

Marlow U3A Music Appreciation Group, Nov 2009

Sir Hubert Parry (1848-1918)

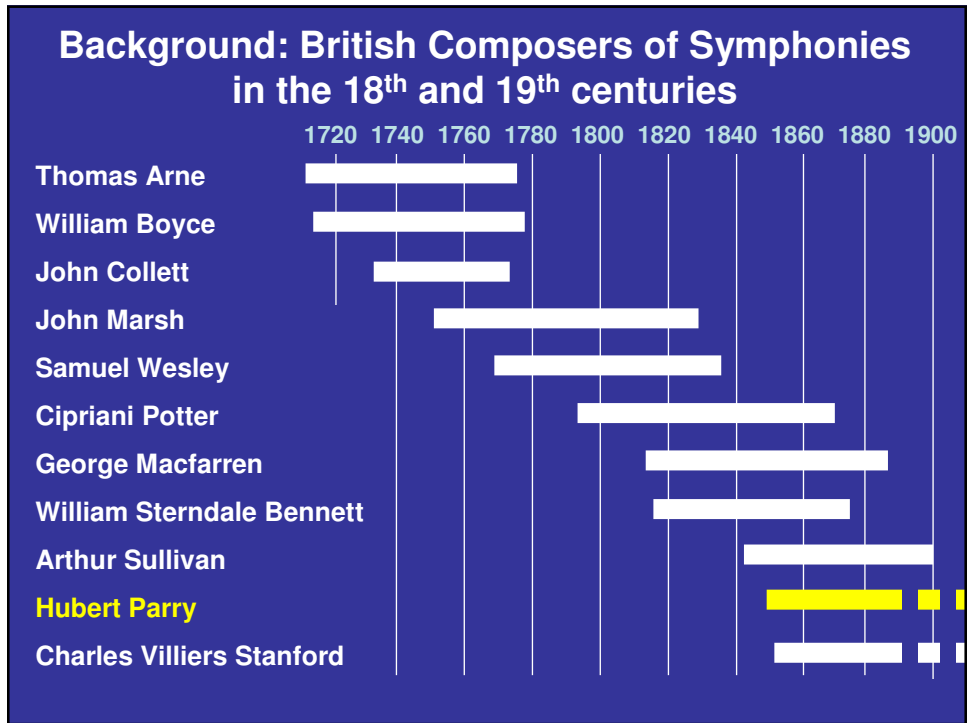
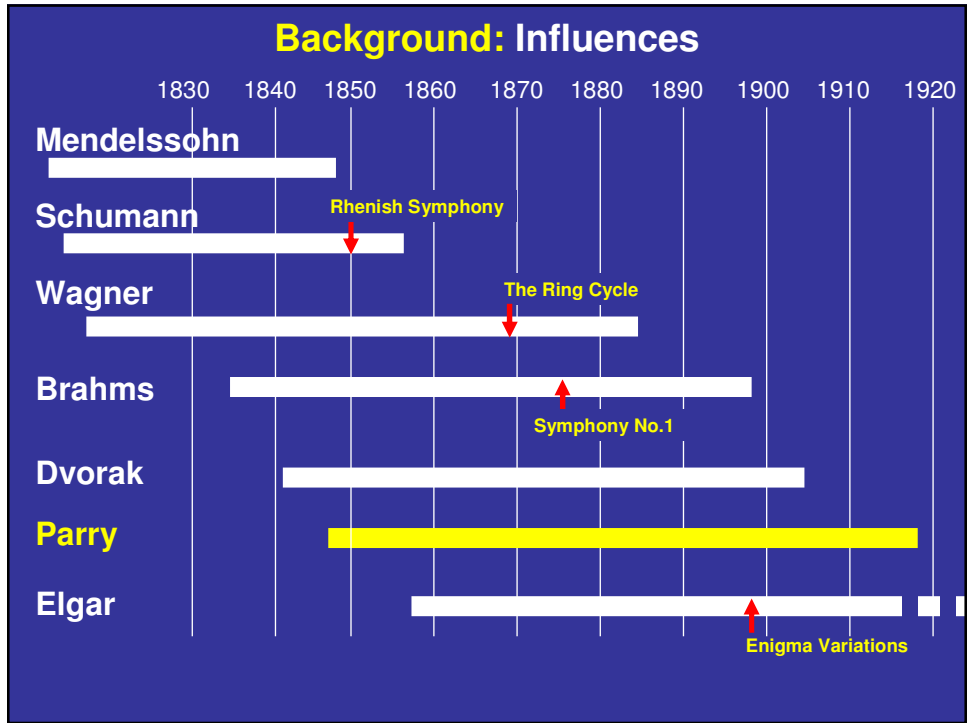


His Rise to National Prominence

Sir Hubert Parry (1848-1918)

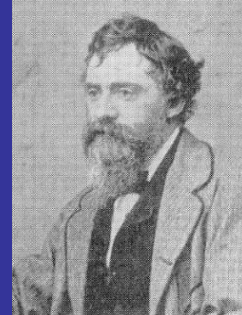
1. Background
2. The Early Years
3. Years of Struggle and Stylistic Experimentation
4. Rise to National Prominence (to 1890)

with emphasis on the orchestral works, especially Symphonies 1 - 3



The Early Years

- ♪ We begin with an extract from the diary of Parry's father, Thomas Gambier Parry, written in Bournemouth and an excerpt from the slow movement (*Maestoso*) of Parry's *Piano Concerto in F sharp major* (1880)



Thomas Gambier Parry
(Hubert's father)

The Early Years

“This is my little Hubert's birthday – this day three years ago he was born in this place. This is a very sweet place. There is a wild nature about the surrounding heathy plains. The high cliffs, commanding an immensely wide sea view, are clothed with ling and heather.”



Thomas Gambier Parry
(Hubert's father)

The Early Years

“As the evening grew dusky I wandered out upon the open heath above the house where I last looked upon the beloved form of my incomparable Isabel. It was a beautiful evening, warm as June and bright with stars.”



Isabella Parry
(Hubert's mother)

The Early Years

“Long and deep were the prayers that I made on that wide heath for my three children and myself. I called all to my recollection since that too happy day 12 years ago when I first made the acquaintance with my loved and now lost wife.”

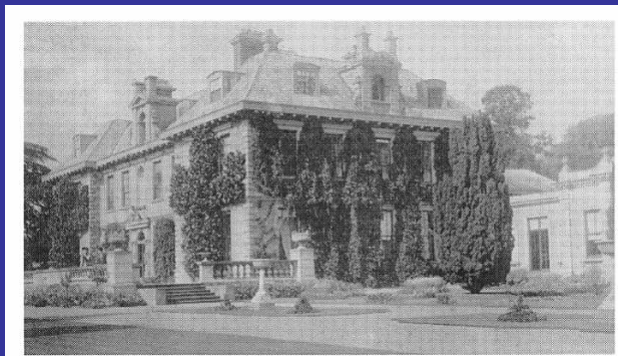


Isabella Parry
(Hubert's mother)

The Early Years

- ♪ Thomas Gambier Parry wrote those words on Hubert's third birthday
- ♪ His wife, Isabella, had been ill when heavily pregnant, and the strains of Hubert's birth sapped any remaining strength
- ♪ She died at the age of 32, only twelve days after Hubert was born.

- ♪ Thomas owned Highnam Court, close to Gloucester and the River Severn



9. Highnam Court

- ♪ But in the long-run it proved to be a drain on his finances

The Early Years: Eton and Oxford

- ♪ Parry's father discouraged him (and elder brother Clinton) from music as a career, and chose a tutor for Hubert at Eton who had little interest in music
- ♪ Nevertheless, Hubert sought musical tuition, and obtained it from Dr. George Elvey, organist of St. George's Chapel, Windsor

The Early Years: Eton and Oxford

- ♪ While at Eton and Oxford, Parry produced some small-scale works such as songs, anthems and piano music
- ♪ Music in England was dominated by Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn and the Anglican liturgy. So it is not surprising that Parry's early works were in a Mendelssohnian vein



The Early Years: Eton and Oxford

- Hubert was often invited to spend time at Wilton House, seat of the Earls of Pembroke, where he befriended Maude Herbert



The Early Years: Love Blooms

- Hubert and Maude soon became sweethearts. They met occasionally in London, and they corresponded
- However, Parry's family did not have the status or financial clout of the Pembrokes and the Herberts, so Hubert and Maude kept their relationship hidden from Lady Herbert.



- ♪ Eventually Maude informed Hubert that: *“I have received a most disagreeable letter from George (Pembroke) obliging me to tell Mama of our engagement”*
- ♪ Parry wrote in his 1870 diary: *“the crash came”* (a letter from Lady Herbert) *“correspondence and loving converse were stopped, and all was black”*

Letter from Lady Maude Herbert (1870)

“My dear Hubert

“I am very much grieved to have to write to you on the subject of Maude, but you leave me no alternative.

“I have never for one single moment led you to suppose that I could sanction an engagement between you, which would result in utter ruin and misery to both. I have never varied in my opposition to your wishes.”

Letter from Lady Maude Herbert (1870)

(speculating on joint future income)

“Now I ask you plainly if you think it *possible* for Maude to live upon that, educated as she has been and brought up in every luxury and comfort? Can you love her and wish to expose her to such utter misery? There is nothing but misery in store for poor Maude in such an alliance to which no parent or guardian of hers could *ever* give consent.”

Letter from Lady Maude Herbert (1870)

“How could you have the courage to entangle Maude into an engagement when you have no home to offer her and no prospect of one?”

“This thing must be altogether at an end. I can allow *no* correspondence between you, and you must release Maude from this tacit engagement. *It can never be.*”

Letter from Lady Maude Herbert (1870)

- ♪ Parry's reaction was of defiance. He stood fast in his intentions, but was forced to comply with her conditions.
- ♪ His agreement to find a "respectable career outside music" pleased his father as well as the Pembrokes/Herberts
- ♪ One of Lady Herbert's warnings was valid, however: **"Maude hates music except for your sake."**

- ♪ After Oxford, Parry entered into a partnership at Lloyds at the instigation of his father, and in the hope that Lady Herbert's opposition would relent
- ♪ But he retained his interest in music, and met Joachim, Walter Broadwood and Clara Schumann
- ♪ Through these acquaintances, his musical tastes developed towards Schumann and Brahms

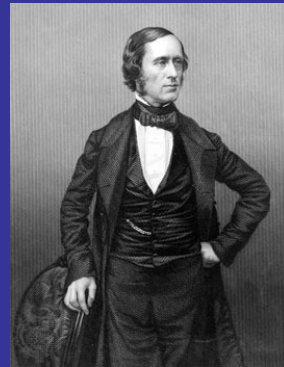
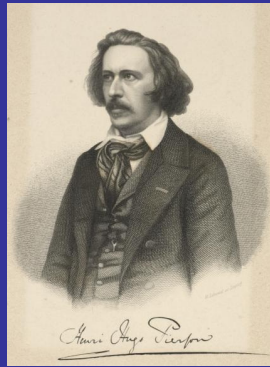
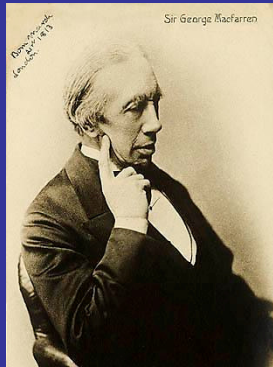
The Early Years: Marriage, 1872

- ♪ **Finally, the Herberts relented. Hubert and Maude were married at St.Paul's, Knightsbridge**
- ♪ **In the same year, Parry met Edward Dannreuther, a virtuoso pianist and champion of new music, especially Wagner**

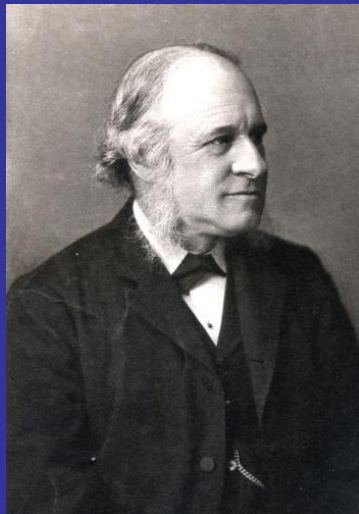
Years of Struggle and Stylistic Experimentation

Teachers and Mentors

- ♪ As well as advice from Dannreuther, Parry received tuition in composition from Sir George Macfarren, Henry Pierson and (briefly) Sir William Sterndale Bennett



Sir George Grove



- ♪ Grove promoted “the best music of all kinds”, including works by young British composers, through frequent concerts
- ♪ From 1875 he embarked on the production of his famous *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and commissioned Parry as author for selected articles

Sir George Grove

- ♪ As Grove's own workload grew, he entrusted more and more articles to Parry, both as originator and editor
- ♪ This at last gave Parry the opportunity to extricate himself from his partnership at Lloyds (which had not been fruitful) and concentrate on music.

Continual Health Problems

- ♪ But from his teens Parry suffered from a debilitating heart condition – *“an extraordinarily irregular action of the heart which hardly gave me an hour's peace. During the fits work was impossible”*
- ♪ Parry's doctors frequently prescribed rest and a holiday. But inactivity soon made him more anxious about the work that he should have been doing...

Stylistic Experimentation

♪ Parry now composed chamber music with more self-confidence, including:

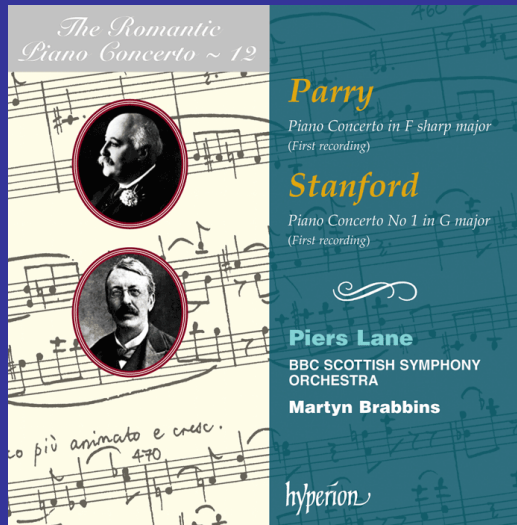
- ♪ *Grosses duo* for 2 pianos (1876)
- ♪ *Nonet* for wind instruments (1877)
- ♪ *Piano Sonatas 1 and 2* (1877)
- ♪ *Piano Trio No.1* (1879)
- ♪ *Fantasie Sonata* (1879)
- ♪ *Piano Quartet in A flat* (1879)

Stylistic Experimentation

♪ as well as orchestral works such as:

- ♪ *Concertstuck in G minor* (1877)
- ♪ *Overture to Guillem de Cabestanh* (1878)
- ♪ *Piano Concerto in F sharp* (1880) that we heard an extract from earlier

♪ The recording of the Piano Concerto was made with the assistance of Lloyds of London, in recognition of Parry's early career there



Stylistic Experimentation

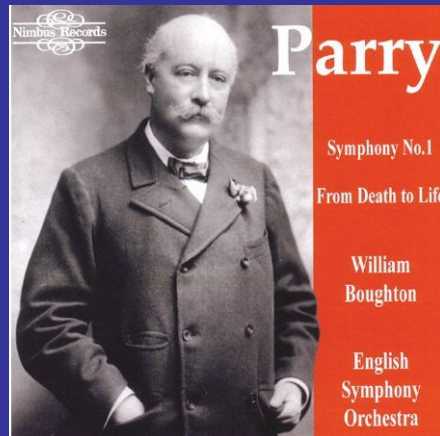
♪ These led to his first choral commission *Prometheus Unbound* (1880), which greatly impressed its audiences and critics. This is the work most influenced by Wagner.

Rise to National Prominence

Symphony No.1 in G (1882)



43 minutes



>45 minutes

Symphony No.1 in G (1882)

I've chosen several themes to illustrate Parry's musical style at this point in his career:

- ♪ Opening of First movement – *Con fuoco*
- ♪ Second movement – *Andante*



Symphony No.1 in G (1882)

Fourth movement – *Allegretto molto vivace*

- ♪ Opening theme
- ♪ Second subject group



This is pure Parry!

Symphony No.1 in G (1882)

- ♪ It was in this symphony and other Parry works of this period, such as the *Piano Quartet* and *Prometheus Unbound*, that “an individual English musical voice made its first appearance since the death of Henry Purcell”

Symphony No.1 in G (1882)

- ♪ Among all the congratulations, the most precious was from his father:
“Dear Hubert – I must not let a day pass without just a word to say how deeply Linda and I were impressed with your work. It is a great work. It will surely be given again, and I do hope indeed to be within reach to hear it”

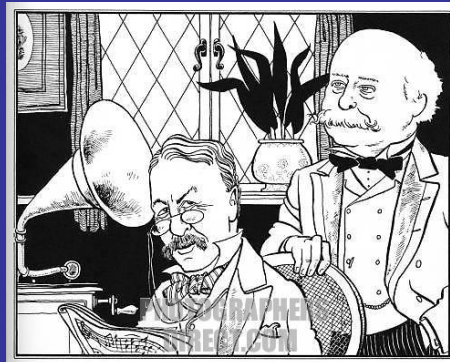
Professor at the Royal College of Music

“My dear Parry, 30 December 1882
“I write by desire of the Prince of Wales to
ask if you will assist him in this great
experiment by taking the Department of
Musical History with a seat on the Board
of Professors..... Into no hands could
lectures on the history and development
of music be put with more propriety than
into yours”

G.Grove (Director)

Parry and Stanford

- ♪ Charles Villiers Stanford was by this time a leading light in the musical life of Cambridge
- ♪ Stanford showed considerable support for Parry's music
- ♪ Through Stanford's influence, Parry received commissions from Cambridge for a symphony and music for a play *“The Birds”*



Symphony No.2 in F (1883) “The Cambridge”

♪ Another letter from George Grove:

“I saw Charlie yesterday morning and he played me the first movement of your symphony, and I can’t help telling you of the very great impression it made on me. It is splendid – so clear and tuneful and fresh, and so like your own dear self! I felt its kinship to the greatest.”

Symphony No.2 in F (1883) “The Cambridge”



Symphony No.2 in F (1883) “The Cambridge”

- ♪ This work confirms Parry’s gift for counterpoint (the coherent combination of distinct melodic lines). Often in Parry’s music you will hear three part counterpoint
- ♪ The style he develops foreshadows the expressive language of Elgar.

Symphony No.2 in F (1883) First movement

- ♪ The theme of the symphony is the life of an undergraduate. Perhaps it is autobiographical?
- ♪ The first movement’s introduction *Andante sostenuto* reflects on the transition from schoolboy to University man.

Symphony No.2 in F (1883) First movement - Introduction

- ♪ *Andante* – opening theme. This is the main theme that crops up in various forms throughout the symphony



Symphony No.2 in F (1883) “The Cambridge”

- ♪ The second movement - *Scherzo* – depicts merrymaking during a long vacation
- ♪ The third movement – *Andante* – reveals to us the hero’s first real passion, including the anxieties as well as the happier phases of falling in love

Symphony No.2 in F (1883)
Third movement - *Andante*

- The *Andante* begins with the reappearance of the opening theme from the Introduction
- Soon this becomes the supporting theme to a beautiful new melody
- But the serenity of this theme is shattered by the “anxieties”

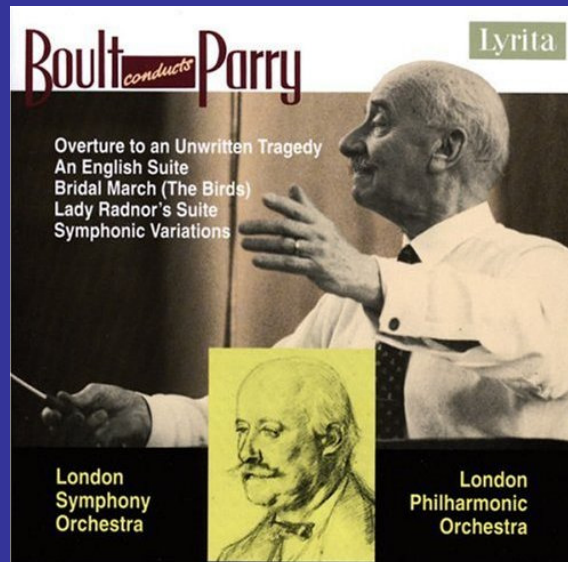
Symphony No.2 in F (1883)
Fourth movement *Allegro vivace*

- This depicts “the undergraduate’s delight at having taken his degree, his grand resolve for the future, and his determination to make his way in the world”
- Opening theme, played “*sul G*” (*play this on the fourth string – G*):

Symphony No.2 in F (1883) Fourth movement *Allegro vivace*

- Eventually, another adaptation of the main theme appears in rich scoring on the strings
- and even in the last few bars, yet another adaptation of the main theme brings the work to a satisfying end

Bridal March from *The Birds*



Bridal March from *The Birds*

- ♪ At this time there was a tradition at both Oxford and Cambridge of producing ancient plays with modern incidental music
- ♪ *The Birds*, by Aristophanes was originally produced in Athens in 414 BC!

Bridal March from *The Birds*

- ♪ The main theme of the Bridal March provides a preview of the *nobilmente* strains of some of Elgar's melodies

Bridal March from *The Birds*

♪ *The Birds* was the first of three plays by Aristophanes for which Parry provided incidental music. The others were:

♪ *The Frogs* (1892)

♪ *The Clouds* (1905)

♪ Vaughan Williams emulated this with his incidental music for:

♪ *The Wasps* (1909)

Choral Works

♪ In the mid-1880s Parry suffered a major setback when he failed to secure even a single performance of his opera *Guenever*. Undoubtedly the libretto (by Una Taylor) was a major reason for the rejection. Bad timing (too similar to other works that were about to be presented) was also given as an excuse.

Choral Works

♪ He bounced back from this disappointment with two major choral successes:

♪ *Blest Pair of Sirens* (1887)

♪ *Judith – oratorio* (1888)

Excerpt from the oratorio *Judith*: *Long Since in Egypt's Plenteous Land* (words and music by Parry)

Long since in Egypt's plenteous land
Our fathers were oppressed;
But God, whose chosen folk they were,
Smote those who long enslaved them there,
And all their woes redressed.

The Red Sea stayed them not at all,
Nor depths of liquid green;
On either hand a mighty wall
Of waters clear rose at his call,
And they passed through between.

**Excerpt from *Judith:*
Long Since in Egypt's Plenteous Land
(words and music by Parry)**

In deserts wild they wandered long,
They sinned and went astray;
But yet his arm to help was strong,
He pardoned them tho' they did wrong,
And brought them on their way.

At last to this good land they came,
With fruitful plenty blest;
Here glorious men won endless fame,
Here God made holy Zion's name,
And here he gave them rest.

♪ The tune later became known as
"Repton" – the hymn tune for *Dear
Lord and Father of Mankind*

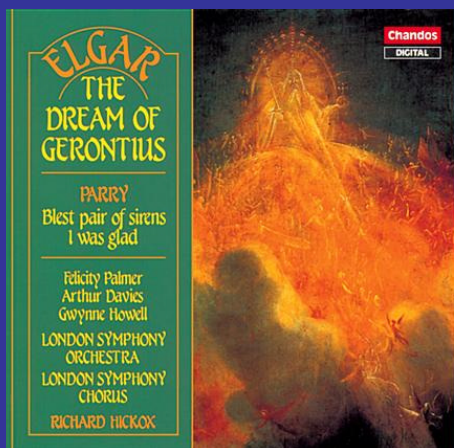
OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

57 REPTON. 8 6. 8 8 6. C. H. H. PARRY, 1848-1918
(from *Judith*).

Blest Pair of Sirens (1887)

- ♪ Based on Milton's *Ode at a Solemn Music*
- ♪ The rehearsals were encouraging: *"At the end old Grove jumped up with tears in his eyes and shook me over and over again by the hand, and the whole choir took up the cue..."*
- ♪ The first performance (under Stanford) was *"quite uproariously received"*, and it has been a favourite with choirs ever since

Blest Pair of Sirens



London Symphony
Orchestra and
Chorus
Richard Hickox

Blest Pair of Sirens

Women's voices enter lyrically:

- ♪ *O may we soon again renew that Song*
- ♪ *And keep in tune with Heaven, till God 'ere long*

Raising the roof at the end:

- ♪ *To His celestial consort us unite*
- ♪ *To live with Him, and sing in endless morn of light.*

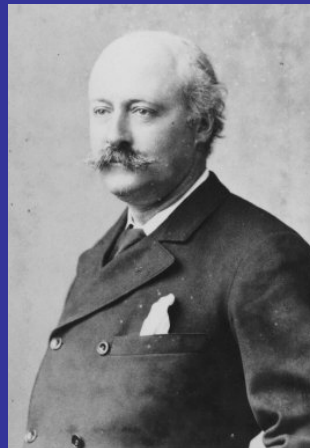
John Milton (1608-1674)

Blest Pair of Sirens

- ♪ The music director of the Duisberg Festival prepared a German translation in 1903. But Parry was reluctant to travel to the performance in view of his commitments.
- ♪ AJ Jaeger eventually persuaded him to attend. The concert also included two major works by Bruckner and *Tod und Verklarung* by R. Strauss.
- ♪ The audience gave Parry a “clamorous reception” and it made a powerful impression with the German critics.

Blest Pair of Sirens

- ♪ Jaeger wrote that “*Parry had a really great success. In fact his Sirens had more success than Strauss’s Tod & Verk! They nearly killed Parry with kindness, especially the ladies*”
- ♪ Elgar called this work “*amongst the noblest works of man*”



Dilemma

- ♪ The enormous success of *Blest Pair of Sirens* and *Judith* put Parry in a quandary. I would argue that many of Parry’s best works were orchestral rather than choral. Yet most of the subsequent continual stream of commissions were for choral works. Parry felt unable to say “No” to these.
- ♪ His 3rd Symphony was his last major orchestral work until the *Symphonic Variations* in 1897.

Symphony No.3 in C (1889) “The English”

- ♪ Hans Richter had successfully taken up the first two symphonies, and Parry’s creative reputation was now at its height
- ♪ Parry originally intended this as a Symphony for Small Orchestra
- ♪ It was first performed with Parry conducting at a Philharmonic Society concert in May 1889.

Symphony No.3 in C (1889) “The English”

- ♪ It won immediate favour, creating considerable excitement among critics:

“There has arisen among us a composer who is capable of restoring our national music to its true place in the art of Europe”

Sir William Hadow

Symphony No.3 in C (1889) “The English”

- ♪ Some say that this is Parry’s orchestral masterpiece on a large scale – an exuberant English equivalent of Mendelssohn’s *Italian* symphony or Schumann’s *Rhenish* symphony
- ♪ Parry, characteristically, was surprised at its great success.

Symphony No.3 in C (1889) “The English”



Symphony No.3 in C (1889)

Fourth movement: *Moderato*

- ♪ Unusually for a symphony, this movement is a set of variations
- ♪ Even more unusually, there is no change of key throughout the 12 variations, and not much change of tempo. But Parry still creates considerable variety within these constraints

Symphony No.3 in C (1889)

Fourth movement: *Moderato*

- ♪ Twelve variations (some are AABB, some ABB, some AAB)
- ♪ Coda, and final restatement of the theme (AB)
- ♪ For the next 20 years, this was the most frequently performed symphony by any British composer.