

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61.....Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Composed in 1909-1910.

Premiered on November 10, 1910 in London, conducted by the composer with Fritz Kreisler as soloist.

In 1909, Edward Elgar was at the height of his career. The *Enigma Variations* had appeared in 1899 and the oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius* one year later, spreading Elgar's name throughout Britain, the Continent and the New World. Cambridge University made him a doctor *honoris causa* in 1900; Oxford did so five years later. With his choral ode for the coronation of Edward VII in 1901 and the appearance of the first two *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* in 1902, he became England's unofficial music laureate. (He had to wait until 1924 to be appointed Master of the King's Musick.) He was knighted in 1904. The University of Birmingham named him to its music faculty in 1905. Europe and America demanded to see him in person, so he traveled widely to conduct and dispense his own music. A series of splendid works tumbled forth in those years — *Cockaigne*, *Sea Pictures*, the *Introduction and Allegro* for Strings, *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, supplemented by numerous part and solo songs and chamber pieces. When he finished the First Symphony at the end of 1908, he was ready for a rest.

In April 1909, shortly after Hans Richter had introduced the First Symphony in Manchester and London, Elgar and his wife, Alice, accepted an invitation to visit their American friend, Mrs. Julia Worthington, at her villa in Careggi, near Florence. Feeling drained creatively, Elgar had sworn off music for the time being (in later years at his home, "Plas Gwyn" at Hereford, he set up a chemistry lab into which he frequently escaped for the same reason), and played the part of the happy tourist in Italy. The Elgars traipsed about Tuscany and made an excursion to Venice. As it had Mendelssohn and Brahms and Berlioz during the previous century, Italy inspired Elgar to composition. While in Careggi his muse was rekindled and the first sketches for two new works — a violin concerto and another symphony — appeared. Elgar left Italy in early June, stopping at Garmisch-Partenkirchen for a session of sincere mutual admiration with Richard Strauss, and arrived at Plas Gwyn on June 16th. He worked some more on the Concerto, but the second half of 1909 was heavily booked with festival appearances and conducting engagements, including an extended tour with the fledgling London Symphony Orchestra, and he devoted his available time for composition to the Second Symphony, so the violin piece lay dormant until the first of the year.

After resuming work on the Violin Concerto in January 1910, Elgar had doubts about his ability to finish it. (He had already abandoned two attempts at such a piece in 1890 and 1901.) Some of his close friends, especially the Lord and Lady Stuart-Wortley and Lady Edward Speyer (who in less elevated days had been the professional violinist Leonora von Stosch), shepherded him through this bad time, and by March he was committed to the completing the piece. Though Elgar was himself an experienced violinist, he asked W.H. Reed, a member (and later concertmaster) of the LSO, for advice on the finer points of technique and notation. Reed described the scene when he entered Elgar's London flat in New Cavendish Street: "There was the composer, striding about, arranging scraps of manuscript in different parts of the room, pinning them to the backs of chairs and placing them on the mantelpiece with photograph frames to hold them in position. It was wonderful to note the speed at which he scribbled out another passage or made an alteration or scrapped a sketch altogether as being redundant." (Elgar always used separate sheets of manuscript paper so that he could shuffle them at will to compare the piece's various sections.) Elgar worked on the Concerto throughout the summer, in London, at Plas Gwyn and at the cottage of his friend Frank Schuster at Maidenhead, frequently seeking Reed's advice and trial performance of the most recent sketches. (The two musicians remained close; Reed issued an admiring biography of the composer in 1949.) The Concerto was finished on August 5, 1910. "It's *good!* awfully emotional! too emotional but I love it," he told Schuster.

The premiere was set for November 10, 1910 in Queen's Hall, London, at the opening concert of the Philharmonic Society's 99th season. Elgar agreed to conduct. Violinist Fritz Kreisler, who had been encouraging Elgar to write a concerto for him since at least 1906 and to whom the score was dedicated, was the soloist. The performance marked the

first premiere of a major work by Elgar in nearly two years, and interest ran high — the hall was sold out weeks in advance. The performance went splendidly. “Probably there has never been at a Philharmonic concert such a scene of enthusiasm,” reported the *London Musical Times*. Kreisler toured successfully throughout England with the piece; Eugene Ysaÿe introduced it on the Continent in March 1911; Albert Spalding gave its American premiere in Chicago nine months later. The Violin Concerto was the last unalloyed triumph of Elgar’s life.

When the Concerto was published by Novello simultaneously with its premiere, the score appeared with a cryptic Spanish legend on the flyleaf: “*Aquí está encerra el alma de.....*” (“*Here is enshrined the soul of.....*”), a quotation from Le Sage’s *Gil Blas de Santillane* (1735). As with the *Enigma Variations*, Elgar here posed a puzzle of identity. When the conductor Nicholas Kilburn asked for a solution to the riddle, Elgar replied, “Here, or more emphatically *in here*, is enshrined or simply enclosed — burial is perhaps too definite — *the soul of ...?* The final ‘de’ leaves it indefinite as to sex or rather gender. Now guess,” though he assured another friend that “the ‘soul’ was feminine.” Elgar seems to have provided one clue by the five dots following the quotation, two more than the three customary for an ellipsis in printer’s syntax, with which he was thoroughly familiar. Early speculation favored Mrs. Worthington, at whose Italian villa the Concerto was conceived. Her first name was Julia (five letters) and her nickname was “Pippa,” and, it was rumored, the composer was in love with her. Later and more convincing evidence, however, points to Alice Stuart-Wortley as the recipient of the tacit dedication. The Elgars had met Alice, daughter of the painter Millais, in 1906, when the Stuart-Wortleys moved to London from Sheffield. Elgar visited them frequently at their home in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, thereafter, and was particularly delighted when Alice played his music for him on the piano. (“*I love to hear you play,*” he confided to her in 1911.) His feelings for her at the time of the composition of the Violin Concerto seemed to have warmed beyond fondness. “I have been working hard at the ‘windflower’ themes [his nickname for her; they both loved the countryside and its wildflowers] — but all stands still until you come and approve,” he wrote on April 27, 1910. For the rest of his life he referred to the piece in his letters to her as “our own concerto,” and sometimes inscribed them with a musical quotation from the score. Whether to Alice or to Julia or to some unknown other, Elgar’s mysterious legend calls forth not just the unspoken emotions of many years ago, but also serves as an arrow straight to the heart of this eloquent Concerto’s true nature — feelings intimate and tender contained in a setting expansive and magniloquent. “To listen to the Violin Concerto,” wrote Diana M. McVeagh, “is at times like eavesdropping on a private conversation — or even a confessional — so inward is its quality.”

It may be of some interest to certain listeners to know that the opening movement largely follows the traditional sonata-concerto form, that the four main thematic motives are presented in quick succession by the orchestra during its introduction, that the music is spun almost completely from these melodic fragments, and that the requirements for the soloist, both technical and expressive, are among the most demanding of any concerto in the literature. Others, however, will find that Elgar’s craftsmanship, masterful and mature as it is, is simply the means to the end of this music’s expression, of which John F. Porte wrote, “His vein of tender sentiment is perhaps the most lovable of all its kind in music, and shared by that of Schubert; Elgar never shows us a soul that is seared or tortured, for while he can feel, he does not despair. An extreme sensitiveness to poetic ideas or reflections is part of Elgar’s thought, but this is always counterbalanced by a breezy reaction, a throwing aside, as it were, of anything which might lead to doubt; it is the ascendant spirit, the strong faith in himself, the blessing of common pluck, which never failed him.” The second movement continues in a similar vein, though is more given to song than to rhetoric. Elgar once said that he wrote the finale as a frame for the accompanied cadenza that lies at its heart, “whose amazing loveliness would alone keep the composer’s name alive,” wrote Diana McVeagh. Themes from the earlier movements are recalled and transformed in the course of the finale to create a marvelous unity of expression throughout the entire work.

**Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70..... Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)**

Composed in 1884-1885.

Premiered on April 22, 1885 in London, conducted by the composer.

When Dvorák attended the premiere of the Third Symphony of his friend and colleague Johannes Brahms on December 2, 1883, he was already familiar with the work from a preview Brahms had given him at the piano shortly before. The effect on Dvorák of Brahms' magnificent creation, with its inexorable formal logic and its powerful shifting moods, was profound. Dvorák considered it, quite simply, the greatest symphony of the time, and it served as one of the two emotional seeds from which his D minor Symphony grew. The other, which followed less than two weeks after the first presentation of the Third Symphony, was the death of his mother.

Brahms not only encouraged Dvorák in his work, but also convinced his publisher, Simrock, to take on the music of the once little-known Czech composer. Dvorák always respected and was grateful to his benefactor, and when Brahms' Third Symphony appeared he looked upon it as a challenge presented to him to put forth a surpassing effort in his next work in the form. With Brahms' Symphony as the inspiration, and his grief at his mother's passing as the soul, the idea of a new symphony grew within him. He poured some of his sadness into the Piano Trio in F minor, Op. 65, composed early in 1884, but the spark which ignited the actual composition of the Seventh Symphony was not struck until the following summer. Dvorák had been garnering an international success with his music during the preceding years, and his popularity was especially strong in England. As one of the stops on his busy conducting tours through northern Europe, he visited Britain for the first time in the spring of 1884, and on June 13th he was elected an honorary member of the Philharmonic Society and simultaneously requested to provide a new symphony for that organization. It gave him the reason to put the gestating Symphony to paper. Following another English foray in the fall that was even more successful than the earlier one, he set to work on the Symphony in December.

With thoughts of his mother still fresh in his mind, and with the example of Brahms always before him ("It must be something respectable for I don't want to let Brahms down," he wrote to Simrock), Dvorák determined to compose a work that would solidify his international reputation and be worthy of those who inspired it. In his study of the composer's work, Otakar Sourek wrote, "Dvorák worked at the D minor Symphony with passionate concentration and in the conscious endeavor to create a work of noble proportions and content, which should surpass not only what he had so far produced in the field of symphonic composition, but which was also designed to occupy an important place in world music." On December 22nd, Dvorák wrote to his friend Antonín Rus, "I am now busy with the new Symphony (for London) and wherever I go I have no thought for anything but my work, which must be such as to move the world — well, God grant that it may be so!" He was so pleased with progress on the piece, even during the busy holiday season, that on New Year's Eve he told another friend, Alois Göbl, "I am again as happy and contented in my work as I have always been up to now and, God grant, I always shall be." The orchestration was undertaken during the winter, and the score finished in March, only a month before its premiere in London.

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Dvorák's D minor Symphony has been regularly heard in the world's concert halls ever since it was new, and it is regarded by many as his finest achievement in the genre. Sir Donald Tovey's comment is representative: "I have no hesitation in setting Dvorák's Seventh Symphony along with the C major Symphony of Schubert and the four symphonies of Brahms as among the greatest and purest examples of this art-form since Beethoven." It has a gravity and austerity that

are seldom encountered in the works of this composer, about whose music the great Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick once said, "In it, the sun always shines." Its texture and orchestration are often reminiscent of Brahms, but Dvorák's own distinctive personality is never suppressed, a difficult balance for him to attain during these years since he wanted to write music that would embody both the great German symphonic tradition and the unique characteristics of the Bohemian folk music that he held so dear. Though they are very different works, he succeeded remarkably well in each of his last three symphonies.

The Symphony begins with an ominous rumble deep in the basses reminiscent of both the introductory measures of Bruckner's symphonies and the beginning of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, another work in D minor and coincidentally also commissioned by the London Philharmonic Society. The haunting main theme is introduced by the violas and cellos, then echoed by the clarinets. Almost immediately, the possibilities for development built into the theme are explored, and the music rapidly grows in intensity until a climax is achieved when the main theme bursts forth in dark splendor from the full orchestra. The tension subsides to allow the flute and clarinet to present the lyrical second theme. The development, woven from the thematic components of the exposition, is compact and concentrated. The recapitulation is swept in on an enormous wave of sound that is capped by the re-entry of the timpani. The main theme is abandoned quickly, and the repeat of the flowing second theme is entrusted to two clarinets in a rich setting. The main theme returns, at times with considerable vehemence, to form the coda to this magnificent movement.

The second movement opens with a chorale of an almost other-worldly serenity that had been little portrayed in music since the late works of Beethoven. A complementary thematic idea with wide leaps of pathetic beauty is heard from the strings. The unusual form of the movement, part variations, part sonata, is perhaps best heard as the struggle between the beatific grace of the opening and the various states of musical and emotional tension that militate against it. It is likely that Dvorák intended this affecting music as the heart of the Symphony, as a cathartic portrayal of the feelings that had troubled him since the death of his mother.

The *Scherzo* is the greatest dance movement among Dvorák's symphonies. It is at once graceful and compelling, airy and forceful. Its bounding syncopations give it an irresistible vivacity set in a glowing, burnished orchestral sonority. Though the trio is more lyrical, it has an incessant rhythmic background in the strings that lends it an unsettled quality.

The finale continues the brooding mood of the preceding movements. Unlike many minor-mode symphonies of the 19th century, this one does not end in a blazing apotheosis of optimism, but, wrote Sourek, "rises to a glorious climax of manly, honorable and triumphant resolve." The finale is large in scale and assured in expression, and carries an emotional weight equal to that of the earlier movements. It is a moving climax to one of Dvorák's greatest works.

Of Dvorák's Seventh Symphony, Otakar Sourek wrote, "The spirit of the great symphonist-architect emanates in full glory from the work as a whole, and from each movement, from each section and, indeed, from each bar, building up before us a composition of monumental proportions, unified in all its parts, bold in design, of material without flaw or fracture, a composition which is one of the greatest and most significant symphonic compositions since Beethoven."

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enormous wave of sound that is capped by the re-entry of the timpani. The main theme is abandoned quickly, and the repeat of the flowing second theme is entrusted to two clarinets in a rich setting. The main theme returns, at times with considerable vehemence, to form the coda to this magnificent movement.

The second movement opens with a chorale of an almost other-worldly serenity that had been little portrayed in music since the late works of Beethoven. A complementary thematic idea with wide leaps of pathetic beauty is heard from the strings. The unusual form of the movement, part variations, part sonata, is perhaps best heard as the struggle between the beatific grace of the opening and the various states of musical and emotional tension that militate against it. It is likely that Dvorák intended this affecting music as the heart of the Symphony, as a cathartic portrayal of the feelings that had troubled him since the death of his mother.

The *Scherzo* is the greatest dance movement among Dvorák's symphonies. It is at once graceful and compelling, airy and forceful. Its bounding syncopations give it an irresistible vivacity set in a glowing, burnished orchestral sonority. Though the trio is more lyrical, it has an incessant rhythmic background in the strings that lends it an unsettled quality.

The finale continues the brooding mood of the preceding movements. Unlike many minor-mode symphonies of the 19th century, this one does not end in a blazing apotheosis of optimism, but, wrote Sourek, "rises to a glorious climax of manly, honorable and triumphant resolve." The finale is large in scale and assured in expression, and carries an emotional weight equal to that of the earlier movements. It is a moving climax to one of Dvorák's greatest works.

Of Dvorák's Seventh Symphony, Otakar Sourek wrote, "The spirit of the great symphonist-architect emanates in full glory from the work as a whole, and from each movement, from each section and, indeed, from each bar, building up before us a composition of monumental proportions, unified in all its parts, bold in design, of material without flaw or fracture, a composition which is one of the greatest and most significant symphonic compositions since Beethoven."

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