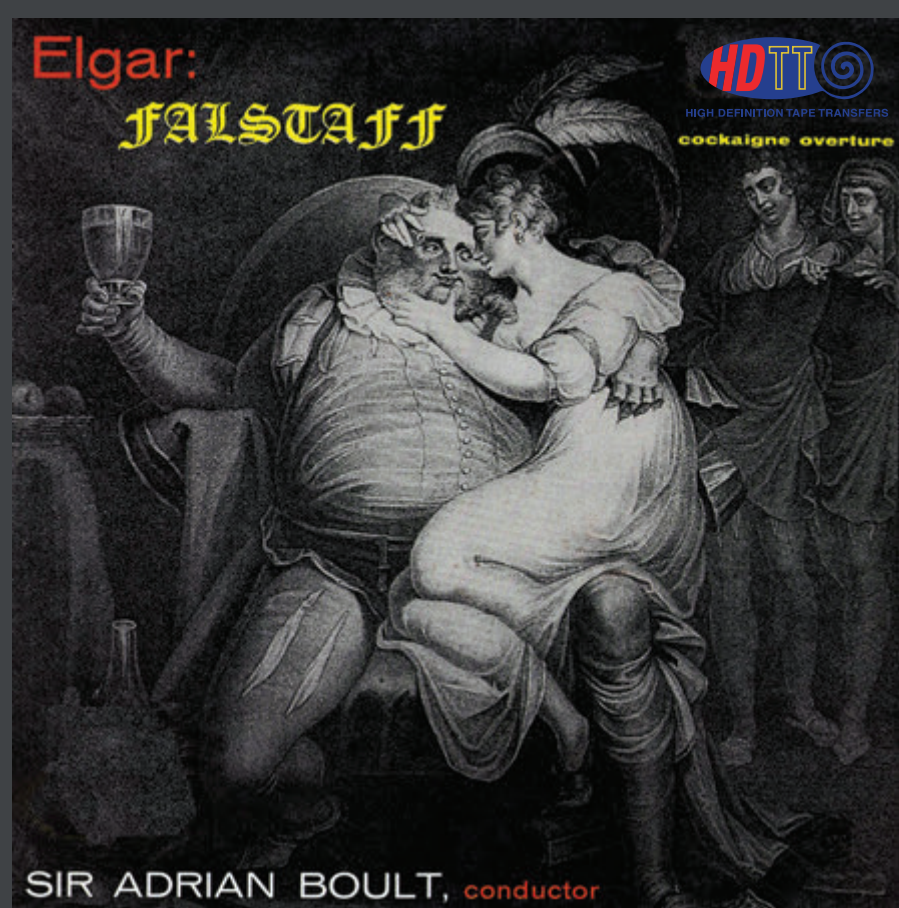


diminution (a saucy rendition supposedly meant to represent the impudent disdain of the London youths for their stodgy elders), roving about harmonically, before the coda reviews our main themes and dissolves into the development section.

After a timid beginning in B flat major, the development soon bursts forth into a full-scale brass-band parade that, through sheer force, compels the entire orchestra to join in. Elgar's musical portrayal of the band as it grows distant again is striking: not wishing to resort to such bluntly obvious tactics as placing instruments offstage or in the balconies, the composer instead uses harmonic discrepancy (initially a sustained F pedal in the nearby orchestra against the band theme in G flat major in the increasingly distant clarinets) to create the illusion of separation and even distance.

In the wake of all this tumult our young couple wanders into a church. Here Elgar's theme is of the most moving and eloquent kind, and yet the brash youngsters outside can still find it in themselves to ridicule its incessant, dogmatic nature (cheekily and effectively represented by an overuse of melodic sequence). A complex contrapuntal structure is built up from all these various melodic fragments until, by sheer accretion, a recapitulation is forced upon the scene. Although this final portion of the overture remains thoroughly in the C major tonality that underlies the entire work, Elgar does make an effective harmonic digression to E flat major for the reprise of the pompous, "nobilmente" London theme.



This work confidently embraces the European traditions of symphonic writing, and does not suffer in comparison with the symphonic poems of Richard Strauss; yet it is among Elgar's most distinctly English inspirations. Falstaff works both as a portrait of a larger-than-life character ("not only witty in [him]-self, but the cause that wit is in others") and as an evocation of the colorful and confident England of Shakespeare's Henry IV parts one and two, and Henry V. Here, Falstaff the man is the "knight, gentleman and soldier" - a high-living, hard-drinking giant of a man, full of braggadocio and ready humor rather than the pathetic buffoon of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

The characters of Sir John and Prince Hal are deftly drawn in music; contrasting themes underline their uneasy relationship. There is also room for placid "interludes" such as "Gloucestershire, Shallow's Orchard," which serve as reminders of Elgar's unerring skill at orchestral landscape-painting.

Falstaff is indeed very pictorial music; in scene after scene, characters and places come to life through evocations of color, rhythm and melodic contour.

The sequence depicting Falstaff's death inevitably recalls the closing section of Richard Strauss' *Don Quixote*, but it is without Strauss' more extroverted dramatics. Snatches of old songs run through the old knight's head until, to the sound of muffled drums, he breathes his last - a gentleman to the last.

Falstaff is an extremely effective piece of musical storytelling; it

is vivid, engaging, and full of gentle humor. However, its purely musical construction would give complete satisfaction without knowing anything about Shakespeare's plays, or the times in which he lived.

Edward Elgar's second extant orchestral overture, the *Cockaigne Overture*, Op. 40, originated in 1901, just a year or two after the completion of the famous *Enigma Variations*. *Cockaigne* was a medieval notion, a fictitious land of flowing wine and easy living that Elgar used as a backdrop for a light-hearted musical description of vivacious, turn-of-the-century London, as seen and heard through the eyes and ears of a young couple. Elgar seems to have planned a follow-up to *Cockaigne* in which he would explore the city's darker aspects ("City of Dreadful Night" was to be the subtitle), but nothing ever came of the idea.

The *Cockaigne Overture*, subtitled "In London Town," is a relatively brief piece of music -- about 350 bars all told -- cast in a traditional sonata-allegro form. A scherzando opening offers bits and pieces of themes that will presently take on more definite shapes and roles; the main "London" theme in C major, broad and sure, is given by the violins after a compelling introductory passage. A typically broad-spanned melody in E flat reflects on the couple's love for each other: the tender but passionate striving of the melody's initial octave leap could not be more typically "Elgarian." The "London" theme is given a treatment in

Elgar Falstaff Cockaigne Overture

Sir Adrian Boult - Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra

- 1 "Falstaff" Symphonic Study In C Minor, Op 68 33:32
- 2 Cockaigne Overture, Op. 40 14:00

Released by Westminster 1957



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