

James Hepokoski  
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## Lincoln Center: Introductory Elgar Presentation

Welcome to our Elgar Symposium at Lincoln Center. Before beginning the discussions with our distinguished panel of Elgarians—Anthony Payne, Robert Anderson, Michael Kennedy, and Patrick McCreless, all of whom I'll introduce more formally a bit later—I'd like to start us off with an overview of Elgar and his music: an album of musical snapshots and brief remarks that might help to orient our subsequent conversation.

In the public's view, Edward Elgar emerged as an undeniably significant composer in the late-Victorian years around 1900—at age 37 or 38. For many, the composer associated with Worcester and Malvern (not London) was instantly recognized as the much-awaited magisterial figure of English composition—the greatest since Purcell, it was said (almost instantly displacing his older rivals, Parry and Stanford). But as I'm sure many of you know, merely to slot him into this nationalistic role alone is to do an injustice to this complex musical figure. From the outset, Elgar was a conflicted man of strong, spontaneous emotion—a multilayered personality. What's more, he seems to have intended much of his music to have been unusually confessional, directly linked with the circumstances of his life—and with his “concealed” inner thoughts—in ways that Elgar himself (tantalizingly) invited us to deduce. He told us repeatedly that he had scattered throughout his works hints of musical and personal secrets, enigmas, riddles, codes, double meanings. Elgar's grippingly expressive music is inseparable from Elgar the man, the man torn between untrammelled, even boyish exuberance, achingly nostalgic dreams, and almost unfaceable resignation and despair.

Elgar seems to have viewed himself as the nonprivileged outsider, as the hypersensitive, secret man consigned to a haunted life of apartness and ultimate non-acceptance, no matter how exalted the official honors that might accrue to him or how wide and seemingly intimate his circle of friends. He felt these exclusions deeply: as a man of decidedly ordinary origins from the English countryside, as a practicing Roman Catholic in a country welded to Anglicanism, as an exclusively self-taught composer—no official seal of sanctioned conservatory training here—as the man who, in 1889, at the age of 32, married a woman nine years his senior and his superior in social status, Alice Roberts, who would bear him a daughter and who would devote the rest of her life to him.

Two sides of Elgar's personality announced themselves in two early works written in the years immediately after his marriage. One side consisted of sumptuous, honorific evocations of heroic nobility and legendary grand deeds—usually of great times, now lost to time. What would become Elgar's instantly recognizable *nobilmente* manner started to come through vividly with his first major work for orchestra. This was the concert overture *Froissart* from 1890, titled after the late-medieval French chronicler of English history, Jean Froissart—a time “when chivalry / Lifted up her lance on high,” as Elgar put it. *Froissart* is an emotionally bold, and self-assured work, and its command of orchestration and harmonic resources—often Wagnerian—is especially impressive when one remembers that the composer was essentially self-taught. Here's the opening of the introduction to *Froissart*. It passes rapidly through three phases: first, a heraldic flourish; second, a set of *Meistersinger*-like repetitions and sequences serving as a link to—the third phrase—the unfurling of a typically Elgarian broad, noble melody. In this third phase notice especially the rich thickness of the

doubled orchestral sound, underpinned by trembling, emotional swells from the center of the orchestra—virtually an Elgarian signature, even at this early date of 1890.

*Froissart* Overture: Andrew Davis, BBC Symphony 1---0:00-0:55

The opposite side of this Elgarian *nobilmente* extroversion—or the musical sleeve pulled inside out—may be heard in the early, more obviously “interior” Serenade for Strings from 1892. As in *Froissart*, there seems also to be a myth or dream evoked here, but of a different kind. Instead of mythical grandeur, we find here an aesthetic retreat into floral intimacy, the characteristically Victorian dream of recovering a lost, chaste freshness set apart from adult modernity, the neverland romance of idealized innocence, unattainable longing. Notice especially the sigh-like swells building to quick peaks in the center, then exhaling with melancholy—again, an Elgarian signature.

Serenade for Strings (first mvmt)—Adrian Boult, LPO, 5---0:00-0:54

Following a decade marked largely by the composition of choral-festival pieces (*The Light of Life*, *Caractacus*, and others—important formative works in the Elgar canon) came the composer’s musical breakthrough in 1898-99. This was the “*Enigma*” Variations for orchestra—surely among the first of his overtly “confessional” pieces—and the work in which Elgar’s mature style finally locked into place. He was now on his way to becoming England’s most celebrated composer. We all know the underlying premise of the piece: The initially stated “Enigma” theme, surely in part representing Elgar himself, is subjected to fourteen

contrasting variations, each providing a musical portrait of a member of Elgar's circle of close friends—his “friends pictured within,” as he put it.

But at the heart of the *Enigma* lies the fundamental Elgarian paradox. On the one hand, the piece often brims over with animated conviviality and amusing private references, and these would seem to be positive celebrations of intimate friendship. On the other hand, as Elgar remarked some thirteen years later, for him the *Enigma* theme had always meant the opposite: it “embodied” “my sense of the loneliness of the artist.” In other words—and paradoxically—this tribute to friendship sprang from Elgar's sense of wistful distance, irremediable isolation, and disturbing separateness from his circle of friends.

Enigma: Andrew Litton, Royal Phil. Orch 5---0:00-1:21 (theme, complete)

“If only.” “If only.” With the “Enigma” Variations we encounter Elgar's simultaneous contradictions, his obsession with dark secrets, ciphers, and riddles—many of which remain still unsolved. Now a famous composer, Elgar continued to conceive portions of his music as encrypted confessions for an otherwise unspoken inner life frequently shot through with longing, depression, and loneliness. Against such a backdrop the many passages of exuberant, patriotic, *nobilmente* music in Elgar can sometimes strike us as cover-ups, as hijinks, japes, and manufactured high spirits, as the conjuring-up of a “better land” at least momentarily erasing the loneliness underneath.

In 1901 the young critic Ernest Newman dined with the Elgars and the dinner conversation happened to touch on the topic of suicide. Newman reported that Elgar's wife steered the conversation quickly in another direction, then whispered to Newman [and I quote]

“that Edward was always talking of making an end to himself.” 1901, it might be added, was also the year of Elgar’s high-spirited *Cockaigne* overture—another cover-up?—and of the first two of the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, the first of which, of course, contains Elgar’s most famous *nobilmente* tune, which would overlay with a patriotic text in the *Coronation Ode* of 1902, “Land of Hope and Glory.”

But his most ambitious achievement of this time was another massive choral and orchestral setting—a bit earlier, from 1900—of Cardinal John Henry Newman’s *The Dream of Gerontius*, an explicitly Roman Catholic visionary poem of deathbed suffering, death itself, and the soul’s reawakening into an incandescently vivid, ultimate world of angels, demons, and judgment. For Elgar, steeped in the English choral-festival tradition, this 90-minute work was a high point: “This is the best of me,” he wrote at the end of the autograph score. Elgar’s compositional mastery was everywhere apparent: it was clearly a post-Wagnerian work, pulled together by recurring, more or less officially labeled leitmotifs and with allusions to the style of *Parsifal* and the *Ring* very much in evidence—and yet Elgar managed to find his own distinctive voice in all of this. Here’s a brief sample from Part 2 of *The Dream of Gerontius*—part of the reawakening after death: The leading Angel—a mezzo-soprano—announces to the Soul that it is now crossing the threshold into the presence of judgment, and a Choir of Angelicals sings the celebrated chorus, “Praise to the Holiest in the Height / And in the depth be praise.” In terms of style, notice the Valkyrie-like music for the mezzo—a mezzo-Brunnhilde as Angel, as it were—giving way to a climactic, largely diatonic Elgarian chorus:

*Gerontius*: Britten, Yvonne Minton, CD2/track 5---0:55-1:55

*Gerontius* failed famously at its Birmingham Festival premiere in 1900 but recovered in a Düsseldorf performance in 1902 conducted by a much-impressed Richard Strauss, who after the performance raised a glass to Elgar as the first English “progressivist.” Elgar’s broader career was now solidly launched, and official honors started pouring in: dinner with King Edward and the Prince of Wales in 1904, a knighthood later in the same year for “Sir Edward Elgar,” a professorship at the University of Birmingham that took effect in 1905, more commissions, and so on. Now around the age of fifty, the composer had achieved celebrity status--though not without controversy. Following *Gerontius*, his plan had been to write a cycle of leitmotif-grounded oratorios based on the New Testament—something like a *Ring*-cycle of English oratorios, and in fact he composed two of them, *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, before abandoning the project with some disappointment.

And for all of it, there had as yet been no symphonies from Elgar—though he had toyed with the idea in the late 1890s--no concertos, no longer instrumental works. In 1905 Ernest Newman put his finger directly on the apparent problem: Was Elgar essentially a miniaturist incapable of larger symphonic forms? “[Elgar] is at his best either when he gets a fine poetic text that burns like a flame within him . . . or when he is working at a kind of necklet of gems—as in the [*Enigma*] Variations . . . where the miniature form absolves him from the necessity of running on for a single moment after he has become tired.” Elgar finally took up the challenge in 1907-1908 with another watershed work that launched an entirely new phase to his career. This was the enormously successful First Symphony—a musical and cultural monument marking (as was widely noted) the real moment of entrance of English composition onto the international symphonic platform. It was initiated with one of the

broadest, most impressive melodies in the entire symphonic literature. And again, the melody was filled with Elgarian musical signatures: the neo-Handelian walking bass, the full-throated, post-Wagnerian orchestral doubling, the noble inner swells—though always giving the sense that the melody might well be incapable of sustaining itself without such trembling energizers—and finally, the characteristic fading-away of the vision into fairyland nostalgia, as though the vision were, at the end, dissolved and lost, a vision of a past that no longer is:

First Symphony: --- Boult -- (2nd stanza of “big tune”) 1:35-3:03.

Elgar had now begun the series of his most ambitious symphonic works—and each took on more and more of the air of an intense, encrypted personal confession. These works arose from a complex personal blend that included fervent high spirits, a perhaps Platonic love for the woman he called “Windflower” (Alice-Stuart Wortley), generous portions of longing and nostalgia, often-shattered hopes, and the dark depression that Elgar was experiencing more regularly. The Violin Concerto of 1910 was another huge success—it was compared favorably with Beethoven’s—but the masterly Second Symphony of 1911 (with its stark contrasts and quick changes of mood) was less immediately successful. Similar fates met the overtly confessional symphonic ode *The Music Makers* (1912) and the meticulously detailed “symphonic study,” *Falstaff* (1913). And now new, more dissonant breezes were blowing in the musical world—breezes decidedly unsympathetic to Elgarian concerns: In 1912, Schoenberg’s *Five Pieces for Orchestra* were played in London, and Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* was performed there shortly after its 1913 Paris premiere. In a stroke or two, “musical

modernism” now meant something different—and Elgar, still mourning nostalgically the loss of the childhood’s wholeness, was now seeing yet another world slip out of his grasp.

But then again, so was Europe, on the eve of the First World War. On the 26th of June 1914, one month and two days before the assassination of the Habsburg Archduke Francis Ferdinand, Elgar made his second visit to the studio, “His Master’s Voice,” to conduct and record the big tune of first *Pomp and Circumstance* March, along with most of the fourth march and the *Salut d’amour*. As it turned out, the recordings were all memorable images of a musical and cultural world on the edge of a precipice about to be swept away forever. Elgar’s 1914 recording of his most well-known tune may strike us as surprisingly slow—Jerrold Northrup Moore has argued that its tempo was necessitated by inadequate technology—but one wonders. (On the same day he did not conduct the trio of the 4th march this slowly, for example.) The assembled orchestral musicians, we are also told, were among London’s “most experienced.” Here’s the man himself on the eve of the Great War, the 26th of June 1914.

Pomp No. 1 (Elgar 26 June 1914) ---- HMV recording (track 2:---0:20-1:37)

The war years, obviously, took their toll, and Elgar’s music took on an even more melancholy, bleak, and valedictory cast. As he put it to his confidante Alice Stuart-Wortley in 1917, “Yes: everything good & nice & clean & fresh & sweet is far away—never to return.” In 1918-1919—the years just before the death of his wife in 1920—we encounter a kind of special “late style” flowering—in effect, reflecting on and bidding farewell to his entire composing career. Here we have three chamber works—a violin sonata, a string quartet, and a piano quintet—as well as the Cello Concerto. The desperately anguished concerto is of course



the most well-known of these. But who but Elgar could have composed the deeply warm, yet unutterably lonely, post-Brahmsian slow movement to the Piano Quintet, surely one of the most profoundly felt passages that he ever wrote? Here again, Elgar the man stands before us—but pay attention not only the warm beginning, but also to the heavy sighs and driftings into yearning dream, and before too long, the inevitable decay into descending sequences, and dying glimmers, as the vision fades, comes apart. For the Elgarian, this can be special territory, where every moment of the music discloses something new, something essential.

Piano Quintet, 2nd movement (Adagio) (Medici Quartet, John Bingham)—first 1:20

After the death of his wife, a shattered Elgar withdrew further in the 1920s and early 1930s: composing much less frequently—and only small, occasional pieces at that—but committing much of his earlier music to gramophone recording. In late 1932 the BBC commissioned a Third Symphony from Sir Edward, now 75 years old. Throughout the following year he produced 127 pages of manuscript sketches for the symphony, which was to include music from several earlier works either completed, such as the 1923 incidental music for a [*King*] *Arthur* play, or abandoned, such as the second *Cockaigne* Overture and the oratorio *The Last Judgement*. Many of the sketches and drafts focussed on the first movement's exposition and recapitulation, though revealing little nothing certain about the development; the other movements were represented by a few telling, often harmonized thematic blocks, sometimes borrowed from other pieces but also with large gaps of continuation and structure.

At Elgar's death in 1934 the symphony was left in this state—along with Elgar's wishes that no-one should “tinker” with it (as he put it)—and there it remained for around 60 years. As I'm sure we all know, the task of realizing the symphony on the basis of the sketches and drafts was eventually given by the Elgar family to Anthony Payne—an immense project—and its recording and premiere in 1998 instantly became one of the most talked-about events of the past year's concert world—reviewed and assessed (and admired!) everywhere. Toward the end of our panel today, we'll return to this “new” Third Symphony and discuss it directly. For the moment, let's hear only part—a little under two minutes (about two-thirds)—of the first movement's exposition, a C-minor *Allegro molto maestoso* (originally intended about twenty years earlier for the oratorio *The Last Judgement*)—a first subject that Elgar by and large fully drafted, though he scored only the opening few bars: we'll hear the bold and surging, parallel-harmony first subject leading to a lovely *cantabile* second subject in E-flat major, sweeping upwards and downwards in enticing sequences—quite new and quintessential Elgar, speaking again after more than 60 years.

Elgar-Payne 3rd, first movement, 0:00-1:48.

Wonderful music indeed, and we'll return to it at the end of our panel. For now, however, we'll call an end to our opening tour of sound-snapshots and turn to our panelists, who will help us in our viewing of a little-known, brief film of Elgar.

(Introduce)

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**Dr. Robert Anderson** took his first degree at Cambridge (England) and his doctorate in music at the City University, London. He has given many continuing education courses for London University, and broadcasts frequently for the BBC on musical subjects. He has conducted all Bach's church cantatas in London city churches and most Elgar choral works at the Royal Albert Hall, London. He has written criticism mainly for *The Times of London* and *The Musical Times*. His books have included a catalog for the British Museum of ancient Egyptian musical instruments, a work on Wagner, and two Elgarian studies, the first called *Elgar in Manuscript* followed by the present Elgar volume in the *Master Musicians* series. He's currently planning a book on Elgar and chivalry. A major project has been close involvement with the first 13 volumes of the *Elgar Complete Edition*.

**James Hepokoski**, distinguished McKnight professor of musicology at the University of Minnesota, is the author of a chapter on the Elgar symphonies in the recent collection, *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. D. Kern Holoman (1997). More generally, his work has concentrated on larger issues of musical modernism, aesthetics, national styles, and form around the turn of the century. He is the author of *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge, 1993) and books on Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff* (Cambridge, 1983 and 1987), as well as several essays on Debussy, Strauss, Sibelius, Dvořák, Ives, and, most recently, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. He has been a co-editor of the musicological journal *nineteenth-century Music* since 1993, and is joining the department of music at Yale University in 1999.

**Michael Konnody** was born in Manchester in 1926. Apart from three wartime years in the Royal Navy, during which he served in the British Pacific Fleet, he has been on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* since 1941. He was northern editor

of the *Daily Telegraph* from 1960 to 1986 but had begun writing music criticism for it in 1950. In 1986, he became its joint chief music critic and in 1989 became music critic of the *Sunday Telegraph*. He has written several books, including *The Halle Tradition* (1900), *The Halle 1858-1983* (1982), *Portrait of Manchester* (1971), *History of the Royal Manchester College of Music* (1970), and *Barbirolli, Conductor Laureate* (1971). Among his other books are an edition of Charles Halle's autobiography (1972), a history of the first 21 years of the Royal Northern College of Music (1994), studies of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Britten, Walton, Strauss, and Mahler and the *Oxford Dictionary of Music* and *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*. His large-scale biography of Richard Strauss will be published by Cambridge University Press in January 1999. He is a member of the board of directors of the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. For his services to music, he was appointed OBE in 1981 and CBE in June 1997.

**Patrick McCreless** is professor of music at Yale University. From 1983 to 1998 he was on the faculty of the school of music of the University of Texas at Austin. He has also taught at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester and the University of Chicago. He has published widely on the operas of Wagner, including a monograph, *Wagner's Siegfried: Its Drama, Its History, and Its Music*. He has also published essays and book chapters on the theory and analysis of chromatic music in the nineteenth century; Schenkerian theory; literary theory and music; and the history of music theory. He is an associate editor of *Nineteenth-Century Music*, and he served as president of the Society for Music Theory, 1993-95. In addition to his scholarly work, he has in recent years remained active as an organist and as a conductor of new music.

**Anthony Payne** was born in London in 1936. After doing national service he studied at Durham University. After graduating, he

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pursued a career as a freelance musicologist, journalist and lecturer, reviewing regularly for publications such as *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

In the mid 1960s, he composed *Phoenix Mass* for chorus and brass ensemble, and commissions swiftly followed. His *Concerto for Orchestra* was chosen for the ISCM World Music Days in Boston in 1976, and BBC commissions have included two major orchestral works for the Proms, *The Spirit's Harvest* (1985), and *Time's Arrow* (1990), as well as the String Quartet (1978), and *Empty Landscape* *Haar's Tase* (1995). His works have been premiered by the Hallé and English Chamber Orchestras, the BBC Singers, the Chilingirian and Mulici String Quartets, and the Nash, Endymian, and Fires of London ensembles. His most recent work, a Piano Trio, was premiered at the Wigmore Hall in April 1998.

February 1998 saw the premiere by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Andrew Davis of his reconstruction of Elgar's Third Symphony. A CD issued by NMC Recordings soon followed, along with other British performances at the Royal Albert Hall Proms, Barbican Centre, and in Birmingham, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Bristol, Liverpool, and Manchester, with orchestras including the London Symphony, Halle, Bournemouth, and BBC Scottish Symphony. In November 1998, the Philadelphia Orchestra gave the U.S. premiere under Andrew Davis, and performances by the Chicago Symphony and National Symphony Orchestra follow in March.

Anthony Payne currently reviews for *The Independent*, and *Country Life*, and is a broadcaster and lecturer. He has been Darius Milhaud Professor at Mills College, Oakland, has taught at The New South Wales Conservatorium and the University of Western Australia, and has given seminars at Cornell, Harvard, Penn, Princeton, Rice, Stanford, and USC. He has written books on *Schoenberg* (Oxford University Press) and *Frank Bridge* (Thames). *Elgar's Third Symphony The Story of the Reconstruction* was published by Faber & Faber in August 1998.

Founded in 1985, the **Berlin Philharmonic Piano Quartet** comprising three string

players from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, plus the eminent Russian pianist Pavel Gililov—is among the few permanently established ensembles of its type. They have performed throughout Europe and Japan, as well as at numerous important festivals. Their distinguished interpretations of the standard classical and romantic works are coupled with a strong commitment to broadening the repertory with major commissions. Their recordings on the Koch label (three to date) have received enthusiastic critical acclaim.

Russian-born pianist **Pavel Gililov** studied at the Leningrad Conservatory and was a prize winner in Moscow, at the Concorso Viotti in Vercelli, as well as at the Chopin Competition in Warsaw. He has taught master classes at the Music Hochschule in Cologne since 1982. His concert activities have taken him to the stages of Paris, Vienna, Berlin, New York, London, Milan, Buenos Aires, and Sydney. He has also performed with a number of leading orchestras and has been heard on frequent radio broadcasts. Mr. Gililov has premiered a number of new piano concertos dedicated to him by their composers.

**Rainer Mehne**, violin, was a student of Ludwig Bus in Saarbruecken and of Andre Gertier in Hannover before joining the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1975. He is an active soloist and chamber musician, appearing frequently on television, radio, and recordings both as a violin soloist and in collaboration with noted ensembles like the Philharmonisches Oktett Berlin and the Philharmonische Virtuosen Berlin.

**Heinz Ortleb**, viola, studied in Berlin with Hans Duenschede and Hans Mahike. From 1957 to 1966, he was a member of the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra under Ferenc Fricsay before being appointed to the Berlin Philharmonic. His intense love for chamber music reaches back to 1952 when he first joined the Westphal Quartett, and he has toured worldwide with this ensemble and others, such as the Philharmonische Virtuosen Berlin, the "Berliner Harmoniker," and the Berlin Chamber Orchestra.