

subsides into a ghostly transformation of the "spirit of delight" theme before the return of the wistful opening brings the movement full circle. Relief is attempted in the scherzo, by turns mercurial, gypsy-like, and playful. Where one would expect a trio comes instead the mysterious theme from the first movement, worked up to a frightening, pounding climax described by Elgar as the pounding in one's head during a fever. The finale, unlike any other in the literature, commences with a subtle, leisurely theme which gives way to a typically Elgarian nobilmente theme and a closing martial one. The central section is fugal and warlike, with the climax occurring over a long-held high trumpet note, followed by an exotic Celtic theme with muted cymbal. The recapitulation reviews the opening themes in succession. Then comes for one last time the "spirit of delight" theme, in augmentation and glowingly orchestrated into a most beautifully serene and poignant close to the symphony.



ELGAR SYMPHONY No. 2



The Firs: Elgar's Birthplace

SIR JOHN BARBIROLI HALLE ORCHESTRA

Having achieved unprecedented success with his Symphony No. 1, Elgar was now fully confident of his symphonic prowess and threw himself into work on its successor. The composer, usually flippant about even his most ambitious works, spoke from his heart regarding his latest opus, proclaiming, "I have written out of my soul." And indeed the public anxiously awaited a repeat of the grandiloquent, "feel-good" sentiment of the A flat symphony, only to be stymied by the very different Symphony No. 2 at its 1911 premiere. The tepid applause that greeted the work disappointed Elgar, who exclaimed, "They sat there like stuffed pigs!" The slow movement may have struck a chord with a populace still grieving the death of a popular monarch, but the long sunset of the entire work's close was unsettling to an audience that would have preferred an ending of assertion and optimism. Time has been kinder to the work, which is now viewed as a poignant epilogue to an age of innocence.

The well-read Elgar selected a line from Shelley, "Rarely, rarely comest thou, Spirit of Delight," putting the essence of that thought into a theme that as a cyclic unifier throughout the symphony. Without any fanfare, this theme sweeps the work into the energetic swing of the first movement, a complex of lively and varied themes that unfold kaleidoscopically. Midway through the first movement a new theme emerges, also with a significance to be revealed later; this theme is as mysterious and unsettling as a lost soul. The buoyant mood reappears for the recapitulation, and the recurring "spirit of delight" theme is joyously hammered out as the terse coda.

No greater contrast could be imagined than the following adagio, which follows the great tradition of Beethoven's Eroica and Bruckner's Seventh. It is a study in dignified mourning. Opening with a plaintive lament, the movement assumes a funereal mantle and seeks solace in contrasting themes, including a soaring Tristan-like theme which seems a desperate grasping for illusive joy. An intense climax is reached and

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1 Allegro vivace e nobilmente 19:24

2 Larghetto 13:50

3 Rondo (Presto) 8:20

4 Moderato e maestoso 14:20

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