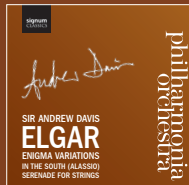


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ELGAR

FROISSART • SYMPHONY No.1 • SYMPHONY No.2

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

CD 1 [1] **Overture, Froissart, Op.19** 15.01

Symphony No.1 in A flat major, Op.55

[2] I. Andante nobilmente e semplice - allegro 7.32

[3] II. Allegro 7.53

[4] III. Adagio 11.45

[5] IV. Allegro - lento - allegro molto 12.11

Total timings 54.23

CD 2 **Symphony No.2 in E flat major, Op.63**

[1] I. Allegro vivace e nobilmente 18.54

[2] II. Larghetto 13.56

[3] III. Rondo - presto 8.38

[4] IV. Moderato e maestoso 15.56

Total timings 57.23

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ELGAR

FROISSART • SYMPHONY NO.1
SYMPHONY NO.2

Elgar: Symphonies 1 and 2 and Overture, *Froissart*

In the monumental Victorian era, with Britain ruling the waves and at the zenith of its economic, military, industrial and imperial power, artists, architects, poets and polymaths seemed to be ten-a-penny. The likes of Paxton, Alfred Waterhouse and George Gilbert Scott were erecting the grandest or most innovative structures, from sophisticated private residences, places of worship and on to Whitehall and the Crystal Palace. Alma-Tadema, Burne-Jones, Millais and co. visited classical poise, pre-Raphaelite beauty and artistic controversy on the Royal Academy, while Dickens, Wilde, Tennyson, Lewis Carroll and the Brownings measured conservatism with outright scandal, either on the stage or in published volumes. And then there were others, such as John Ruskin and William Morris whose brilliance shone over numerous arts and disciplines.

While Great Britain was making the running in most of the arts and crafts, music seemed barely to be on the agenda – at least so far as home-grown talent was concerned. To the

Germans, Britain was ‘Das Land ohne Musik’ (‘the country without music’) in the Nineteenth Century, and the island certainly comes up short when musical luminaries are the name of the game. This is hardly to say that the British Isles were not awash with great music – they certainly were, but little of it was indigenous. While Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven had rapidly become staples of the orchestral, chamber and instrumental classical canon, music for religious purposes had been somewhat stifled ever since the Puritan tirades against liturgical and theatrical music. The oratorios of Handel neatly side-stepped these issues by being neither liturgical in initiation nor purely theatrical in conception. Instead they were regarded as merely sacred and dramatic, which seemed to please everyone, even many a hard-line Nonconformist. This template was set before Victoria became monarch and Handelian oratorio, rather than opera, was setting the musical pulse of the nation. By the time Victoria and Albert were Queen and Prince Consort, Mendelssohn was already

well known in Britain, having edited a few of Handel's oratorios for publication in London and was busily breathing Bach's *St Matthew Passion* back to life again in the public consciousness. His oratorio, *Elijah*, composed for the Birmingham Festival in 1846, and now with an English text, further endeared him to the British public and helped re-invigorate English composers into moving toward the European mainstream. As to orchestral music, the fascination with the Viennese School of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven was gradually picking up on the later Romantic symphonists and increasingly Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and others were being played by groups such as the Crystal Palace Orchestra and, by the turn of the century, even Richard Strauss's orchestral works were receiving fine notices in the United Kingdom. In England, the likes of William Sterndale Bennett, Edward German, Arthur Sullivan and Hubert Parry were not quite taking the symphonic bull by the horns with the gusto that their continental counterparts managed.

For the first great British symphonies of modern times which have stood the test of time and can lay claim to admission to the symphonic canon, we must turn to Edward Elgar, who, like Brahms, left symphonic

composition until later in life. His first major work for orchestra was the concert overture **Froissart, Op.19** which was premièred to excellent reviews in 1890 at the Three Choirs Festival in Elgar's own heartland of Worcester. By turns rip-roaring, noble and romantic, the overture is a splendid evocation of the life and events described by the famous medieval chronicler Jean Froissart. With the success of a lengthy orchestral piece behind him, Elgar initially attempted to write a symphony based on the life of the military hero, General Gordon of Khartoum. The press carried notices to the effect that Elgar was working on it in 1899, the same year as the highly successful première of the *Enigma Variations*. This 'Gordon Symphony' seems not to have amounted to a great deal in terms of a remotely finished product, and indeed his **Symphony No.1 in A flat major, Op.55** did not appear until almost a decade later, in 1908. He was not to be hurried into producing a sub-standard work and even accepted and subsequently refused a commission for a symphony in 1904 from the Leeds Festival Committee. The Symphony proved well worth the wait and was spectacularly well-received at its world première at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester on 3 December 1908 and almost riotously cheered to the rafters on its London première four days later at the Queen's

Hall. Elgar's close friend and musical confidante, August Jaeger wrote of the London performance:

The Hall was packed ... I saw [Hubert] Parry, [Edward] German ... After the first movement [Elgar] was called out; again, several times after the third, and then came the great moment. After that superb Coda the audience seemed to rise at E[lgar] when he appeared. Never heard such frantic applause after any novelty, nor such shouting. Five times he had to appear before they were pacified. People stood up and even on their seats to get a view.

The great Austrian conductor Hans Richter not only wielded the baton at the symphony's early performances but was also the work's dedicatee. He was thrilled by the piece, calling it, 'The greatest symphony of modern times'. Jaeger himself considered the work's third movement, 'not only one of the very greatest slow movements since Beethoven, but I consider it *worthy of that master*'. Praise indeed.

The work opens with what Elgar's wife Alice, noted in her diary as, 'E ... Playing great beautiful tune – ie the tune of the Symphony, the one which opens and closes it and influences many musical happenings along the way'. This expansive, noble melody does indeed infuse the symphony. The second movement reverses this

theme while the third continues to develop it in one of the most beautiful slow movements that Elgar composed. The Finale resumes the musical argument and the struggles of the opening movement before ending in a resplendent restatement of the 'great beautiful tune' with which the symphony commenced, now in fully resplendent orchestral garb.

Attempts have been made to give the symphony an extra-musical programme, but Elgar himself saw none but the 'wide experience of human life, a great charity (love) and a massive hope in the future'. Further, in a lecture given in 1905 Elgar appears to presage his own emergence as a symphonist:

I hold that the symphony without a programme is the highest development of art ... It seems to me that because the greatest genius of our days, Richard Strauss, recognises the symphonic-poem as a fit vehicle for his splendid achievements, some writers are inclined to be positive that the symphony is dead ... but when the looked-for genius comes, it may be absolutely revived.

Was Elgar really referring to himself? Who knows, but if so then he was certainly not far off the mark. Much encouraged by the success of the First Symphony, there wasn't long to

wait for another. After completing his Violin Concerto for Fritz Kreisler, again to tumultuous acclaim, the **Symphony No.2 in E flat major, Op.62** was completed in double-quick time and again performed at the Queen's Hall on 24 May 1911, now with the composer on the rostrum. Dedicated to the recently deceased King Edward VII, this time there was to be no jubilant celebration: the hall was some way from a sell-out and, according to one newspaper critic, the audience reacted to the work with 'much favour, though with rather less enthusiasm than usual'. Another described the reaction thus: 'the symphony was received with unhesitating and most cordial warmth'. Such damning with faint praise was a shock to Elgar who asked his friend and the orchestra's leader, W.H. Reed, 'What is the matter with them, Billy? They sit there like a lot of stuffed pigs'. Subsequent performances were very poorly attended and there was to be no repeat of the 90-odd performances the First Symphony received in its first year. Elgar was so put-out that not even his appointment to the Order of Merit in George V's Coronation Honours list did much to lift his spirits.

These days the Second Symphony is hailed at least as much as the First, and it is therefore difficult to pinpoint quite what the audience

didn't care for in the piece. It is written for similar orchestral forces and contains Elgar's trademark wistfulness as well as plenty of gusto. It is certainly a more complex work and is rather less dramatic than the First Symphony, although both works are clearly identifiably by the same composer writing in the same idiom. It has been suggested that the symphony's peaceful ending did not engender the rapturous behaviour from audiences which may have reacted more favourably to a rousing finale.

The composer's annotations for a programme note on the work give mention to the occasional extra-musical inspiration. While these are informative they in no way tell us what any particular passage or movement is actually about and Elgar was less than willing to encourage too much speculation – his gnomic utterances are often about as much help as the composer likely wanted them to be. For example, above the first movement, which he described as 'tremendous in energy' he wrote a quotation from Shelley on the score: 'Rarely, rarely comest thou, / Spirit of Delight'. He later further explained, 'To get near the mood of the symphony the whole of Shelley's poem may be read, but the music does not illustrate the whole of the poem, neither does the poem wholly elucidate the music'. If this

explains anything it directs the listener to the many questions and battles that rage at times in the symphony and point rather more towards Elgar's own inner complexity than to any overt influence from the outer world. Even the funereal, elegiac *Larghetto* which might be considered as mourning the death of Edward VII was written, according to the composer, before the death of the King, and that the spirit of the work as a whole, 'is intended to be of high & pure joy: there are retrospective passages of sadness but the whole of the sorrow is smoothed out & ennobled in the last movement, which ends in a calm & *I hope & intend*, elevated mood'. And yet, the composer Herbert Howells, in a 1938 broadcast, remembered Elgar describing the slow movement as indeed that of a funeral cortège for a king.

One absolute certainty, straight from the creator's pen is that the third movement was, 'sketched on the piazza of S. Mark, Venice. I took down the rhythm of the opening bars from some itinerant musicians who seemed to take a great satisfaction in the broken accent of the first four bars'. There are numerous other utterances which either muddy the waters or possibly supply flickers of actual extra-musical influences. But as already noted, Elgar himself has already explained his symphonic credo: 'I hold that the symphony without a programme is the highest development of art'. And with both of his symphonies, Elgar certainly reached the pinnacle of his own complex, exuberant, thoughtful and splendid art.

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BIOGRAPHIES

SIR ANDREW DAVIS

Since 2000, Sir Andrew Davis has served as Music Director & Principal Conductor of Lyric Opera of Chicago, where he will conduct three of the eight

productions presented in the 2009-2010 season. Maestro Davis is the Conductor Laureate of the Toronto Symphony (having previously served as the Principal Conductor), the Conductor Laureate of the BBC Symphony Orchestra (having served

as the 2nd longest running Chief Conductor since its founder, Sir Adrian Boult) and the former Music Director of the Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Born in 1944 in Hertfordshire, England, Maestro Davis studied at King's College, Cambridge, where he was an organ scholar before taking up the baton. His diverse repertoire ranges from baroque to contemporary, and his vast conducting credits span the symphonic and operatic and choral worlds. Sir Andrew is a great proponent of twentieth-century works including those by Janáček, Messiaen, Boulez, Elgar, Tippett, and Britten, in addition to the core symphonic and operatic composers' works.

With the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Maestro Davis has led concerts at the London Proms and on tour to Hong Kong, Japan, the US, and Europe. He has conducted all of the major orchestras of the world from the Chicago Symphony to the Berlin Philharmonic to the Royal Concertgebouw, and at opera houses and festivals throughout the world including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala and the Bayreuth Festival.

Maestro Davis is also a prolific recording artist. He has recorded for Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, Warner Classics International, Capriccio, EMI, and CBS. In 2008, Sir Andrew released Elgar's Violin Concertos featuring violinist James Ehnes and London's Philharmonia Orchestra

on the Onyx Classics label, which won Gramophone's coveted "Best of Category – Concerto" award. Recent releases include Beethoven's Violin Concerto with violinist Min-Jyn Kim and the Philharmonia Orchestra on the Sony label and a solo recital of operatic favorites sung by soprano Nicole Cabell with the London Philharmonic Orchestra on the Decca label, which in 2008 won the Solti Prize from the French Académie du Disque Lyrique.

In 1992, Maestro Davis was created a Commander of the British Empire for his services to British music, and in 1999 he was made a Knight Bachelor in the New Year Honours List. In 1991, he received the Royal Philharmonic Society/Charles Heidsieck Music Award.

In the 2009-2010 season he conducts productions of *Tosca*, *Faust*, and *The Damnation of Faust* at Lyric Opera of Chicago and *Hansel and Gretel* at the Metropolitan Opera. He will be seen on the podium with the New York Philharmonic, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Sir Andrew makes return appearances with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Proms and in London, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

For more information about Maestro Davis, please visit his web site at www.sirandrewdavis.com.

philharmonia orchestra

The Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. Acknowledged as the UK's foremost musical pioneer, with an extraordinary recording legacy, the Philharmonia leads the field for its quality of playing, and for its innovative approach to audience development, residencies, music education and the use of new technologies in reaching a global audience. Together with its relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, most importantly its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Philharmonia Orchestra is at the heart of British musical life.

Today, the Philharmonia has the greatest claim of any orchestra to be the UK's National Orchestra. It is committed to presenting the same quality, live music-making in venues throughout the country as it brings to London and the great concert halls of the world. Every year the Orchestra performs more than 200 concerts, as well as presenting chamber performances by the Soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and recording scores for films, CDs and computer games. Since 1995 the Orchestra's work has been underpinned by its much admired UK Residency Programme, which began with the launch of its residencies at the Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank

Centre, and now also includes De Montfort Hall in Leicester, the Anvil in Basingstoke and a series of partnerships across Kent and the Thames Gateway, based in Canterbury. The Orchestra's international extensive touring schedule each season involves appearances at the finest concert halls across Europe, the USA and Asia.

During its first six decades, the Philharmonia Orchestra has collaborated with most of the great classical artists of the 20th century. Conductors associated with the Orchestra include Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini, Cantelli, Karajan and Giulini. Otto Klemperer was the first of many outstanding Principal Conductors, and other great names have included Lorin Maazel (Associate Principal Conductor), Riccardo Muti (Principal Conductor and Music Director) and Giuseppe Sinopoli (Music Director). As well as Esa-Pekka Salonen, current titled conductors are Christoph von Dohnányi (Honorary Conductor for Life), Sir Charles Mackerras (Principal Guest Conductor), Kurt Sanderling (Conductor Emeritus) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate).

The Philharmonia Orchestra continues to pride itself on its long-term collaborations with the finest musicians of our day, supporting new as



well as established artists. This policy extends into the Orchestra itself, where many of the players have solo or chamber music careers as well as their work with the Orchestra. The Philharmonia's Martin Musical Scholarship Fund has for many years supported talented musicians at the start of their careers and a new Orchestral Award, inaugurated in 2005, allows two young players every year to gain performing experience within the Orchestra.

The Orchestra is also recognised for its innovative programming policy, at the heart of which is a commitment to performing and commissioning new works by leading composers, among them the Artistic Director of its Music of Today series, Julian Anderson. Since 1945 the Philharmonia Orchestra

has commissioned more than 100 new works from composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Mark-Anthony Turnage and James MacMillan. The Philharmonia Orchestra's joint series with SBC, *Clocks and Clouds: The Music of György Ligeti*, won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Best Concert Series Award in 1997 and *Related Rocks: The Music of Magnus Lindberg*, was nominated for an RPS Award. Other recent awards for the Orchestra include the RPS Large Ensemble Award and two *Evening Standard* Awards for Outstanding Artistic Achievement and Outstanding Ensemble. In May 2007 PLAY.orchestra, a 'virtual Philharmonia Orchestra' created in partnership with Southbank Centre and Central St Martin's College of Art, won the RPS Education Award.

Throughout its history, the Philharmonia Orchestra has been committed to finding new ways to bring its top quality live performance to audiences worldwide, and to using new technologies to achieve this. Many millions of people since 1945 have enjoyed their first experience of classical music through a Philharmonia recording, and in 2008/9 audiences can engage with the Orchestra through webcasts, podcasts, downloads, computer games and film scores as well as through its unique interactive music education website launched in 2005, The Sound Exchange (www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange), which is now visited by almost 2 million people a year. In 2005 the Philharmonia

became the first ever classical music organisation to be shortlisted for a BT Digital Music Award, and in the same year the Orchestra presented the first ever concert webcast. Now more than 3500 people a month download free monthly Philharmonia video podcasts, which include artist interviews and features on repertoire and projects; these films are also watched by more than 60,000 people on YouTube. Recording and broadcasting both continue to play a significant part in the Orchestra's activities: since 2003 the Philharmonia has enjoyed a major partnership with Classic FM, as The Classic FM Orchestra on Tour, as well as continuing to broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Overture, Froissart recorded live at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre, London, 12 April 2007

Producer - Misha Donat Engineer - Mike Cox for Floating Earth

Symphony No. 1 recorded live at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre, London, 12 April 2007

Producer - Misha Donat Engineer - Mike Cox for Floating Earth

Symphony No. 2 recorded live at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre, London, 20 May 2007

Producer - Misha Donat Engineer - Mike Hatch for Floating Earth

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