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MAY 2020

# Prelude

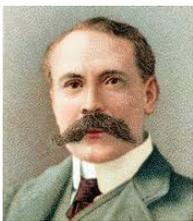


## MASTERWORKS #8:

### ENIGMA VARIATIONS MAY 8 – 10, 2020

While some patients awaken post-surgery in a state of drug-induced delusion, Edward Elgar's surgery in 1918 for severely infected tonsils was followed by a stroke of genius which resulted in his renowned Cello Concerto in E minor, regarded as the last masterpiece he composed for orchestra.

By Emily Holowczak, HSO Development Assistant



Edward Elgar

Born in England on June 2, 1857, Edward Elgar was a late-19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticist who, despite his reputation as a gifted composer, had no formal training in composition.<sup>i</sup> His father was an organist, piano tuner and music dealer, and Elgar was introduced to music at a young age, starting with violin lessons at age seven.<sup>ii</sup> By the age of eight he was proficient on piano and violin and quickly taught himself a variety of other instruments that included bassoon.<sup>iii</sup> At 15, determined to earn a living as a musician, Elgar left school to make his way in the world. He worked briefly in an attorney's office,<sup>iv</sup> but, by the age of 16, he was able to support himself as a teacher and freelance musician.<sup>v</sup> For the rest of his life, he never took a permanent job but conducted locally, performed, taught and composed.<sup>vi</sup>

As a talented violinist, bassoonist, bandmaster, and church organist, Elgar gained experience by performing with a variety of local chamber groups.<sup>vii</sup> He scraped by until his 1889 marriage to Caroline Alice Roberts, a published novelist of some wealth.<sup>viii</sup> Elgar was 29 when he met Alice. She was his pupil and eight years his senior.<sup>ix</sup> They married three years after they met, much to the horror of Alice's parents, who saw Elgar, a mere musician, as socially inferior.<sup>x</sup> Alice became her husband's business manager and social

secretary and worked to secure Elgar the reputation she felt he deserved as a musician and composer.<sup>xi</sup>

Elgar's passion for composition blossomed in 1891, and although he wrote prolifically for local musicians, he failed to achieve sufficient recognition as a composer.<sup>xii</sup> Alice suggested they move to London to be closer to the music world,<sup>xiii</sup> but the effort to establish Edward as a composer in London did not go well, and the Elgars returned to their home in Worcestershire after just two years.<sup>xiv</sup>

Initially, Elgar focused his composing career on choral works, but his inability to make a significant income from composition left Elgar depressed.<sup>xv</sup>

His best friend, August Jaeger, attempted to cheer him, assuring him, "Your time of universal recognition will



Enigma Variations

come."<sup>xvi</sup> Jaeger was right. It was the popular *Enigma Variations*, performed in London in 1899 and written when Elgar was 42, that established Elgar as one of the most talented composers of his time. The *Nimrod Variation* of the piece was a tribute to Jaeger. In 1904, Elgar was knighted and became a professor of music at the University of Birmingham.<sup>xvii</sup> His career as a composer was firmly established.

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On March 15, 1918, Elgar underwent tonsil surgery and when he awoke the morning after the operation, Elgar immediately asked for a pencil and paper.<sup>xxviii</sup> In a burst of creative energy, he quickly jotted down



Edward and Alice at Brinkwells Cottage

some musical ideas which became the 9/8 theme of the first movement of his Cello Concerto.<sup>xxix</sup> Elgar and his wife Alice had rented Brinkwells, a charming cottage near Fittleworth in West Sussex, England, and it was there that Elgar went to recuperate from the surgery.<sup>xx</sup> The spark of creativity he enjoyed post-surgery was brief, and Elgar put the piece on hold.<sup>xxi</sup> He sent for his piano to be delivered to the cottage. It finally arrived in August, some five months later.<sup>xxii</sup>

Once the piano arrived, Brinkwells proved to be an inspirational sanctuary for Elgar.<sup>xxiii</sup> The cottage was rented from the landscape painter, Rex Vicat Cole, who had a large studio on the property.<sup>xxiv</sup> Elgar's creativity was ignited by Cole's paintings and for Elgar, the painter's studio was the perfect setting in which to compose music.<sup>xxv</sup> At Brinkwells, Elgar experienced a creative surge that lasted until his death in 1934. In a letter to his friend Sidney Colvin, Elgar wrote: "The sun is climbing over our view in golden mist... I have never seen anything so wonderful... I see now where the great



Edward Elgar

painter Turner found such sights as Norham Castle." At Brinkwells, Elgar completed the Cello Concerto, which he dedicated to Colvin.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The Cello Concerto was premiered on October 27, 1919 and featured British cellist Felix Salmond as soloist with Elgar as the conductor.<sup>xxvii</sup> While Elgar was hopeful for success, the concert rehearsals were disastrous, and the opening performance was met with mixed reviews. Although there were several performances of the work by renowned cellists, including Pablo

Casals, it would take over 45 years from its composition for the Concerto to receive the worldwide recognition it so richly deserved, thanks to the incredible artistry of a prodigy named Jacqueline du Pré.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In 1963, at the age of 18, du Pré's performance of Elgar's Cello Concerto with Sir Malcolm Sargent at The Proms (Royal Albert Hall in London) was so popular that she returned three years in a row to perform the work. Her recording of the Cello Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra, made in October of 1965 for EMI, revealed an emotional ferocity that captured the hearts of all listeners.<sup>xxix</sup> It was du Pré's recording that skyrocketed the Concerto to popularity around the world. In an article written in 2019 for *The Strad* magazine, author Raphael Wallfisch wrote, "She (du Pré) was fixed in the mind of the British public as the living soul of Elgar."<sup>xxx</sup> The tragic story of du Pré's life only adds to the melancholy of the Cello Concerto, as her career was cut short by multiple sclerosis. Tragically, she passed away from the disease in 1987, at the age of 42.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Thanks to the interpretation by a 20-year-old cellist, Elgar's Cello Concerto found increasing popularity and ultimately became a hallmark of English music and culture.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Join us!

**Please join** the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for ***Enigma Variations*, May 8 - 10, 2020**, to hear our guest soloist, Joshua Roman, perform Elgar's Cello Concerto No. 3, in a concert that also features Elgar's *Enigma Variations* and Anna Clyne's *Within Her Arms*.



## WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?

Try HSO'S Listening Guide, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Jacqueline du Pré performs Elgar's Cello Concerto, with her husband, Daniel Barenboim conducting:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPhkZW\\_jwc0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPhkZW_jwc0)

*Enigma Variations* is performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Bernstein:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GbD20h8-\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GbD20h8-_4)

Anna Clyne's *Within Her Arms*, a piece for 15 stringed instruments, may be viewed at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5C-IDsMygc>

### Interested in learning more?

Have you fallen in love with the sound of the cello? If yes, you'll want to listen to the Bach Cello Suites with Yo-Yo Ma:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nu9MDqGhIak>

To learn more about du Pré and the cello concerto, enjoy this documentary on Medici TV:

<https://www.medici.tv/en/documentaries/jacqueline-du-pre-and-the-elgar-cello-concerto/>

*Hilary and Jackie* is a movie about Jacqueline du Pré and her sister, Hilary, and the film trailer may be viewed here:

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7mli40>

For extra fun, enjoy an interview with Grammy-nominated composer Anna Clyne:

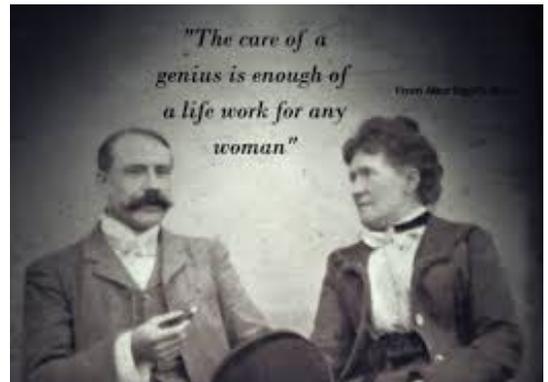
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le4wcVZMAEk>



*Enigma Variations*



Sir Edward Elger



Edward and Alice Elger

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Casey's  
Classics

**Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.**

Two of Elgar's greatest works in one concert! Who could wish for more? The *Enigma Variations* put Elgar's name on the international map. There are many great recordings, but critics generally put, at the top of the list, any Adrian Boult reading. (WARNER.) Pierre Monteux and the London Symphony Orchestra (DECCA), a conductor not typically associated with the composer, created a magnificent version that is uniquely unforgettable.

The Cello Concerto by general consensus, has one recording for the history books: the 1954 recording of Jacqueline du Pré with John Barbirolli and the London Symphony (WARNER), a sublime version that has bested all others for the past five decades.

Anna Clyne's moving *Within Her Arms* can be heard on YouTube.



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