

## Montgomery Philharmonic 2017 - 18 Our 12th Season : Old Friends ... New Friends

### Concert 1, Sunday, October 29, 2017 : Old Friends ... New Friends

Dvořák | Berwald | Elgar

#### About Edward Elgar –

Edward Elgar was regarded by Henry Purcell as the greatest English composer and was strongly influenced by Dvořák, Brahms, and Wagner for their chromaticism, and Berlioz, Massenet, Saint-Saens, and Delibes for their style of orchestration. From his earliest days as a composer, Elgar kept sketchbooks filled with thematic and organizational material. Whenever he had an idea, he would write it in his sketchbook and then, later, assemble pieces drawn from these notated ideas.

During the 1890's, Elgar's reputation grew as a composer writing mostly works for choir. He wrote many pieces for the great choir festivals of the English Midlands. These choir festivals kept him busy, but by 1898, he wrote that he "felt sick at heart over music" and he hoped to find more work writing larger pieces. Shortly thereafter, he wrote the *Enigma Variations*. The piece was premiered in London with the famous German conductor, Hans Richter and it received rave reviews from the London press.

This success sparked commissions for orchestral pieces and it was a time of great productivity. He wrote five *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* between 1901 and 1930, the first of which is most famous because it is always played at the last concert of the London Proms. People all over the world know this march and it is most famously used for graduations in the United States and the United Kingdom.

In March 1904, a three-day festival of Elgar's works was presented at Covent Garden—an honor never before bestowed on any English composer. Along with a sold-out crowd, King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra attended the first concert, at which Hans Richter conducted *The Dream of Gerontius*. Elgar conducted the complete *Sea Pictures*, the tone poem *Froissart*, *Enigma Variations*, the first two *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, and the premiere of a new orchestral work, *In the South (Alassio)*, a work inspired by an Italian holiday.

Elgar was appointed composition professor at the University of Birmingham, and on July 5, 1904, he was knighted at Buckingham Palace. Elgar continued to write important pieces, such as his *Violin Concerto* dedicated to the Fritz Kreisler, more *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, *Falstaff*, and *Symphonies 1 and 2*. When World War I broke out, he wrote pieces to help the war effort. Toward the end of the war, Elgar was in poor health so he moved to the countryside with his wife. While convalescing, he wrote several important works, including the *Violin Sonata in E minor*, the *Piano Quintet in A minor*, the *String Quartet in E minor*, and the *Cello Concerto in E minor*. By 1920, Elgar's music had fallen out of fashion, and on April 7, 1920, his wife died of lung cancer. The loss of Alice, his constant supporter, sent Elgar into a deep depression. He tried to overcome the depression by taking up several hobbies. Although he did not totally abandon composition, Elgar's output was limited and he seemed more interested in recording his music. He produced recordings of many of his famous pieces using Abbey Road Studios in London. These recordings caused a musical revival of his works, and in 1932, the BBC organized a festival of his works for his 75th birthday. Elgar was working on a 3rd symphony—an opera, *The Spanish Lady*—when he passed away.

- **Born:** June 2, 1857, Lower Broadheath, England
- **Died:** February 23, 1934, London, England
- **Nationality:** English
- **Compositions:** 2 symphonies, *Enigma Variations*, *Pomp and Circumstances Marches*, Violin Concerto, Cello Concerto, Choral Works including the *Dream of Gerontius*, chamber music and song cycles.
- **Father:** William Henry Elgar, violinist, organist, music publisher and piano tuner
- **Mother:** Ann Greening Elgar, patron of the arts
- **Spouse:** Caroline Alice Elgar
- **Children:** Carice Elgar

#### *Variations on an Original Theme, Opus 36 (Enigma Variations) (1898–99) – Edward Elgar (1857–1934)*

Elgar describes his process of writing perhaps the most famous set of variations in the symphonic repertoire as follows. On October 21, 1898, tired from teaching all day, he sat down at the piano and the melody that he improvised caught his wife's attention. When she mentioned that it was charming, Elgar began to improvise variations on the theme in a style that reflected some of his friends' personalities. These variations were expanded and orchestrated, and then published in 1899 by Novello & Co. Music Publishers. Elgar dedicated the work "to my friends pictured within," each variation being a musical sketch of one of his circle of close acquaintances. This small introduction to the piece caused people to wonder who the initials belonged to. Each small sketch is a brilliant variation on the original theme that depicts some aspect of one of Elgar's friends. There has been much research about these friends, and the Elgar Society research describes each variation below.

#### Theme (Enigma: Andante)

The charming, melodic contours of the G minor opening theme convey a sense of searching introspection.

In all, fourteen people and a dog are featured in the variations described below.

**First Variation, C.A.E.** – Elgar's wife, Alice, lovingly portrayed

**Second Variation, H.D.S.–P.** – Hew David Steuart-Powell, a pianist with whom Elgar played in chamber ensembles

**Third Variation, R.B.T.** – Richard Baxter Townshend, a friend whose caricature of an old man in an amateur theatre production is captured in the variation

**Fourth Variation, W.M.B.** – William Meath Baker, "country squire, gentleman and scholar," informing his guests of the day's arrangements

**Fifth Variation, R.P.A.** – Richard Arnold, son of the poet Matthew Arnold

**Sixth Variation, Ysobel** – Isabel Fitton, an amateur viola player from a musical family living in Malvern

**Seventh Variation, Troyte** – Arthur Troyte Griffith, a Malvern architect and close friend of Elgar throughout their lives; the variation focuses on Troyte's limited abilities as a pianist

**Eighth Variation, W.N.** – Winifred Norbury, known to Elgar through her association with the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society; the variation captures both her laugh and the atmosphere of her eighteenth century house

**Ninth Variation, Nimrod** – A. J. Jaeger, Elgar's great friend, whose encouragement did much to keep Elgar going during the period when he was struggling to secure a lasting reputation; the variation allegedly captures a discussion between them about Beethoven's slow movements

**Tenth Variation, Dorabella** – Dora Penney, daughter of the Rector of Wolverhampton and a close friend of the Elgars

**Eleventh Variation, G.R.S.** – George Sinclair, organist at Hereford Cathedral, although the variation allegedly portrays Sinclair's bulldog Dan paddling in the River Wye after falling in

**Twelfth Variation, B.G.N.** – Basil Nevinson, an amateur cellist who, with Elgar and Hew Steuart-Powell, completed the chamber music trio

**Thirteenth Variation, \*\*\*** – probably Lady Mary Lygon, a local noblewoman who sailed for Australia at about the time Elgar wrote the variation, which quotes from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. The use of asterisks rather than initials has, however, invited speculation that they conceal the identity of Helen Weaver, Elgar's fiancée for eighteen months in 1883–84 before she immigrated to New Zealand.

**Fourteenth Variation, E.D.U.** – Elgar himself (Edoo was Alice's pet name for him)

**Instrumentation** –2 flutes (2nd flute – piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in B-flat, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns in F, 3 trumpets on F, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, organ, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

#### Artifacts –

<http://www.elgar.org/welcome.htm> – Webpage of the Elgar Research Center

<http://elgar.org/elgarsoc/archive/> – Link to Elgar Society Journals



1. Elgar: In the South - Enigma Variations - John Eliot Gardiner & Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
2. Elgar: Orchestral Works - City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Woods & Sir Simon Rattle
3. Elgar: Enigma Variations & Holst: The Planets - London Symphony Orchestra & Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra



1. Edward Elgar (Shire Library)
2. Enigma Variations and Pomp and Circumstance Marches in Full Score (Dover Music Scores)
3. Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination

#### YouTube.com Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaPtKoL-FsM>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR9SmjmJz\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR9SmjmJz_4)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDe4Bg7c\\_IU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDe4Bg7c_IU)