

techniques, jazz influence, and striking harmonic procedures (not to mention occasionally exotic ensembles (e.g., the incidental music to *The Tempest*, 1921, scored for two male voices, trumpet, trombone, piano, gong, and five percussionists!)).

Bliss' notable career as a conductor began in 1921 with his appointment as conductor of the Portsmouth Philharmonic Society. Invited to compose a work for the Three Choirs Festival in 1922, Bliss created one of his best-known works, the *Colour Symphony*; this adventuresome work had the unwelcome side effect of causing a strain in the relationship between Bliss and Elgar, a dedicated conservative through whom the actual commission for the work had come. After two years in California with his brother and father (1923-1925) (during which time Bliss lived in semi-retirement from the musical world and married Trudy Hoffmann), the composer returned to Great Britain and resumed his active composing career with the *Introduction and Allegro* of 1926 (commissioned and premiered by Leopold Stokowski).

Over the course of the 1920s Bliss began to re-evaluate his heritage as a composer and found him veering away from the "modernist" tendencies of the post-War years in favor of a richer melodic approach in which sound musical rhetoric and construction occasionally suffer in favor of expression and clarity of dramatic purpose. The five-movement *Morning Heroes*, a choral symphony dedicated to the victims of World War I and premiered in 1930, is a fine example of Bliss' new outlook.

The first years of World War II were spent in the United States teaching at Berkeley, but Bliss returned to England to take over as director of music at the BBC from 1942 to 1944. Knighted for services to British music in 1950, Bliss served as Master of the Queen's Music from 1953 to until his death in 1975 at the age of 83.

Elgar Pomp And Circumstance

Bliss Things To Come & Welcome To The Queen *Sir Arthur Bliss conducting the The London Symphony Orchestra*



Like so many of his countrymen during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British composer Edward Elgar was ardently patriotic. Combined with his natural militaristic turn (he had, after all, married the daughter of an army general) and love of ceremony, this patriotism made Elgar perfectly suited to author a long and distinguished line of Marches; ultimately, these would take a place not only in the traditional occasional music of his own country, but also in that of Britain's sister-nations across the Atlantic. The five Pomp and Circumstance marches, published collectively as Opus 39 but actually composed over a period of almost thirty years, are without a doubt the best known of his pieces in this peculiarly British genre. Though their collective title, drawn from a line in Shakespeare's *Othello* describing "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war," clearly allies them with the British military tradition, the musicality and variety (and even charm) of these five pieces render them enjoyable sans any nationalist association.

The first in the set, in D major (1901), earned Elgar his knighthood; it was later adapted into the Coronation Ode and given the well-known lyrics "Land of Hope and Glory." The famous trio section is as recognizable as the Union Jack, now virtually ubiquitous at high school and university graduation ceremonies. If one can put aside its over-familiarity, this is a very beautiful theme; as the composer himself described it in very unceremonious language, "I've got a tune in my head that's going to knock 'em dead!"

The A minor march that follows was composed almost simultaneously with the preceding one; it has never achieved anything like the fame of its sister-piece, and yet it is in many ways a better work. The trio in particular could hardly be a more striking contrast to the G major melody of the first march.

Elgar must have been in a particularly dramatic mood when he penned the Pomp and Circumstance March No. 3 in C minor (completed in 1904). This is no militaristic exercise, but rather a dramatic orchestral poem. Three bassoons

offer vague hints of a melody during the subdued opening, but the quietude is not sustained for long, as a massive brass-laden crescendo paves the way for a broad main tune. The light theme and staccato accompaniment of the A flat major trio offer a well-earned reprieve from the physicality of the march-proper.

March No. 4 in G major, composed in 1907 recalls something of the general enthusiasm of the famous first March. The main march idea is built on a single rhythmic cell, while the C major trio is marked "nobilmente."

Almost 25 years would pass before the composer completed the fifth Pomp and Circumstance March, but upon hearing the result it quickly becomes apparent that Elgar saved the best for last. The main melodic idea is all youth and exuberance (especially considering that its composer was well over seventy at the time), and Elgar provides the trio section with a broad melody that is at least the equal of the G major tune in the first March.

Although outspoken in his support of the post-World War I Parisian avant-garde during his youth, English composer Arthur Bliss ended his long career as a dedicated proponent of a more conservative, neo-Romantic musical aesthetic. Educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge and at the Royal College of Music (where he found his studies with Charles Stanford too stifling), Bliss' earliest music (all later withdrawn and subsequently destroyed by the composer) shows a strong knowledge of and interest in the music of Edward Elgar.

After service with the Royal Fusiliers (and later the Grenadier Guards) during the War, however, Bliss' musical aesthetic changed dramatically, and he quickly became known as a thoroughly "modern" composer, owing more allegiance to the exciting happenings on the continent than to the musical life of his own country. His music from the 1920s (such as the *Rhapsody* for two voices and chamber ensemble) is characterized by unusual vocal

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Elgar Pomp And Circumstance Marches

- 1 No. 1 In D Major 5:56
- 2 No. 2 In A Minor 5:23
- 3 No. 3 In C Minor 5:38
- 4 No. 4 In G Major 4:55
- 5 No. 5 In C Major 5:33
- Bliss Things To Come
- 6 Ballet 3:35
- 7 Attack 2:08
- 8 Pestilence 2:16
- 9 Reconstruction 1:54
- 10 Machines 1:29
- 11 March 3:47
- 12 Bliss Welcome the Queen 6:38

Producer: Christopher Whelan Engineer: Ken Cress

Recorded by Decca for RCA 1957 at Walthamstow Assembly Hall



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