poor man’s Mendelssohn. But ignore him! *The Light of the World* deserves to be heard, and this is going to be your only opportunity of getting acquainted with it.

I have scarcely left myself space to deal with the performance and recording: though, as I have said, it’s a question of Hobson’s choice. Dutton are to be congratulated on producing an excellent recording in almost every respect in that lovely venue, the Watford Town Hall. I would query only the balance of the excellent Kinder Children’s Choir, seemingly yards closer than the rest of the forces.

The one negative in the performance – and for me it is a major one – is the singing of the BBC Symphony Chorus, normally such a fine body of singers. Sadly not on this occasion. The sopranos – and there are nearly thirty

of them – lack blend; it being too easy to pick out individual voices. The choir as a whole seems to have been asked to sing with their voices produced too far back in the throat, resulting in a generally dull tone and dull intonation. Listen to the join between the orchestral end of track 17 on the second CD and the start of the unaccompanied chorus of track 18: on the face of it the same chord, but in practice two quite different views of intonation. I kept wanting to shout ‘for God’s sake, smile!’ at the singers. It also makes phrasing so much more difficult. The tenors especially suffer from placing their voices so far back – there is no ring to their tone, and corporately they have a struggle reaching the higher notes.

The BBC Concert Orchestra plays like angels, and in John Andrew they have a conductor with just the right feel for the pacing and flow of the music. All the soloists are excellent, but I would single out the baritone Ben McAteer, who sings the part of Jesus, as outstanding, both in beauty of voice and in understanding of what to do with it. A singer with brains, as Elgar would have said.

In summary, a fine issue of a fine work. Buy it!

Martin Bird

**Elgar: *The Music Makers / The Spirit of England***

Sarah Connolly (mezzo soprano) Andrew Staples (tenor)  
BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra  
Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos has done Elgar proud over the years, and this latest CD, sponsored in part by the Elgar Society, couples Elgar’s last two major choral works. Andrew Davis is one of our finest Elgarians, and shapes both scores with total understanding of the complex rhythmic ebb and flow that they require. The recording captures well the spacious acoustic of Watford Colosseum, the sound is rich and opulent but detail is always clearly delineated. In *The Music Makers* I would have liked a bit more harp in the orchestral sound, but that is a minor quibble. The chorus is excellent as is their diction, and however complex the music becomes, or how powerful the sound, orchestral detail can be clearly heard. This is Sarah Connolly’s second recording of the work, and she brings warmth of tone throughout the whole register of her voice, and complete empathy with the sense and emotion of the words. The final section, where Elgar quotes ‘Novissima hora est’ from *The Dream of Gerontius* is particularly moving.

Informative and very readable booklet notes from Andrew Neill are included (as are the full texts), and especially useful are the exact quotations that Elgar uses in the work, from himself and others, although bars 662-665 are from the second movement of the Violin Concerto, not the first.

*The Music Makers*, once nearly always referred to as ‘the rarely performed M M....’ has become one of the composer’s most often performed choral



Chandos CHSA 5215

works, at about forty minutes fitting comfortably into one half of a concert. And the self-quotations, which once threw some critics into apoplexy, now seem so apt and integral to the composer's perception of the work.

*The Spirit of England* also seems to have emerged from the shadows, and rather than an occasional piece of wartime music can now be seen as one of Elgar's finest choral works. My favourite recording has always been the original one, with a radiant Teresa Cahill and Scottish forces under Alexander Gibson (now on Chandos). But there is stiff competition from Felicity Lott/Hickox (EMI), Susan Gritton/Lloyd-Jones (Dutton), Judith Howarth/Wilson (Somm) and Rachel Nicholls/Elder (Hallé CD). This is the first recording with a tenor soloist, although the Dutton CD does include a tenor for the middle movement *To Women*. In fact the score specifies either tenor or soprano soloist, and we know that Elgar often used a tenor soloist in the middle movement. I suppose the cost of using two soloists has meant that one is nearly always used now, which makes sense, and nearly always the soprano has been the voice of choice. My worry is that I have become so used to the soprano voice in this work that I wondered that a tenor throughout would not be to my taste.

I have to say that Andrew Staples sings magnificently, rising to the great climaxes with absolute assurance, with a fine golden ring to his voice, and the quieter moments are equally well managed.

If I still end up preferring a soprano, that is a personal judgement and in no way reflects on Andrew Staples's splendid assumption of the part. I'm sure Elgarians will want to hear this and make their own decisions.

Again the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus perform wonderfully well. The sound is rich and well-focused, with the organ clearly audible. Andrew Davis's performance is the quickest on record, at a whisker over 25 minutes. The others clock in at about 27, with Gibson's spacious performance just over 30 minutes. But there is no sense of undue haste here, and the work makes its usual moving effect. It is surprising to think that Binyon's words were very new when Elgar set them, without the emotion and memories that they evoke now, but how wonderfully matched they are in this work. It is difficult to read or hear the words without Elgar's deeply felt music alongside them.

Barry Collett

**Wand of Youth, Suite No 1 (Op 1a)**

**Wand of Youth, Suite No2 (Op 1b)**

**Nursery Suite**

**Salut d'amour, (Op 12)**

**Chanson de Nuit, (Op 15 No 1)**

Hallé Orchestra

Sir Mark Elder



Hallé CDHLL 7548

The music on this disc is the beating of the heart of Elgar's creativity: music from a composer in his prime but returning to his recollections of youth with short pieces of great variety. From the *joie de vivre* of 'Fairies and Giants' and the elegance of the 'Sun Dance' to the tender mysteriousness of 'Fairy Pipers' and 'Slumber Scene' the music has virtually everything. Then there is the *Nursery Suite* that ends in luminous nostalgia. This is music in a 'state of innocence' with Elgar in nearly all his moods: each miniature is exquisitely orchestrated. It is a shame the Suites are rarely programmed in concerts but this release on the Hallé label includes both *Wand of Youth* and *Nursery Suites* with the bonuses of *Salut d'amour* and *Chanson de Nuit*. I may be wrong but I think this may be only the second time all three Suites have been issued together. I have a treasured CD from 1991 issued by Koss Classics with Raymond Leppard conducting the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra but that is about it. Incidentally that recording is well worth finding for the performances are enchanting and a worthy companion for this Hallé release.

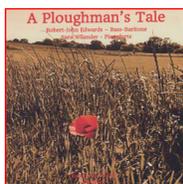
For the two *Wand of Youth Suites* there are recordings by three knights: Adrian Boult, Charles Grove and Charles Mackerras as well as many others. However, the recording that has given me the greatest pleasure over the years is that by Vernon Handley with Liverpool's orchestra from 1988. Handley ensures that the variety of moods within the short pieces are vested with the necessary changes of atmosphere. His 'Fairy Pipers' once broke my heart but now I am not so sure: it is very slow, being thirty seconds longer than Groves and a full minute more than Leppard. Elder takes four minutes which is about average and that quicker pulse ensures that the music does not drag but still retains its mystery. What adds to the strength of these pieces is Elgar's great melodic ability. Each piece is memorable, often with second subjects of equal strength such as that in 'Little Bells' which became such a striking part of *The Starlight Express* music.

This is the second recording of the *Nursery Suite* made by Sir Mark Elder. Readers may recall the disc issued by the Society in 2008 when the *Suite* was performed by the Royal College of Music Junior Department Symphony Orchestra. The children (largely of teen-age and not studying music full-time) played at a level they could only have imagined. Sir Mark, cajoled, bullied and flattered a performance from the young players that has enchanted Barry Collett (who reviewed the recording) and me ever since. That these players can stand comparison with the best is to their credit but, even so, they are not the Hallé whose leader is the wonderful Lyn Fletcher. Her playing of

the cadenza in 'Envoy' captures the mixture of nostalgic innocence which is at its heart. Not since Lawrence Collingwood's recording from 1954 (on LP) has a soloist penetrated the music so successfully. The 'Wagon Passes' moves as it should and does not drag and even sounds slightly menacing. The *Nursery Suite* was first recorded by Elgar in 1931 and then successively over 50 years by Collingwood, Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Charles Groves and Bryden Thomson. I do not have the latter and neither do I recall hearing recordings by William Boughton or Norman del Mar. To round matters off, there is the addition of charming performances of *Chanson de Nuit* and *Salut d'amour*, the latter reminding me of Elgar's first recording with orchestra from 1914. I can recommend this Hallé label recording with great enthusiasm: the playing is of the highest standard, the pacing just right and the recording quality exemplary.

The accolade of 'Elgar's Orchestra' has surely now returned to the Hallé as this recording proves and, to add strength to this point, what other orchestra can boast a principal conductor who shares a birthday with the great man?

Andrew Neill



### **A Ploughman's Tale**

Robert-John Edwards (bass-baritone)  
Sara Wilander (piano)

This privately recorded CD has just reached me. It is a collection of songs written in, or about, the First World War. So there are songs by Butterworth, Gurney, Vaughan Williams, Somervell, Finzi, Farrar and others. It is an interesting collection, well sung with excellent diction (but with just a few intonation problems) and well accompanied by his pianist. The sound is clear and well-focused, if a bit close-miked.

Readers of the Journal will be interested in the two Elgar songs in the collection, *Twilight* (from the op. 59 set), and *A War Song*. Both are well performed, although it is a pity the date of the latter is wrong in the booklet notes. Although it was published in 1903 it was written in 1884. Song texts are not included although, as previously mentioned, the singer's diction is clear enough. The CD can be purchased from the singer ([info@robertjohnedwards.co.uk](mailto:info@robertjohnedwards.co.uk)) at £10.00 plus £2 p & p

Barry Collett

## LETTERS

### ***Parry Diary Transcription***

*From Kevin Allen*

My thanks to volunteer transcribers Richard Hall, Ian Morgan, Mack Lindsey, the late John Weir, and particularly Martin Bird, who have kindly come forward in response to my appeal in last April's Journal. As a result of their combined efforts I estimate that at least 35 years (out of 54) will have been transcribed by the time this appears. With the support of Ian and Kate Russell of Shulbrede Priory, we have linked up with a project mounted jointly by Durham University and the Royal College of Music, to seek funding towards a long overdue scholarly edition of the Diary. It is to be hoped that the recent upsurge of interest in Parry, given special impetus by the various special performances of his music during the Centenary year, and by the appearance of Michael Trott's book on the composer, will all help to make this project a reality.

### ***Grania and Diarmid***

*From Andrew Neill*

Dear Sir, I read with interest the review by Michael Schwalb of the SOMM CD issue 'The Hills of Dreamland' in the December 2018 issue of the Journal. Mr Schwalb writes: 'It is embarrassing for a commendable label like SOMM which has contributed considerably to make Elgar's songs more popular, to hype Elgar's beautiful, but only three pieces of *Grania and Diarmid* as "Complete incidental music".' I have to admit to being confused! Any reader of the review would not take issue with Mr. Schwalb's commendable comments about the SOMM label but I can assure Mr Schwalb that there is no missing music for *Grania and Diarmid*. What SOMM recorded is 'it': The so-called 'Incidental Music', the great Funeral March and the song 'There are seven that pull the thread' so beautifully sung by Kathryn Rudge and composed by Elgar at the 'last minute'!

RWCD 001

Geniuseleon.

Edward Elgar. Von Matthias Gschmann.

Seine Tatkraft verbinden den Willen, daß am Plin- modernes Drotarium, großen Stils, die Apertur für sein erste Musikschule...

Nichter, in London einen entsprechenden Wirkungsreis ge- haben hat. Ghien ist jedoch nur ein fernerer Umlauf...

Quellen. Es ist von einflussreicher Bedeutung für den Werde- gang Elgars, daß er von Jugend an zu den großen Meistern...

Selber reißten die Mittel nicht weiter als auf einen kurzen Ausbruch (1882). Im Jahre 1885 folgte Elgar seinem Vater noch in der Organistenstelle an der St. George'skirche...

Das Elgar muß es mit großer Befriedigung erfüllen, daß die Hauptkraft für die allgemeine Förderung der Be- deutung Elgars Zeugnisse waren. Setzt für seine englischen Landsleute war die Stimme der berühmten Kritik über die Auf- führung des Werthens in Salisbury erst das Signal zu...

kommen zu sein, bevor braucht, in irgend welche künstlerische Richtung zu gehen, sondern konnte überhaupt alles, was in seinen Händen lag, zur Weltverbreitung ausgeben...

Das Elgar als großen Mann, ist groß und tief. Die Egher- werte Gedankens einen Stoff, der entnommen ist dem feststehenden Gedankensstoff. Gerade die größten Werte Elgars...

nichtiges Werkstück zu Gott voranz und ist für jeder eine positive Entscheidung, des christlichen Glaubens, aber der Zug der Veranschaulichung der Elgar ist...

Die Elgar als großen Mann, ist groß und tief. Die Egher- werte Gedankens einen Stoff, der entnommen ist dem feststehenden Gedankensstoff. Gerade die größten Werte Elgars...

Stelle nach der Verkündigung des Primates an Petrus „Verkündigt allen . . .“ oder die unnachahmlich reizende Stelle des Frauenchores „Und der Herr wandte sich“. Daß Elgar ein König des Orchesters ist, ahnt man schon nach einigen Werten in die Partitur seines *Dratoriums*, denen sich hier eine Wunderwelt orchesterlicher Feinheiten und Klangeffekte aufbaut. Elgar ist in dieser Beziehung nur Richard Strauss an die Seite zu stellen, er ist ihm völlig ebenbürtig darin, vielleicht noch überlegen, was die poetisch feine Verwendung der instrumentalen Eigenheiten betrifft. Dabei ist es ihm keineswegs um neue und unerhörte Klangkombinationen zu tun, sondern er sagt selbst, daß er innerlich die Instrumente höre und daß er sie so heranziehe, wie es der Ausdruck der Gedanken und Worte verlange, alles also nicht Klang um seiner selbst willen, sondern von innerer Notwendigkeit der Sache und des künstlerischen Konzeptes gefordert.

Als ich das erste Werk Elgars in meine Hände bekam — es war der Klavierauszug des „*Gerontius*“ — war ich sofort beim Aufschlagen der ersten Seiten sympathisch berührt. Es mag ein sehr unwesentlicher Umstand für die künstlerische Beurteilung scheinen, aber es zog mich an, dort das O. A. M. D. G. zu finden. Ein Künstler, der mit solchen Intentionen an sein Werk geht, und wir finden die bei Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Liszt, steht von Anfang an uns näher, weil er seine auf ein religiöses Thema aufgerichtete Kunst zugleich wie einen Gottesdienst auffaßt. Ihm ist ein *Dratorium* mehr als eine Gelegenheit, in einer musikalischen monumentalen Form zu uns zu sprechen, er wahr, können wir sagen, den ursprünglichen Sinn des Wortes *Dratorium* als eines großen Aktes der Gottesverehrung oder des religiösen Bekenntnisses. Ich möchte in diesen vier Buchstaben eine ganz persönliche Note Elgars erblicken, die gerade bei den „A p o s t e l n“ unverkennbar ist. Das Werk ist geradezu ein Werk seines Lebens, wie Goethes „Faust“ ein künstlerisches Glaubensbekenntnis. Seit den Tagen seiner Kindheit mächtigt eigentlich nach seinem eigenen Geständnis diese Idee mit ihm heran. Er erblickt die ersten Keime zu derselben in einer Erinnerung an seine Schulfeste. Lassen wir ihn selbst sprechen; „Mr. Reeve sagte einst zu seinen Schülern: Die Apostel waren arme Männer zur Zeit ihrer Berufung, vielleicht vor Herabkunft des hl. Geistes nicht geschickter als ihr. Das machte mich nachdenklich, und das *Dratorium* von 1903 ist das Ergebnis.“ Geplant wurde eine *Trilogie*, die den ersten Teil der Aufführung entgegensteht, die

anderen Teile sind noch nicht vollendet. Sie sollen die Wirksamkeit der Apostel und das Weltende und Gericht behandeln. Der erste Teil enthält eine Schilderung der Apostel von ihrer Berufung an bis zur Himmelfahrt des Herrn. Elgar war sein eigener Librettist! Mit bewunderungswürdiger Sachkenntnis ist der Text zusammengestellt aus den verschiedensten Stellen der Heiligen Schrift des alten und des neuen Testaments. Es handelte sich ihm nicht um eine einfache Abschilderung des Evangelienberichtes, sondern um eine meditierende Beschauung der einzelnen Lebensbilder, in denen die Apostel in dem angegebenen Zeitabschnitte in der Heiligen Schrift gezeichnet werden. Die Form der Darstellung tritt wesentlich aus dem Rahmen der überlieferten Art des *Dratoriums* heraus und hält die Mitte zwischen der traditionellen Form desselben und dem musikalischen Drama. Den Personen des *Dratoriums* (Christus, Maria, ein Engel, Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Johannes, Judas und ein Erzähler) steht der Chor gegenüber im Sinne der antiken Tragödie. Der Geist der antiken Tragödie beherrscht überhaupt das ganze Werk, als es sich hier um eine in großen Zügen skizzierte Handlung handelt, deren Kenntnis bei dem Hörer vorausgesetzt wird. Es ist die Gestaltung eines im edelsten Sinne vollstimmigen Stoffes, der religiöses Gemeingut ist und einer ins Einzelne gehenden Detailskizze bedarf. Es werden die Hauptzüge hervorgehoben, ohne daß der Dichters bei den einzelnen Szenen lange verweilt. Stimmungsbildern gleich zieht die Fülle von Begebenheiten der neustamentlichen Heilsgeschichte, insofern sie mit den Aposteln in Zusammenhang steht, vorüber, aber stets mit lebendiger Beziehung zum gläubigen Betrachter. Diese Beziehung herzustellen, ist die wesentliche Aufgabe des Chores, der somit wirklich die Rolle des antiken Chores zu erfüllen hat. Die Einheit des Kunstwerkes ist in der ganzen Art der Bilderfolge einer Gefahr ausgesetzt, die jedoch überwunden und beseitigt wird durch die meisterhafte Verbindung, durch das Prinzip des Leitmotives, wobei das Orchester in unübertrefflicher Weise die Beständigkeit der Stimmung herstellt.

Ueber das Werk selbst, dessen Aufführung bevorsteht, einläßlicher zu sprechen, wird ja nach seiner ersten Wiener Vorführung Gelegenheit sein. Jedenfalls ist es eine künstlerische Tat, daß dieses bedeutende Werk nun, ein Jahrzehnt nach seiner Vollendung, dem Wiener Musikpublikum bekannt gemacht wird.

## 100 YEARS AGO ...

1919 opened with the Elgars back at Severn House, Alice ‘trying to unpack & settle things a little – The house so lovely but very dusty of course’. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> Elgar was ‘becoming absorbed in his music again’, and had ‘settled that [Billy Reed’s] 4tet shd. come on Tuesday’ to play through the new chamber music. He told Ernest Newman: ‘the Sonata is finished and the Quartet; – your Quintet remains to be completed – the first movement is ready & I want you to hear it – it is strange music I think & I like it – but – it’s ghostly stuff’. On hearing the slow movement of the Quartet, Alice described it as ‘like captured sunshine’.

Writing to ‘Windflower’ at the beginning of February, Elgar said: ‘I long for Brinkwells even in this weather’, but on the 9<sup>th</sup> he was ‘writing, finishing last movement of Quintet’. Three days later he was ‘not at all well, felt he could not go to Bath as arranged. Despairing telegrams &c’. He was due to conduct at the Pump Room Festival – some nifty rearrangement saw his concert delayed until the 15<sup>th</sup>, when Alice ‘was relieved to hear Orch. playing quite well, & quite the right reading of things’.

At the beginning of March Elgar met Bernard Shaw again at ‘a select little luncheon party, the only guests being Elgar, myself, and Roger Fry [who uttered] ‘the words “There is only one art”’. He got no farther; a formidable growl from Elgar stopped him. We all turned to him; and there he was, teeth bared and all his hackles bristling, glaring at Fry. “Music” he thundered “is written on the sky – and you compare it to a DAMNED imitation!!!!”’.

Shaw was invited to hear the chamber music at Severn House on 7 March. He wrote to Elgar next day: ‘The Quintet knocked me over at once: I said to myself, with the old critic’s habit of making phrases for publication, that this was the finest thing of its kind since Coriolan. I don’t know why I associated the two; but I did: there was the same quality – the same vein’.

On 15 March Elgar conducted *Gerontius* in Liverpool, and on his return he and Alice made a fleeting visit to the Speyers at Ridgehurst. At the end of the month, on the very day the papers issued the reminder ‘Summer Time. Put clocks forward to-night’, the Elgars awoke to ‘Cold & deep snow on looking out, the deepest this winter probably’ – some six inches.

By mid April the Quintet was finally complete, and Frank Schuster had arranged a concert of ‘New Chamber Works by Edward Elgar’ in the music room of his London home. ‘E. could not stay in the room, went into hall ... then the great Quintet. People seemed spellbound & were most enthusiastic’. Herbert Howells, though not impressed overall, ‘carried the Quintet most in mind and affection’. Adrian Boult ‘played an uneasy part in the Quintet in which William Murdoch asked me to turn over for him. Elgars opulent manuscript spread sometimes to the extent of one bar to a page’. Alice summed up proceedings: ‘Very lovely of Frank to have it – E. stayed to dinner not a sympathetic party to him’.

Martin Bird

On the 22 March 1912 Edward Elgar hit the headlines in the *Reichspost*, an ‘Independent daily newspaper for the Christian people in Austria-Hungary’. What brought it about was the Viennese première of *Die Apostel* on Palm Sunday. It was announced as ‘a modern oratorio on a grand scale’ written by an important ‘star in the musical sky’. Elgar’s development is described in detail on pages 1 to 3: He made his way a ‘self-made man’, ‘married a girl of musical and literary education’ [the original really says ‘Mädchen’ (girl)], settled in Malvern near Worcester and wrote several successful works. ‘For us Germans’, says the Austrian paper, ‘it must be especially satisfying that the spearheads for the general appreciation of Elgar’s achievements were Germans...’ and reminds the reader of Hans Richter and Düsseldorf. Elgar’s name is not completely unknown in Vienna at this time because works such as the *Enigma Variations*, *The Dream of Gerontius*, the violin concerto and a symphony and some smaller works have been performed since 1903. In the comments about the music of *The Apostles* the writer summarises: ‘What Elgar has to say is great and deep. It is justified to call Elgar a “religious mystic.”’ [The editor would like to thank Michael Schwalb who discovered this historic article.]

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