

London
Philharmonic
Orchestra

MARQUEE TV
Digital concert programme

2025/26 concert season

Filmed live at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Edward Gardner conducts Elgar

Broadcast 23 January 2026

Elgar In the South (Alassio)

Elgar Sea Pictures

Elgar Sospiri

Elgar Enigma Variations

Edward Gardner conductor

Generously supported by Aud Jebsen

Beth Taylor mezzo-soprano

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Concert performed at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall on 26 November 2025 and filmed by Intersection.

This concert celebrated The Duke of Kent's 90th birthday and 45 years of His Royal Highness's Patronage of the LPO.

This concert was generously supported by the Elgar Society in celebration of its 75th anniversary.

The LPO would like to acknowledge the generosity of all of its members, supporters and donors.
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On stage

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Benjamin Roskams

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Benedetto Pollani

Martin Wray

Chair supported by David & Bettina Harden

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Co-Principal

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Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

Laura Murphy

Chair supported by Ian Ferguson & Susan Tranter

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Lowri Estell

Adam Wynter

Flutes

Juliette Bausor Principal

Chair supported by Malcolm & Alison Thwaites

Ellie Blamires

Stewart McIlwham*

Piccolo

Stewart McIlwham*

Principal

Oboes

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Chair supported by David & Yi Buckley

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Simon Estell* Principal

Horns

John Ryan* Principal

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Trombones

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Lyndon Meredith Principal

Tuba

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**Professor at a London conservatoire*

The LPO also acknowledges the following chair supporters whose player is not present at this concert:

Bianca & Stuart Roden

London Philharmonic Orchestra



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Uniquely groundbreaking and exhilarating to watch and hear, the London Philharmonic Orchestra has been celebrated as one of the world's great orchestras since Sir Thomas Beecham founded it in 1932. Our mission is to share wonder with the modern world through the power of orchestral music, which we accomplish through live performances, online, and an extensive education and community programme, cementing our position as a leading orchestra for the 21st century.

Our home is at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, where we're at the beating heart of London's cultural life. You'll also find us at our resident venues in Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden, and on tour worldwide. In 2024 we celebrated 60 years as Resident Symphony Orchestra at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, combining the magic of opera with Glyndebourne's glorious setting in the Sussex countryside.

Soundtrack to key moments

Everyone will have heard the Grammy-nominated London Philharmonic Orchestra, whether it's playing the world's National Anthems for every medal ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, our iconic recording with Pavarotti that made *Nessun Dorma* a global football anthem, or closing the flotilla at The Queen's Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant. And you'll almost certainly have heard us on the soundtracks for major films including *The Lord of the Rings*.

Sharing the wonder worldwide

We're one of the world's most-streamed orchestras, with over 15 million plays of our content each month. In 2023 we were the most successful orchestra worldwide on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, and in 2024 we featured in a TV documentary series on Sky Arts: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', which was nominated for a 2025 BAFTA. During 2025/26 we're once again working with Marquee TV to broadcast selected live concerts to enjoy at home.

Our conductors

Our Principal Conductors have included some of the greatest historic names like Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2021 Edward Gardner became our 13th Principal Conductor, and Vladimir Jurowski became Conductor Emeritus. Karina Canellakis is our current Principal Guest Conductor, and Sir George Benjamin our Composer-in-Residence.

Next generations

We're committed to nurturing the next generation of musicians and music-lovers: we love seeing the joy of children and families experiencing their first musical moments, and we're passionate about inspiring schools and teachers through dedicated concerts, workshops, resources and training. Reflecting our values of

Pieter Schoeman

Leader

collaboration and inclusivity, our OrchLab and Open Sound Ensemble projects offer music-making opportunities for adults and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Today's young instrumentalists are the orchestra members of the future, and we have a number of opportunities to support their progression. Our LPO Junior Artists programme leads the way in creating pathways into the profession for young artists from under-represented communities, and our LPO Young Composers and Foyle Future Firsts schemes support the next generation of professional musicians, bridging the transition from education to professional careers. We also recently launched the LPO Conducting Fellowship, supporting the development of outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds under-represented in the profession.

2025/26 season

This season's theme, *Harmony with Nature*, explores humanity's bond with the natural world through works by Beethoven, Sibelius, Mendelssohn, Elgar and Dvořák; masterpieces of an era that saw nature as a mirror of human emotion. Closer to our own time, we'll hear from composers as diverse as Duke Ellington, John Luther Adams and Anna Thorvaldsdottir, who have all found a source of creative energy in the processes of nature.

Highlights with Principal Conductor Edward Gardner include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; a pair of concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a performance of Berg's *Wozzeck* to end the season. We'll also welcome back Karina Canellakis and Vladimir Jurowski, as well as guest conductors including Robin Ticciati, Kirill Karabits, Mark Elder and Kahchun Wong. Our lineup of soloists this season includes violinists Anne-Sophie Mutter, Alina Ibragimova, James Ehnes and Himari; cellist Nicolas Altstaedt; and pianists Yefim Bronfman, Alexandre Kantorow and Tomoko Mukaiyama. The season features nine world and UK premieres, including Tan Dun's choral 'Ode to Peace' *Nine*, and *A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)* by jazz icon Terence Blanchard.

We're also thrilled to be touring to South Korea and across Europe, as well as another season bursting with performances and community events in our Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden residencies.



© Benjamin Ealovega

Pieter Schoeman was appointed Leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2008, having previously been Co-Leader since 2002. He is also a Professor of Violin at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance.

Pieter has performed worldwide as a soloist and recitalist in such famous halls as the Amsterdam

Concertgebouw, Moscow's Rachmaninoff Hall, Capella Hall in St Petersburg, Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, and the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. He has also appeared as Guest Leader with many prestigious orchestras across the world. As a chamber musician, he regularly appears at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall. His chamber music partners have included Anne-Sophie Mutter, Veronika Eberle, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Boris Garlitsky, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Martin Helmchen and Julia Fischer.

Pieter has performed numerous times as a soloist with the LPO. Highlights have included an appearance as both conductor and soloist in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the Brahms Double Concerto with Kristina Blaumane, Florence Price's Violin Concerto No. 2, and the Britten Double Concerto with Alexander Zemtsov, which was released on the LPO Label to great critical acclaim.

Pieter's chair in the LPO is generously supported by Neil Westreich.

New video series: 'Humans of the Orchestra'

Click or scan the QR code to watch our interview with Pieter



Edward Gardner

Principal Conductor, London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Photographer London

Edward Gardner has been Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra since 2021. He is also Music Director of the Norwegian Opera & Ballet and Honorary Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, following his tenure as Chief Conductor from 2015–24.

This season's LPO highlights include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; 'Phoenix Lands': two programmes spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; and a concert performance of Berg's opera *Wozzeck* to end the season. In October 2025 he and the Orchestra embarked on a tour to South Korea, and in December a tour of major cities in Germany.

Edward opened his second season as Music Director of the Norwegian Opera & Ballet with *Rusalka* and concert performances of Kurtág's *Fin de partie*. Later this spring he will conduct *Don Carlos* and Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. June 2026 sees concert performances of Wagner's *The Ring Without Words*, and next season the opera house will begin its journey towards a complete *Ring Cycle* in the 2028/29 season.

In demand as a guest conductor, this season Edward returns to orchestras in the USA including the Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Dallas Symphony and National Symphony orchestras, and makes his debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. In Europe he conducts the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Danish National Symphony Orchestra and Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. In Tokyo he makes his debut with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra.

An acclaimed opera conductor, in spring 2025 Edward was re-invited to London's Royal Opera House to conduct the world premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Festen*, having made his Covent Garden debut with *Káťa Kabanová*. In June 2025 he returned to the Bavarian State Opera for *Rusalka*, following *Peter Grimes* in 2022 and Verdi's *Otello* in 2023. Music Director of English National Opera for eight years (2007–15), he has also built a strong relationship with New York's Metropolitan Opera, and has conducted at La Scala, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera and the Opéra National de Paris.

Edward Gardner has recorded extensively with the Bergen Philharmonic on the Chandos label, including most recently *Salome*, as well as a Grammy-nominated Janáček *Glagolitic Mass*. Other recent critically acclaimed releases include *Der fliegende Holländer* with Lise Davidsen, Gerald Finley and the Norwegian National Opera for Decca.

November 2025 saw the release on the LPO Label of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* conducted by Edward Gardner, recorded live at the 2022 BBC Proms (see page 14). In September 2025, the label released his recording of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra & Choir. This was Edward's third Tippett release on the label, following *The Midsummer Marriage* – which won a 2023 Gramophone Award – and the Second Symphony and Piano Concerto with Steven Osborne in 2024. He has also released on the label works by Berlioz, Rachmaninov, Dvořák, Schumann and Britten. In 2024, he and the LPO featured in a Sky Arts series: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', which was nominated for a BAFTA.

A passionate supporter of young talent, Edward founded the Hallé Youth Orchestra in 2002 and regularly conducts the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He has a close relationship with the Juilliard School of Music, and with the Royal Academy of Music.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music, and gained early recognition as Assistant Conductor of the Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. His many accolades include the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor of the Year Award (2008), an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2009) and an OBE for Services to Music in The Queen's Birthday Honours (2012).

Edward Gardner's position at the LPO is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

Beth Taylor

mezzo-soprano



© Olivia da Costa

Lauded by *The Guardian* for her 'dark and focused' voice, 'sensational coloratura' and 'spectacular singing', and by *The Times* for her 'fierce, indeed terrifying' portrayals, Beth Taylor is one of today's most electrifying young mezzo-sopranos. She made her London Philharmonic Orchestra debut in September 2023, in Mahler's Symphony No. 2 under Edward Gardner at the Royal Festival Hall for the Orchestra's 2023/24 season opening concert.

In 2025/26, Beth sings the title role in the final scene of Rossini's *Ermione* with the Monteverdi Choir at London's Cadogan Hall, joins Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic for Mahler's Symphony No. 2 in Los Angeles and on tour to Asia, and returns to Carnegie Hall for Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Orchestra of St. Luke's under Raphaël Pichon, as well as to the Vienna Symphony at the Konzerthaus.

Further highlights include Bach's Mass in B minor and Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Berlin Philharmonic and Kirill Petrenko, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Orchestra of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* with the Royal Danish Symphony Orchestra, Mahler's Symphony No. 3 with the Bergen Philharmonic, *Das Lied von der Erde* in Rouen, and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Beth also appears with all of Munich's leading symphony orchestras within just a couple of months: the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra for Mahler's Symphony No. 2 under Sir Simon Rattle, the Munich Philharmonic for *The Dream of Gerontius*, and the Munich Radio Orchestra for Karl Jenkins's *The Armed Man*. At Wigmore Hall, she appears in recital with pianist Hamish Brown.

Opera performances include Speranza in *L'Orfeo* in Bilbao, and a tour as Cornelia in Handel's *Giulio Cesare* with Il Pomo d'Oro to major European cities including Vienna, Amsterdam, Paris, Madrid and Barcelona.

Beth's recent opera performances include the title role in *La Cenerentola* and *Bradamante (Alcina)* at Opéra de Nancy; Cornelia and *Bradamante* at Glyndebourne; *Arsace (Semiramide)*, *La Cieca (La Gioconda)*, *Erda (Das Rheingold)* and *Erste Norn (Götterdämmerung)* at Deutsche Oper Berlin; *Giuliano Gordio (Eliogabalo)* at Zurich Opera; and *Falliero (Bianca e Falliero)* and *Dardano (Amadigi di Gaula)* at Oper Frankfurt, as well as staged versions of Mendelssohn's *Elias* in Lyon and Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Basel.

On the concert platform, Beth has appeared as Anna (*Les Troyens*) at the Salzburg Festival, Berlin Festival, BBC Proms and Berlioz Festival; Cornelia with The English Concert at Carnegie Hall, Barbican Hall and in San Francisco; the Sorceress (*Dido and Aeneas*) in Madrid, Hamburg, Paris, Luxembourg and Essen; Argia (*La Merope*) at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam; Ursule (*Béatrice et Bénédict*) at the Berlioz Festival; and Teseo (*Arianna in Creta*) at the London Handel Festival. Other major engagements include Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Berlin Philharmonic in Baden-Baden, Mahler's Symphony No. 3 with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, her Canadian debut with the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, her US debut with the Handel and Haydn Society in Boston, and appearances at the BBC Proms, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Gulbenkian Lisbon, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg and Aix-en-Provence Festival.

Beth has collaborated with conductors including Leonardo García Alarcón, William Christie, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Andrea Marcon, Ingo Metzmacher, John Nelson, Rafael Payare, Kirill Petrenko, Raphaël Pichon, Sir Donald Runnicles and Constantin Trinks.

A grand finalist in the 2023 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition, Beth Taylor was the winner of the 2022 Elizabeth Connell Award and the 2018 Gianni Bergamo Classical Music Award, and took third prize at the 2019 Wigmore Hall Competition. She studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and The Open University, and has worked with Jennifer Larmore, Margaret Izatt and Iain Paton.

Programme notes

Edward Elgar

1857–1934

In the South (Alassio), Op. 50

1904



© From the collection of Arthur Reynolds

Edward Elgar at his house, Craeg Lea in Malvern, in 1904, with the manuscript of *In the South* on his piano

'I love it: it's alive!' Elgar said of *In the South*. With its striking 'Straussian' opening, the listener can only but agree. However, the allusion should not be taken too far for, as the conductor Sir Donald Runnicles, a horn player, has pointed out: 'Those Elgar horn parts! People often cite the influence of Richard Strauss on Elgar. Well, perhaps, but the style of Elgar's horn parts is entirely his own'. Furthermore, Elgar had noted the theme in his notebook five years earlier, as a description of bulldog Dan 'triumphant after a fight'. Dan, that immortal dog from Variation 11 of the *Enigma Variations*, was portrayed in this moment of victory at the same time as Strauss was working on *Ein Heldenleben* and therein slaying his own (musical) enemies.

During the winter of 1903–04, Elgar was staying in northern Italy near Alassio. He wanted to reflect 'the thoughts and sensations of one beautiful afternoon in the Vale of Andora', and was particularly taken by the village of Moglio, situated in the hills above Alassio. The village's name also offered onomatopoeic possibilities. The texture of this headlong, exuberant music softens perceptively after 67 bars as, *Nobilmente* (nobly), the music relaxes, and a pastoral section reflects Tennyson's words: 'palm, orange blossom, olive, aloe, maize and vine'. Woodwind represent a shepherd piping, with 'moglio, moglio' in counterpoint. This bucolic atmosphere is temporary, and a change is suggested as, *Grandioso*, we are led into the world of the Roman legions: 'a sound-picture of the strife and wars, the "drums and trappings" of a later time'. With its bold harmonies, this section is eventually supplanted by a peaceful vision: divided strings opening a gateway to a solo viola and then horn singing a *canto popolare* which Elgar later used as the basis for one of his own songs. As the viola solo returns, hints of a change are heard in the orchestra, heralding the recapitulation. Elgar builds excitement and tension as earlier themes are recalled before he heads towards the conclusion, the full orchestra, with the addition of a glockenspiel, ending one of Elgar's most colourful compositions.

Programme notes

Edward Elgar

1857–1934

Sea Pictures, Op. 37

1899

Beth Taylor *mezzo-soprano*

1. *Sea Slumber-Song*

2. *In Haven (Capri)*

3. *Sabbath Morning at Sea*

4. *Where Corals Lie*

5. *The Swimmer*

The texts begin on the next page.

There are few examples of orchestral song-cycles appearing as such, fully orchestrated, without a piano version preceding them. If not unique, Elgar's *Sea Pictures* is a rare example, for even those by Berlioz and Mahler (which Elgar could not have known) appeared first in versions for piano accompaniment. Time has tempered the originality of *Sea Pictures*, the composition of which preceded the premiere and associated success of the *Enigma Variations*.

Commissioned by the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival of 1899, the renowned contralto Clara Butt – 'dressed like a mermaid' – gave the premiere of *Sea Pictures* in St Andrew's Hall Norwich on 5 October, to great acclaim. None of the five poems, related through their nautical themes, can be considered great poetry, but it is Elgar's music and his orchestration that command the attention as the restless swell of the sea opens 'Sea Slumber-Song' by the then-popular British poet, Roden Noel. Beginning in G major, the setting passes through the keys of E major and C major before ending in E major, harp and gong adding to its mystery.

The composer's wife, Alice, amended the text of one of her own poems to fit the theme of the cycle, so her 'Lute Song' became 'In Haven (Capri)'. In C major throughout, Elgar's transparent orchestration matches the intimacy of this miniature within the set.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem 'Sabbath Morning at Sea', with its mystical religiosity, begins in C major – the key in which it also ends, *Grandioso*, after traversing the keys of E major and D flat major. 'Where Corals Lie', in D major, is an interlude between the two 'big' settings, in which the poet, Richard Garnett, imagines a land where his 'rapid fancies [might] fly'.

For his final setting, 'The Swimmer' by the Australian poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, whose monument graces Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, Elgar adds a large organ *ad lib*. In D major throughout, with a brief change to C major on the words 'The skies were fairer', Gordon's imagery and Elgar's music become more and more passionate as the poet, once a horse breaker and steeplechaser, mixes his metaphors towards the poem's climax, which Elgar matches without sentimentality.

Programme notes

1. Sea Slumber-Song

Sea birds are asleep,
The world forgets to weep,
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song
On the shadowy sand
Of this elfin land;
'I, the Mother mild,
Hush thee, O my child,
Forget the voices wild!

Isles in elfin light
Dream, the rocks and caves,
Lulled by whispering waves,
Veil their marbles bright.
Foam glimmers faintly white
Upon the shelly sand
Of this elfin land;

Sea-sound, like violins,
To slumber woos and wins,
I murmur my soft slumber-song,
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.

Ocean's shadowy might
Breathes good night,
Good night ...'

Roden Noel (1834–94)

2. In Haven (Capri)

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

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

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

Caroline Alice Elgar (1848–1920)

3. Sabbath Morning at Sea

The ship went on with solemn face;
To meet the darkness on the deep,
The solemn ship went onward.
I bowed down weary in the place;
For parting tears and present sleep
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!
The waters around me, turbulent,
The skies, impassive o'er me,
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,
As glorified by even the intent
Of holding the day glory!

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day.
The sea sings round me while ye roll
Afar the hymn, unaltered,
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,
And bless me deeper in your soul
Because your voice has faltered.

And though this sabbath comes to me
Without the stolèd minister,
And chanting congregation,
God's Spirit shall give comfort.
He who brooded soft on waters drear,
Creator on creation.

He shall assist me to look higher,
Where keep the saints, with harp and song,
An endless sabbath morning,
And, on that sea commixed with fire,
Oft drop their eyelids raised too long
To the full Godhead's burning.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–61)

Programme notes

4. Where Corals Lie

The deeps have music soft and low
When winds awake the airy spry,
It lures me, lures me on to go
And see the land where corals lie.
The land where corals lie.

By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When night is deep, and moon is high,
That music seeks and finds me still,
And tells me where the corals lie.
And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,
Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,
But far the rapid fancies fly
To rolling worlds of wave and shell,
And all the land where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,
Thy smile is like a morning sky,
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go
And see the land where corals lie.
The land, the land, where corals lie.

Richard Garnett (1835–1906)

5. The Swimmer

With short, sharp, violent lights made vivid,
To southward far as the sight can roam,
Only the swirl of the surges livid,
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.
Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,
And the rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,
Waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward,
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, grey coast and a seaboard ghastly,
And shores trod seldom by feet of men –
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast lie,
They have lain embedded these long years ten.
Love! when we wandered here together,
Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather.
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer and shores were firmer –
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd;
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold.

So, girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,
And strong winds treading the swift waves under
The flying rollers with frothy feet.
One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims on
The sky-line, staining the green gulf crimson,
A death-stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun
That strikes through his stormy winding sheet.
O brave white horses! you gather and gallop,
The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins;
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
In your hollow backs, on your high-arched manes.
I would ride as never man has ridden
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden;
I would ride as never man has ridden
To gulfs foreshadowed through strifes forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.

Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833–70)

Watch:

Edward Gardner on tonight's works

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Programme notes

Edward Elgar

1857–1934

Sospiri, Op. 70

1914

This orchestral version of *Sospiri* was premiered by Sir Henry Wood, who conducted it in The Queen's Hall on 15 August 1914, eleven days into the Great War. Then, this profound 'slow movement', was emotionally out of place for an audience anticipating victory 'by Christmas', and Alice Elgar reported to her husband, who was away conducting in Leeds, only of the 'wonderful effect of "Land of Hope and Glory", which was also performed. *Sospiri* ('Sighs' in Italian) is Elgar at his most heartfelt. It is an example of contained emotion and enters a Mahlerian world of detached

reflection. For a country involved in a world war which would continue for another four years, *Sospiri* would become more and more relevant.

Dedicating the piece to the violinist W H Reed, Elgar composed *Sospiri* quickly for strings and harp (with optional parts for harmonium and organ) during December 1913 and January 1914, in response to a commission from the publisher Elkin. However, the seriousness and depth of emotion present in *Sospiri* were not what Elkin had anticipated, and the work was eventually published by Breitkopf und Härtel.

Edward Elgar

1857–1934

Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), Op. 36

1899

Elgar's biographer, the late Michael Kennedy, stressed the importance of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* to our national musical consciousness when he described this masterpiece as 'the greatest orchestral work yet written by an Englishman'. It is difficult to argue with this assessment, for even nearly 130 years later, the originality and brilliance of the invention and orchestration never cease to astonish. Elgar was then living in Malvern but, despite his increasing fame locally, remained trapped teaching the violin. One evening in October 1898, he sat down at the piano and from his fingers emerged the theme of what would become the *Enigma Variations*. Encouraged by his wife Alice, Elgar began playing the melody as if to portray some of their

friends, writing to A J Jaeger of the publisher Novello & Company '... I have sketched a set of Variations (orkestry) on an original theme: the Variations have amused me because I've labelled 'em with the nicknames of my particular friends – you are Nimrod ... I've liked to imagine the [friend] writing the Var: him (or er) self and have written what I think they wd have written ...'.

The great Wagner conductor Hans Richter agreed to conduct the premiere, which took place in St James's Hall, Piccadilly, on 19 June 1899. Although it was a great success, Elgar was dissatisfied with some of the orchestral effects, which he quickly altered, and Jaeger,

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in agreement with Richter, felt that the Finale was ineffective and should be expanded. At first, Elgar would not be moved, but eventually made the alterations, expanding and broadening the conclusion. Completed by the middle of July, the new ending was heard for the first time in a performance conducted by Elgar in Worcester on 13 September.

Elgar's descriptions of each Variation, from his manuscript and slightly edited, are given below. First, the theme is stated in two sections, which leads directly into his portrait of his wife, Caroline Alice:

1. C. A. E.

'An enlargement of the theme with what I wished to be romantic and delicate additions.'

2. H. D. S. -P.

'Hew David Steuart Powell was a well-known amateur pianist & a great asset in chamber music. His characteristic (diatonic) run over the keys before beginning to play is here humorously travestied in the semi-quaver passages, suggesting a Toccata but chromatic beyond H. D. S. -P.'s liking.'

3. R. B. T. [Richard Baxter Townshend]

'The Variation has a reference to R. B. T.'s presentation of an old man in some amateur theatricals – the low voice flying off occasionally into a "soprano" timbre.'

4. W. M. B. [William Meath Baker]

'A country squire, gentleman & scholar. This variation was written after [our] host with a slip of paper in his hand, forcibly read out the arrangements for the day & hurriedly left the room with an inadvertent bang of the door. The presentation by the oboe is somewhat pert & the growing grumpiness of the bassoons is important.'

5. R. P. A.

'Richard Arnold, son of Matthew Arnold. A great lover of music which he played (pianoforte) in a self-taught manner. His serious conversation was continually broken up by whimsical & witty remarks. The Theme is given by the basses & there is much badinage among the wind instruments.'

6. Ysobel

'A Malvern lady [Isabel Fitton] who is learning the viola [taught by EE]; it may be noticed that the opening bar, a phrase made use of throughout the variation, is an exercise for crossing the strings – a difficulty for beginners: on this is built a pensive and, for a moment, romantic movement.'

7. Troyte

'A well-known architect [Arthur Troyte Griffith] in Malvern. The boisterous mood is mere banter. The uncouth rhythm of the drums etc was really suggested by some maladroit essays to play the pianoforte, later the strong rhythm suggests the attempts of the instructor (E. E.) to make something like order out of chaos, & the final despairing "slam"; as the effort probed to be in vain.'

8. W. N.

'Really a suggestion of an eighteenth-century household, the gracious personalities of the ladies sedately shown. [Winifred Norbury] was more connected with music than any others of the family so her initials head the movement.'

9. Nimrod

'The name is my substitute for Jaeger ['Jaeger': German for hunter. Nimrod: 'the mighty hunter before the Lord' from Genesis 10] who was well known as a critic and friend of musicians. During an evening walk Nimrod discoursed eloquently on the slow movements of Beethoven & said that no one could approach B. at his best in this field. A view in which I cordially concurred. It will be noticed that the opening bars are made to suggest the slow movement of the eighth Sonata (pathetique).'

10. Dorabella [Dora Powell]

'Intermezzo. The pseudonym is adopted from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. The movement suggests a dance of fairy-like lightness. The inner phrases (violas first, - later Flutes) should be noted.'

11. G. R. S. [George Sinclair]

'Late organist of Hereford Cathedral. The Variation, however, has nothing to do with organs, cathedrals or, except remotely, G. R. S. The first few bars were suggested by his great bulldog (Dan, a well-known character) falling down the steep bank into the river, his paddling upstream to find a landing place & his rejoicing bark on landing. G. R. S. said, "Set that to music" – Here it is.'

12. B. G. N.

'Basil Nevinston, an amateur cello player of some distinction; a serious & devoted friend.'

13. * * *

'The asterisks take the place of the name of Lady Mary Lygon, who was, at the time of the composition, on a sea voyage [to New South Wales]. The drums suggest

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the distant throb of the engines of a liner, over which the clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*.'

14. E. D. U.

'Finale; bold and vigorous in general style. Written at a time when my friends ere dubious and generally discouraging as to my musical future, this 'Variation' is merely to show what 'E. D. U.' (a 'paraphrase' of a fond name for thee writer) intended to do. References are made to [a characteristic whistle] C. A. E. & to Nimrod which are entirely fitting to the intention of the piece.'

Dedicated to 'my friends pictured within', Elgar's *Variations* represented a varied collection of intimates, most coming from the society Alice Elgar had enjoyed before her marriage. Those from Elgar's circle were few: Troyte, Nimrod and G. R. Sinclair. These, as well as 'Dorabella', whose stammer he gently parodied, maintained a relationship with Elgar long after the *Variations* had become a staple of the repertoire.

As for the appellation 'Enigma', few musical riddles have caused as much ink to be spent in endeavouring to find a 'solution' to what this writer believes is one of the great 'red herrings' in music. Compounded by Elgar, it is worth noting that the word 'Enigma' did not emerge until after the 'short score' was nearly complete, when the note-writer, for the first performance, Charles Barry, requested information in April 1899. It was Jaeger who wrote the word 'Enigma' (in pencil) over the theme (not the title). Elgar, when interviewed by Barry, told him: 'The Enigma I will not explain – its "dark saying" must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme "goes" but it is not played ...'. Therein lies enough to keep speculators and solvers of riddles frustrated and entertained for well over a century: 'Dark saying' and a 'larger theme'; and so it has been and continues to be!

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