



# Edward Elgar

## Symphonies 1 & 2

Transcribed  
and played by

**David Briggs**

on the organ of

**Worcester  
Cathedral**

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2 CD album

Acclaim  
Productions



There is a strong tradition of transcribing Elgar's music for the organ, beginning with his friends Sir Ivor Atkins, Sir Herbert Brewer and Sir George Robertson Sinclair; more recently, concert organist Keith John has recorded his astonishing transcription of the *Enigma Variations*. Elgar was himself a good organist and his two organ sonatas (G major, 1895 and B flat major, 1933) are both cornerstones of the repertoire. The writing in both sonatas is very orchestral in conception – indeed the G major was later scored, very beautifully, for full orchestra by Professor Gordon Jacob. The other, very intriguing, side of the coin, is to hear Elgar's own orchestration of Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in C minor*.

So why the decision to transcribe Elgar's monumental First and Second Symphonies? I should state at this point that the 'favourites' file on my iPod is primarily filled with orchestral music of the 19th and 20th centuries. As a teenager I was privileged to be a viola player in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and, as such, became completely immersed in the great symphonic repertoire at a very impressionable age. Elgar's symphonies are pieces which have been in my spirit for three decades and I felt they would be ideal candidates for transcription. Siegfried Karg-Elert obviously felt the same when he transcribed the First Symphony for piano in 1933, just a year before Elgar died. It's a great transcription, but virtually unplayable, except for those blessed with three hands.

Although not explicitly autobiographical, I think we can determine a good deal about Elgar's complicated character in the First Symphony. This work underwent an extremely long gestation: Elgar was 51 when it was finished in 1908. He had been thrust into the worldwide musical consciousness with the tumultuous success of the *Enigma Variations* in 1899, but perhaps felt that, in terms of a large-scale symphony, his reputation, and indeed that of British music as a whole, was on the line. No British composer had written a symphony since the significantly smaller-scaled offerings of the English Restoration Period of the eighteenth century. How would his be judged against the symphonic colossus that was Johannes Brahms?

There is little doubt that Elgar was born with a palpable 'big spirit'. You can already hear this in the early pieces. The huge arches of the **A flat major Symphony's** first subject, at once show this creative generosity. His wife, Alice, called it 'Edward's great tune'. Here is a melody as long

and passionate as many of Rachmaninoff's, with a similarly broad sweep and organic sense of growing from within. The theme is heard in various guises throughout the symphony, and, classically, at the end of the last movement where it emerges effervescently triumphant. Some commentators have suggested that this subject represents the ideal of god-given goodness itself, with which we are all born. Particularly extraordinary about the first movement in its entirety is the way the solace and inner warmth of the first subject are soon usurped by all sorts of manic complications, chromaticisms, feelings of unease, experimentation, and not a little emotional turmoil. The first movement, almost as long as the other three put together, is surely something of a personal statement, showing Elgar as an impulsive, aristocratic, gregarious, nature-loving, complex, perhaps even volatile character.

The **Scherzo**, which follows, shows Elgar's love of speed and excitement. This is brilliant music, perhaps verging on the out-of control - maybe like Elgar driving one of these new-fangled motor cars? Suddenly the mood changes and we are taken to the second subject, very much inspired by nature. "Play this as if down by the river", Elgar said as he rehearsed it with the London Symphony Orchestra. A stroke of genius is seen in the way Elgar defragments the material in the final two minutes of the Scherzo and leads into the luscious slow movement.

This **Adagio** is surely one of the most beautiful creations ever to spring from Elgar's pen. Sir Ivor Atkins made a transcription of this movement during the composer's lifetime. It is tender and passionate music, perhaps showing Elgar's love of the calm of nature as well as very deep connection to Alice, but not altogether without some elements of disquiet and inner anguish.

The **last movement** begins with a masterly introduction, hinting at various thematic aspects, including the 'great tune'. The finale proper is characterised by surging, impulsive music, overflowing with energy and ebullience, perhaps depicting the mood of 1908, where the revival of a new century was fused with a certain apprehension about the political instability which eventually culminated in the destruction of World War I. Notable structural elements include the second subject march-like figure, which is later stated (extremely movingly) in the emotionally charged key of E flat minor, in double note values, and a slower tempo. Perhaps Elgar learned the idea of transformation of themes from Cesar Franck. The 'great tune' re-emerges, in radiant style, to produce an exhilarating conclusion.

Holding the original manuscript in the British Library was one of the high points of my life! I was intrigued by the very spidery nature of Elgar's manuscript, and also by the huge crossings-out and pieces of graffiti. He was seemingly something of a doodler. I can perceive, though, that he wrote very fast - none of the stems was vertical, as if pushed along by the wind - and that his pencil could only just keep up with his imagination.

My own transcription was made from two main sources, the 1933 Karg-Elert piano transcription and also the original manuscript of 1908. I was surprised about how much original music could be represented without the transcription becoming too dense (or even unplayable). As always, the main decisions were to do with working out what to leave out, in other words, what could be left to illusion. In some ways I think, in a transcription of this nature, the organ wins over the piano in terms of sustaining the great melodies, creating huge, surging crescendos, and also sheer variety and choice of colouristic opportunity. Recently my approach has been to state the dynamics in the score but not to be too specific in terms of registration, which I think is much better left to the integrity and originality of the player, as well as the instrument in question. When I performed this piece at King's College, Cambridge, the resident organ scholars seemed perplexed that I'd only used three general pistons. I think that successful interpretation of orchestral transcriptions on the organ is heavily reliant on the flexibility and subtle control of the instrument - with ever-changing registration - and in many ways this is more easily done using divisional pistons, in the old fashioned way. Certainly at King's, with three enclosed divisions, and that matchless acoustic, it was possible to make things quite dovetailed, so that (like with the orchestra) you can make *crescendi* and *diminuendi* without hearing stops coming on and off, with use of registrational camouflage. It's a piece I have come to love greatly, principally because of Elgar's omnipresent 'big spirit', which is all-pervading.

"The audience just sat there like stuffed pigs," retorted Sir Edward Elgar after the premiere of his **Second Symphony** in 1913. In some respects, this symphony has never fully recovered from that start - it is perhaps the less popular and less frequently performed of the three symphonies despite being even more melodically inventive and varied than the first symphony. Although the second symphony followed the first by only three years, in the intervening period the world and Elgar had changed. The ebullient, confident mood of the early years of the

century was dying, the tensions that culminated in the First World War were beginning to emerge and, by the time of the symphony's first performance, King Edward VII had also died.

Elgar himself summed up the **first movement** as 'tremendous in energy'. It begins with a magnificent, flamboyant swagger: supremely confident, imperial, noble and lofty in sentiment. As with the First Symphony though, there are undertones of self-doubt, conflict, insecurity and immense yearning. An episode in the first movement, an intense singing tune played by the cellos has a sinister quality which Elgar described as a "sort of malign influence wandering through the summer night in the garden". The storm clouds of World War I are not far away.

In place of the lyrical dreaminess of the first symphony's adagio, the second contains a colossal and very moving **funeral march**. (Many assumed this to be in memory of the recently deceased king, but sketches of the movement exist from some years before.) Elgar probably composed the theme as a tribute to his friend Alfred Rodewald, the Liverpool businessman who conducted the first performance of the first two Pomp and Circumstance marches in 1901 and who died two years later at the age of 43. As Arthur Butterworth aptly remarks: "It is interesting to compare this with the not dissimilar funeral march, the opening movement of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, alike in essentials of funeral solemnity but so different in national character. With Elgar there is a "smiling through the tears" dignity and consolation absent from the frenzied agony of Mahler's more forceful utterance". Coincidentally Mahler died just six days before the premiere of Elgar 2 at the Queen's Hall.

The ensuing **Scherzo** is remarkably modern, uneasy and edgy on both harmonic and textural levels - Elgar must have been aware of the then recent developments seen in the extended tonality (and eventual dodecaphony) of Schonberg, Webern and Berg. This is restless music of considerable nervous energy. The central episode central episode is a soul-searching return to the "malign influence in the garden" from the first movement, now presented in a fearful, awe-inspiring and utterly overwhelming nightmare: Elgar said it was the "horrible throbbing in the head of some violent fever" - as if one were being trampled underfoot by the thunderous hooves of horses charging into battle. Certainly something of a premonition...

# The Tickell Organ in Worcester Cathedral

<b>Great</b>	1 Violone ..... 16	<b>Swell</b>	15 Bourdon ..... 16	<b>Choir</b>	29 Stopped Diapason .8
	2 Open Diapason ... 8		16 Open Diapason ... 8		30 Viola ..... 8
	3 Open Flute ..... 8		17 Gedeckt ..... 8		31 Viola Celeste ... 8
	4 Gamba ..... 8		18 Salicional ..... 8		32 Principal ..... 4
	5 Principal ..... 4		19 Voix Celeste ..... 8		33 Nason Flute ..... 4
	6 Chimney Flute ..... 4		20 Principal ..... 4		34 Fifteenth ..... 2
	7 Twelfth ..... 2 <sup>2/3</sup>		21 Spitz Flute ..... 4		35 Sesquialtera ..... II
	8 Nasard ..... 2 <sup>2/3</sup>		22 Gemshorn ..... 2		36 Mixture ..... III
	9 Fifteenth ..... 2		23 Mixture ..... IV		37 Trumpet ..... 8
	10 Open Flute ..... 2		24 Oboe ..... 8		
	11 Tierce ..... I <sup>3/5</sup>		25 Vox Humana ..... 8		
	12 Mixture ..... IV				
			<i>v Tremulant</i>		
	<i>i Tremulant</i>				
			26 Contra Fagotto .. 16		
	13 Trumpet ..... 8		27 Trumpet ..... 8		
	14 Clarion ..... 4		28 Clarion ..... 4		
	<i>ii Solo to Great</i>		<i>vi Octave</i>		
	<i>iii Swell to Great</i>		<i>vii Sub Octave</i>		
	<i>iv Choir to Great</i>		<i>viii Unison Off</i>		
			<i>ix Solo to Swell</i>		

## Accessories

- 8 pistons and cancel to each manual
- 8 toe pistons to Pedal .....
- 8 general pistons for Quire organ
- 8 general pistons for Transept organ

- Reversible thumb pistons to So/Ped, Sw/Ped, Gt/Ped, Ch/Ped, So/Sw, So/Gt, Ch/Gt, Sw/Gt, So/Ch, Sw/Ch, 32 Sackbut, 32 Diapason
- Reversible toe pistons to Sw/Gt, Gt/Ped

- Sequencer + below each manual
- Sequencer - below Swell and Great
- Swell pistons on General toe pistons
- Sequencer + on all pistons
- + button available as stepper and sequencer

- USB socket for saving settings on flash drive
- MIDI system
- 16 levels of divisional pistons
- 256 levels of general pistons

General cancel

- Solo** 38 Harmonic Flute ... 8
- 39 Viole d'Orchestre .8
- 40 Cor Anglais ..... 16
- 41 Clarinet ..... 8
- 42 Hautbois ..... 8

xvii Tremulant

- 43 Tuba (unenclosed) ... 8

xviii Octave

xix Sub Octave

xx Unison Off

xxi Great reeds on Solo

- Pedal** 44 Open Diapason .. 16
- 45 Violone (from Gt)... 16
- 46 Sub Bass ..... 16
- 47 Principal ..... 8
- 48 Flute ..... 8
- 49 Choral Bass ..... 4
- 50 Mixture ..... IV
- 51 Sackbut ..... 32
- 52 Trombone ..... 16
- 53 Fagotto (from Sw).. 16
- 54 Trumpet ..... 8

xxii Great to Pedal

xxiii Swell to Pedal

xxiv Choir to Pedal

xv Solo to Pedal

xxvi Solo Octave to Pedal

xxvii Gt & Ped combs. coupled

xxviii Sw & Ped combs. coupled

xxix Swell on General toe pistons



The principal theme of **final movement** feels more settled, perhaps even rather Brahmsian, with the initial theme marked *con dignità*. Perhaps Elgar's demons have been exorcised, for the second theme is positive, too, and soon waxes *grandioso* and *nobilmente*. Elgar himself described his second theme as 'Hans himself', referring to the great conductor Hans Richter who was such an indefatigable supporter of Elgar's music. The development – beginning with rapid contrapuntal exchanges – turns into a quasi-battle scene, with a trumpet call whose top target note, a high B, orchestral players make it a point of honour to sustain longer than Elgar dared ask. For the recapitulation, calm is re-established in the tonic key and the music grows organically towards a wondrous climax which subsides finally into a quietly glowing and deeply-moving ending. Perhaps Elgar is baring his soul by writing this music of complete concord, calm and hope, representing a political and cultural utopia which sadly proved unattainable?

I am particularly grateful to Mr and Mrs Ewart James and also the Worcester Three Choirs Festival committee for their support of my Elgar 2 transcription project for the opportunity to perform and record it on the magnificent new Tickell instrument in the cathedral.

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## The Art of transcription – a broad perspective

David Briggs

As my interest in the art of transcription has increased, I often wonder what J S Bach would have had on his iPod: I suspect Vivaldi's 'L'estro armonico', maybe de Grigny's 'Premiere Livre d'Orgue' (which he is known to have copied), and certainly Dietrich Buxtehude's complete Improvisations as a download. Had Bach had an iPhone, he would certainly had the timetables for Air Leipzig, and of course his own website J S Bach.com, where you could download all the most recent Cantata's for 100 euros each, available as PDF or on Sibelius, in any key in any language.

My point, of course, is that J S Bach as well as being a genius with a unique hotline to his creator, was above all a practical and practising musician and was always making transcriptions of his as well as other composers' music. The six Schübler Chorales from 1746 are all from pre-existing Cantata movements and we know that movements from Cantatas and other previously composed works were re-used in all three Passions as well as the B minor Mass. He

transcribed four of Vivaldi's Violin Concerti as solo organ pieces. So Bach was the master of the art of transcription, making the piece in question successful and idiomatic in its new guise. This of course remains the central and imperative crux of any transcription – that it has to be re-invented and not just copied and the link between the art of improvisation and transcription is an interesting one to probe. My own feeling is that intrinsically great music can cross instrumental boundaries with compelling ease. Think of the great pianist, Earl Wild, and his fabulous transcriptions of Rachmaninoff songs. The main component, of course, is that the performance in the new medium has sufficient integrity and colour.

My own first major orchestral transcription for organ was 'Tod und Verklärung' of Richard Strauss which I made in 1992 when I was Organist at Truro. Strauss wrote for the organ very infrequently and this is a great loss. Perhaps his significant agnosticism contributed largely to this. The next big piece followed in 1996 when I'd moved to Gloucester and this was Mahler's 5th symphony, which I'd first known (and fallen in love with) as a viola player back in 1979. This was a massive task which took about three months and probably about the same to learn the notes. Priory recorded it in 1998 and it apparently became their best selling organ CD (especially in Japan). After Mahler came Maurice Ravel, and the wondrous Second Orchestral Suite from Daphnis et Chloë (which I'd also known as a viola player in NYO). Sadly, neither Debussy nor Ravel wrote for the organ – although there is just one student piece by Debussy (a fugue written when he was 16, and hardly recognisable as his style) – I think this may be because at the beginning of the century organs were not nearly as flexible in registrational control as those we have now – of course colour is everything for both these composers and they had the orchestra.

There are several important ingredients which go into both the making and the performance of successful organ transcriptions. I always start from the full orchestral score and not a piano reduction. It's perhaps surprising that, with Elgar, it's not necessary to reduce too much, or to leave too much out. The same can be said about Mahler, where, if you look at the sketches, things are often quite clear (and written for piano over 3 staves). The magic with both composers comes, of course, with the subtlety of the orchestral colour - but with modern console technology it's possible to replicate (or more accurately translate) this in a new medium. It's important, too, not to make the transcription unplayable. Anything that has too

many notes loses its effectiveness and the art of knowing what to leave out is very central to the technique. I tend to find ways, through octave transpositions, re-organising the voicing of the harmony, and so on, to make the music lie well under the hands and both feet.

The organist, of course, has four main advantages over the pianist, when it comes to performing orchestral music: (a) the ability to incorporate either single or double pedal parts, (b) more expressive potential through registrational colour and swell boxes (c) more possibility for sustaining intense orchestral crescendi and (d) very often performing in great cathedrals, where the acoustic and aesthetic ambience can add so much to the emotional impact of this music. Playing the last movement of Mahler 3rd at York Minster recently, the effect of that matchless building on the music was breath-taking. In making the transcriptions I'm quite disciplined about including the composers' original intentions for phrasing, articulations and dynamic parameters. More than that, though, I leave to the integrity and free will of the performer. As with the performance of repertoire, it's always the organist's job to re-create his interpretation with each instrument he comes across. This voyage of discovery is what makes giving organ concerts a lot of fun. From the performance point of view, I always endeavour to adopt a registration scheme that has as much colour and vivacity as the orchestra, but not necessarily the same explicit colours. For instance, there are certain instruments we just don't have – but I think with care it's possible to create registrations which have the same emotional ambience, clarity and contrast. Perhaps the most important thing is to be as compelling as possible in your musical vision, in each bar and of course ensuring that control of the instrument is as streamlined and seamless as possible.

You try and imagine what Elgar would say if he was standing over your shoulder. "Good afternoon, Mr Briggs, please play this piece as if you've never heard it before", "Sorry, old chap, I'm off to the races", "What on earth is this new organ console, a SPACESHIP?"... "If you want to hear my music, just listen around you".

I hope you will enjoy hearing these re-castings of Elgar's originals - rather like seeing great paintings in different frames under completely new lighting conditions. This is highly-charged, emotional music, which shows Elgar's complete mastery of symphonic form and orchestration, and his genius for creating a highly original soundscape, which is instantly recognisable and completely inimitable.

**David Briggs** is an internationally renowned organist whose performances are acclaimed for their musicality, virtuosity, and ability to excite and engage audiences of all ages. With an extensive repertoire spanning five centuries, he is known across the globe for his brilliant organ transcriptions of symphonic music by composers such as Mahler, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Bruckner, Ravel, and Bach. Fascinated by the art of Improvisation since a child, David also frequently performs improvisations to silent films such as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, *Nosferatu*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Metropolis*, as well as a variety of Charlie Chaplin films.



At the age of 17, David obtained his FRCO (Fellow of the Royal College of Organists) diploma, winning all the prizes and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. From 1981-84 he was the Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge University, during which time he studied organ with Jean Langlais in Paris. The first British winner of the Tournemire Prize at the St Albans International Improvisation Competition, he also won the first prize in the International Improvisation Competition at Paisley. Subsequently David held positions at Hereford, Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals. He is currently Artist-in-Residence at St James Cathedral, Toronto.

David's schedule includes more than 60 concerts a year, spanning several continents. Deeply committed to making organ music vibrant for future generations, he enjoys giving pre-concert lectures designed to make organ music more accessible to audiences. In addition, he teaches in Cambridge (UK), frequently serves on international organ competition juries, and gives masterclasses at colleges and conservatories across the U.S. and Europe.

David Briggs is also a prolific composer and his works range from full scale oratorios to works for solo instruments. He has recorded a DVD and 30 Cds, many of which include his own compositions and transcriptions. For more information, visit [www.david-briggs.org](http://www.david-briggs.org).