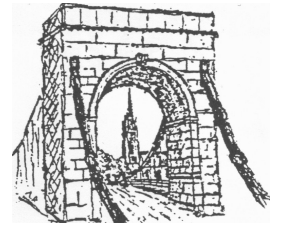




MARLOW U3A MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

38th Newsletter: January/February 2012



Preamble

Introducing our January session, Brian wished everybody a happy New Year and welcomed them to the first MAG session of 2012. He also hoped that those who attended the final session of 2011 had by now recovered from the effects of the “Anything Goes” pantomime!!

Many thanks to all those who returned their questionnaire. There was general support for the idea of adding a summer concert by one or more young musicians to our programme. We will do our best to arrange something along these lines. We also gained some suggestions for future presenters and topics, such as Spanish guitar, JS Bach, Mozart, ballet music, Grieg, Dimitri Shostakovich, Vaughan Williams, Anne Sophie Mutter, Oscar Peterson, and big bands of the 1920s-1940s era.

Please note the change of programme for February and April this year (see page 5).

Edward Elgar: The Early Years (to 1898)

The theme of Keith’s presentation in January was the fine music that Elgar composed in the 1880s and the 1890s, through which he became well-known and respected in western and northern England, and his struggles to become accepted nationally as a serious composer. Keith traced Elgar’s musical development until just prior to the turning point in his career (the *Enigma Variations* (1899) and *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900)).

He was born at Broadheath near Worcester in 1857. The humble house of his infancy is now the Elgar Birthplace Museum and Visitor Centre, with a modern extension behind. His father owned a music shop in Worcester, and from 1863 the Elgars lived over the shop. At about the age of ten, young Edward composed music for a family play, and he later drew on these ideas for *The Wand of Youth* suites (1907/8) and *The Starlight Express* (1915). He attended a Catholic school. Violin lessons were his only formal training in music. Otherwise his ‘teachers’ were the music books and instruments in his father’s shop.



Ken Russell's famous image of the young Elgar with his father's pony on the Malvern Hills



He briefly worked in a solicitor’s office, but at 16 he left to become a freelance musician: organist, violinist, pianist, bassoonist, violin teacher, piano teacher, and part-time composer. Keith played three pieces from the late 1870s/early 1880s: *The Valentine* – an example of Elgar’s music for the staff band of the Powick Lunatic Asylum; *Sarabande* – for the wind quintet (left) that included himself on bassoon and brother Frank on oboe; and *Sevillana* – an early orchestral piece that was first performed in 1884 by the Worcester Philharmonic Society.

In 1886 Caroline Alice Roberts became a piano pupil of Elgar in Malvern. She was the daughter of a Major-General. She had published a novel, wrote verse, knew German and sang in a choir. She recognised Elgar’s potential and character, and became

dedicated to his objective to become a great composer. Elgar composed the very famous piece *Salut d'Amour* as an engagement present for Alice, and she presented him with a poem *The Wind at Dawn*, which Elgar set as a dramatic song. But there were difficulties. She was nearly 9 years older than Elgar. Her Anglican family considered Elgar a poor tradesman, of a lower social class. Nevertheless, she took instruction in the Catholic faith, and they were married quietly in London in 1889. Her family promptly disinherited her.

Elgar played the violin in the Three Choirs orchestras and in the Birmingham Orchestra. Early influences from these experiences included Sir Hubert Parry (especially his *Blest Pair of Sirens*), Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Antonin Dvorak. Elgar also made regular day-trips to rehearsals and concerts in London. These enabled him to hear major works by Wagner, Schumann, Brahms, Liszt and his favourite living composer: Richard Strauss. All of these must have been influential, but from 1890 onwards the best description of Elgar's own music is "Elgarian"! "There is music in the air", he wrote, "music all around us, the world is full of it and you simply take as much as you require. I do all my composing in the open. At home all I have to do is write it down."

Elgar was determined to succeed where so many 19th century British composers had failed: he wished to make a living just from composing. So the Elgars moved to London, where he composed his first major work, the assured *Froissart Overture*. Already (1890) it shows Elgar's mastery of orchestration and contains many of the hallmarks of his mature output. However, Elgar failed to establish himself in London and, after an 'awful', cold, hard winter, the Elgars retreated in 1891 to Malvern. Elgar felt that this humiliation had much to do with his status: provincial, self-taught, Catholic, and son of a shopkeeper.

Early Elgar Playlist

The Valentine
Dance No.3: Sarabande (wind quintet)
Sevillana Op.7
Enina Waltz (piano solo)
Salut d'Amour Op.12
Chanson de Matin Op.15, No.2
Froissart Op.19 (excerpt)
Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf Op.30: The Challenge of Thor and The Death of King Olaf
Caractacus Op.35 (excerpts from Scene VI)



Back in Malvern the music soon started to flow again. *Serenade for Strings*, *The Black Knight* (Elgar's choral symphony), *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands* (his most extensive collaboration with Alice), *Sursum Corda*, *The Light of Life*, *Scenes From The Saga of King Olaf*, *Te Deum and Benedictus*, the *Imperial March* (for Queen Victoria's Jubilee), the *Organ Sonata*, *Caractacus*, the *Enigma Variations* and *Sea Pictures* were all composed there during the remainder of the decade.

"Look out for Elgar's *King Olaf*", wrote August Jaeger to Parry. "There is some fine stuff in this. The young man has imagination, beauty, strength, 'go'. He is exceptionally gifted. I believe in him, and oh! he has melody!! melody that touches one." English choral societies, complacently used to endless re-runs of *The Messiah* and *Elijah*, had never heard such music before, but Edward Elgar was about to give them a good shaking and change everything. Keith played two excerpts from *King Olaf* (1896) and ended with two rousing choruses from *Caractacus* (1898). The love music in *King Olaf* and the dawn music in *Caractacus* show a lyrical, pastoral strain. Ironbeard's death in *King Olaf* and the lament 'O my warriors' from *Caractacus* show profound introspection. Many of the choruses in *King Olaf* are acknowledged masterpieces, and the epilogue following the death of the King is especially moving.

Throughout the 1890s the London establishment still refused to take Elgar seriously as a composer. Even his first major national success – the *Enigma Variations* (1899) – was introduced to the London public by a foreign conductor, Hans Richter, who was persuaded with help from Jaeger and Parry. And after an initial flop in England in 1900, partly because of inadequate rehearsal, *The Dream of Gerontius* owed its success to German conductor Julius Butts. He had sufficient faith in Elgar to have the libretto translated into German, and have it performed to great acclaim in Germany. With such praise flowing from Germany, the musical establishment in London could no longer ignore Elgar. Even so, it was not until 1903 that *The Dream of Gerontius* received its first London performance.

From May 2012 there will be an exhibition on **Elgar and Royalty** at the Elgar Birthplace Museum, just in time for the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations in June.

The Queen is the last surviving dedicatee of an Elgar work. The *Nursery Suite*, composed in 1930, was dedicated to Their Royal Highnesses the Duchess of York, and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret. In 1931 the suite was performed to an invited audience including Princess Elizabeth and her parents.

Music Inspired by Sir Walter Scott

Elgar was inspired to compose *Froissart* after reading Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*, and further works inspired by Scott were the theme for the second half of our January meeting. Guest speaker David Church from High Wycombe U3A opened his presentation by noting that Scott is now a somewhat neglected author. He is mainly remembered for his efforts to encourage a rebirth of Scottish culture two generations after the 1745 rebellion, for example by stage managing George IV’s successful visit in 1822, and rediscovering the Scottish crown jewels. But he was an important and highly influential author, and a major figure in the Romantic movement which swept through Europe at the beginning of the 19th century.



Sir Walter Scott Playlist

Jock O’Hazeldean sung by Mary Garden

Schubert, arr. Liszt: *Ave Maria*

Rossini: *Tanti affetti in tal momento* from *La Donna del Lago*

Boieldieu: *Viens gentille dame* from *La Dame Blanche*

Donizetti: *Chi mi frena* (sextet) from *Lucia di Lammermoor*

Bizet: *Quand la flamme* from *La Jolie Fille de Perth*

Berlioz: *Rob Roy Overture* (excerpt)

Born into the Edinburgh professional class in 1771, he followed his father in becoming a lawyer, but writing became increasingly important. Initially he succeeded as a poet, writing ballads and longer narrative poems. Later he wrote about 30 novels between 1814 and 1828, many of which were based on actual events in Scottish and English history. His work was quickly translated into French, German and Italian. More than 20 novels and six of his narrative poems inspired operas and other works by leading composers of the day. Indeed, Grove lists nearly 100 such operas and suggests that Scott is second only to Shakespeare as a source of operatic libretti. Scott's novels are complex, but many are at heart romantic love stories that are easy to break down into typical, basic operatic plots: tenor gets or loses

soprano in spite of or because of baritone and bass! Furthermore, many European operatic centres were sensitive to anything critical of the Catholic church or absolute monarchy. British

storylines were much safer as England and Scotland were regarded as heretic countries with illegitimate monarchs!

David's first example was the ballad *Jock o' Hazeldean*, which is typical of Scott's adaptations of existing folksongs for which he wrote new words but retained the overall message of the song. It was a very old recording (from a Pathé cylinder). David chose it because it was sung by Mary Garden, an important Scottish singer who was born in Aberdeen in 1874.



Scott made his home at Abbotsford, a house that he designed, located on the banks of the River Tweed in the Scottish Borders

Of Scott's longer narrative poems *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) produced most music. This is not a retelling of the Arthurian legend but a story of 16th century Scotland about Ellen Douglas who lived near Lake Katrine with her father, and was pursued by various suitors including King James V. However, true love triumphs and the story ends with the king agreeing to her marrying a young highlander and pardoning her father for rebellion. David played two related pieces: Schubert's *Ave Maria* in Liszt's piano transcription, and the final aria from Rossini's opera, *La Donna del Lago* (1819).

David then moved on to three operas arising from Scott's novels. *La Dame Blanche* (1825)

by Francois Boieldieu was derived from two early novels, *Guy Mannering* and *The Monastery*, and was set in Scotland some years after the Jacobite rebellion. The white lady of the title is a spirit that haunts the castle of Avenel. The hero is a young English officer who knows nothing of his childhood and turns out to be the long lost heir to the Counts of Avenel.

Donizetti's popular opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) is based on *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), the tragic story of a bride forced for dynastic reasons to marry the wrong man. She kills him on the wedding night and then goes mad and dies. It is based on a true story! Donizetti's was not the first opera based on this story: Grove lists seven previous versions including one by a Danish composer, Bredel, with libretto by Hans Christian Andersen!

David's final operatic excerpt was from *The Fair Maid of Perth* by Bizet (1867) based on one of Scott's last novels published in 1828. In this story, Catherine Glover is a beautiful 14th century girl pursued by many suitors including the Duke of Rothesay.

Two early works of Berlioz were concert overtures based on Scott's novels: *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*.

David ended with the final section of the *Rob Roy Overture*. This contains a Scottish tune, although it

derives from the wrong author (Burns) and the wrong period! It was written when Berlioz was in his late 20s and living in Italy.



Bride of Lammermoor by Millais

Future Programme

Date	Provisional Programme
16 Feb	<p>Following a request from Brian and Roger, whose presentations have been rescheduled for April, the first session will be a change to the original programme. Keith will cover the question What Is A Symphony?, which has been asked by one of our members, and will then go on to present excerpts from one of the finest descriptive works in the symphonic repertoire: Richard Strauss's Alpine Symphony. But is it a symphony?</p> <p>Piano Transcriptions Alan will present some examples of piano transcriptions of vocal music, ranging from Baroque to Romantic. The aim is to show how different pianists have transcribed the music and preserved the relationship between the vocal line and the accompaniment.</p>
15 March	<p>Leonard Bernstein: Bridging the gap between concert hall and Broadway Leonard Bernstein was an American composer, conductor, pianist and teacher noted for his accomplishments in both classical and popular music. His special gift of bridging the gap between the concert hall and Broadway made him one of the most glamorous musical figures of his day. His fame derived principally from his long tenure as conductor and musical director of the New York Philharmonic and from the tremendous success of <i>West Side Story</i> (presented by Jim)</p> <p>The Operas of Giuseppe Verdi (continued) Following on from Nina's introduction to Verdi last year, she will speak about two very successful operas from his middle period: <i>Rigoletto</i> and <i>La Traviata</i>. Excerpts illustrating the plots will be shown on the screen.</p>
19 April	<p>The Making of Violins, Cellos and Spinets (presented by Roger Freeman)</p> <p>The Violin in Jazz: From New Orleans to the present day (presented by Brian)</p>

Please note the above dates in your diary. We look forward to seeing you at (or soon after) 9.45am on 16th February at the URC.

Waiting List

Because of constraints relating to refreshments and toilet facilities, there is a limit on numbers and we are managing a waiting list. Potential new members should contact Brian in the first instance. Could regular members please contact Brian in advance if you cannot attend a particular meeting, so that a chance can be given for others to come along.

U3A Group Bookings for Concerts/Events

Bookings and transport for the following events are being arranged by the Theatre Group:

- ♪ Philharmonia Orchestra playing a concert performance of *Yeomen of the Guard*. 3pm on Sunday 15th April at Royal Festival Hall. Leaving Marlow at 12 noon. Cost £22. Tricia Kilner-Smith (01628 471284) is taking bookings for this concert.
- ♪ Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall. Evening performance on Thursday 31st May. A Gala concert to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Performances by Lesley Garret, Nicola Benedetti, Alison Balsom and Emma Johnson. Includes music by Haydn, Piazzolla, Ravel, Mozart and Vaughan Williams. Full programme on RAH website or from Angela Walker who is taking bookings. Her phone number is 01628 486134. The cost will be £32.

Local Concerts/Events in the next few weeks include:

- ♪ Russian State Ballet of Siberia perform *Giselle* (2 February), *Sleeping Beauty* (3 February) and *Swan Lake* (4 February) at Wycombe Swan. Thurs-Sat at 7.30pm plus Saturday matinee at 2.30pm.
- ♪ The Heath String Quartet with Carole Presland (piano) play Britten, Schumann and Brahms. 7.30pm on 9th February at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Lunchtime Concert by Richard Uttley (piano): Bach/Chopin/Debussy, 12th February at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Marlow Jazz Club have regular events on Tuesdays (14th February, 6th and 20th March). See <http://www.marlowjazz.co.uk/>. 8.30pm at the Royal British Legion Hall, Marlow.
- ♪ Pyatt/Gould/McCawley Horn Trio play Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann and Brahms. 7.45pm on Saturday 18th February at Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield.
- ♪ Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at Wycombe Swan. Mendelssohn *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Mozart *Clarinet Concerto*; Elgar *Enigma Variations*. 7.30pm on Sunday 19th February 2012.
- ♪ Music for a Royal Occasion: The Festival Chorus marks the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year with festive music including Purcell's 1685 anthem for James II's Coronation and Mathias's acclaimed tribute for the Silver Jubilee in 1977. 3pm on Sunday 26th February at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Surrey Brass with Musical Director Robin Smith. 7.30pm on 8th March at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Slough Philharmonic Society and Bartosz Woroch (violin) play Walton *Crown Imperial*, Elgar *Violin Concerto* and Dvorak *Symphony No.9*. 7.30pm on Saturday 10th March at The Centre, Slough.
- ♪ City of London Sinfonia play works by JS Bach, CPE Bach, Mendelssohn and Gorecki. 7.30pm on Saturday 10th March at All Saint's Church, High Wycombe.
- ♪ Dr Christopher Fifield is giving a talk on "The Life and Voice of Kathleen Ferrier" at Marlow U3A's monthly meeting on Thursday 22nd March.
- ♪ Marlow Recital Society concert by pianist Maria Nemtsova including the original version of *Pictures at an Exhibition*. 7.30pm on Saturday 24th March at Vine House, 9 Glade, Marlow.
- ♪ St John's Chamber Orchestra Lauren Reeve-Rawlings (horn) play Mendelssohn, R. Strauss, Vaughan Williams and Beethoven. 7.30pm on Sunday 25th March at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Merrie England by Edward German. 24th-28th April at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Marlow Choral Society's Spring Concert will celebrate the Jubilee with music by Elgar, Parry, Handel and German. 7.30pm on Saturday 12 May 2012 at All Saints Parish Church, Marlow.

★ If you would like to feature any events of interest herein, please email the details to Keith ★

Happy listening!

Brian (484099, brian.humphrey2@ntlworld.com) and Keith (891507, keithrachel@hotmail.com)

P.S. Don't forget that you can view what we have done at previous sessions at our web site:
<http://www.marlowu3a.org.uk/id12.html>