

The Severn Suite (Op. 87)

Edward Elgar

The Severn Suite (Op.87) was composed by Elgar when he was 73 as a test piece for the 1930 British National Brass Band Championships. Elgar dedicated it to his friend, the author and critic George Bernard Shaw. Some critics consider the Severn Suite to be Elgar's best work in his later years, arguing that is a neglected masterpiece. The work is very "Elgarian" in the high Romantic style. It is fine music originally composed for brass by a famous acknowledged master that will be enjoyable for players and audiences alike. The duration of the full piece is around 16:30 and includes five movements, that follow each other without breaks: 1) Introduction (Worcester Castle) – *Pomposo* (2:10), 2) Toccata (the Tournament Grounds) - *Allegro molto* (4:20), 3) Fugue (The Cathedral) – *Andante* (3:00), 4) Minuet (in the Commandery) (5:00) – *Moderato*, and 5) Coda - *Lento – Pomposo* (2:00). The River Severn runs through the center of Worcester, England where Elgar spent his childhood and again lived in later life.

Despite what was thought for decades, it is now clear that Elgar produced a manuscript score for the full brass band written in C but intended to sound in Bb as had been the tradition for brass band transposed scores. That score surfaced in the late 1990's and is now in the Elgar Museum. Dr. Stephen Allen, professor of Music at Rider University and recognized Elgar scholar, utilized that Elgar manuscript to prepare a new 90th anniversary urtext critical edition of the brass band score and parts in 2020. The present arranger is grateful to Professor Allen for the opportunity to utilize his new critical edition as source material for this arrangement and for his suggestions.

The subtitles refer to historic places in Worcester, though the subtitles did not appear in Elgar's original brass band score and may have been added by the original publisher and perhaps not Elgar himself. It is however interesting to note that the subtitles do in fact appear on Elgar's own manuscript for his version for full orchestra, though they are said to be in someone else's handwriting.

For more information, there are at least 2 fairly recent articles that provide excellent information about the work.

Allen, Stephen Arthur (Spring, 2019). *Sepia Tones and Ghosts Pictured Within: Late Style and Elgar's The Severn Suite*, *The Musical Times* pp1–32.

Kay, Robert (December 2013). *The Severn Suite: Manuscripts, Music and Myths*. *Elgar Society Journal*.

Professor Allen suggests that the work is not merely a sight-seeing tour of Worcester, but rather is a nostalgic musical work largely focused on Elgar's later life. Note for example that Worcester Castle has not existed for centuries, except for occasional small sections of walls in various place in and around the city. Professor Allen suggests that the first *pomposo* (The Castle) section theme, represents Elgar as an old man and widower returning from his London life as a celebrity to live and walk around Worcester seeing the sights in Worcester. The tender $\frac{3}{4}$ time legato tune that appears after the *pomposo* perhaps represents his deceased wife Alice, whom he recalls as he walks the routes they used to walk together. Both of these melodic themes reappear later in the work, sometimes inverted. Allen also suggests that the second movement (Toccata-the Tournament Grounds), may not have anything to do with medieval jousting tournaments, rather

it may represent Elgar recalling racing through the city on wild bicycle rides as he was known to do as a younger and even middle-aged man. The third movement (Fugue-the Cathedral) is a serious and prayerful fugue. Does it represent the still in use old majestic Worcester Cathedral itself, or should it be subtitled “*in the Cathedral*” recalling Elgar’s prayers and longing for Alice whenever he visited the Cathedral? It builds to an emotional climax, before yielding to the fourth movement Minuet. The Minuet’s subtitle *In the Commandery* refers to a building that dates back centuries. At various times in its history it has been used for a military HQ, residences, a church, a monastic hospital, a hotel, a museum, a printing factory and now for city functions. The tunes in the Minuet are adapted from early wind quintets it is said Elgar composed when he was a young church organist at St. George’s Catholic Church that is still in use in Worcester, perhaps during homilies that did not keep Elgar’s attention. The final Coda returns to the *Pomposo* Worcester Castle theme and the lovely $\frac{3}{4}$ melody Allen suggests represents Alice.

The question as to the proper key for the piece has been controversial over the decades. To make a long story short, the present arranger is persuaded that Bb is the proper key for the brass band, and for a quintet of brass instruments. It is discussed thoroughly in the Elgar Society Journal article by Robert Kay mentioned above. Contrary conclusions as to the proper key have been reached by others. The original publication of the work for brass band is in fact in Bb. However, at least two brass band editions have been published with the parts for the Bb instruments shown in D so as to sound in C. There is also an arrangement for orchestral brass section by a famous British trombonist sounding in C. In addition, Elgar worked with organist and friend Ivor Atkins who fashioned the Severn Suite into what appears in the Elgar catalog of works as Organ Sonata No. 2 (omitting the Minuet). It is in Bb as well. Ian Farrington and Thomas Murray each produced and recorded a complete version for organ in C. Elgar himself rescored the Suite for full symphony orchestra in 1931 and it is in C, as he said the piece should be in the best key for the instrumentation, hence Bb for brass band and C for orchestra. Each of these arrangements is published by publishers other than the original publisher. The current editor has seen most of these and all claim their own copyright without any reference to any other of the publishers that published earlier versions.

Mark J. LaFratta

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Dedicated to my friend, George Bernard Shaw

Full Score

THE SEVERN SUITE

(Op.87)
for Brass Quintet

Edward Elgar
arr. M. J. LaFratta

I. Introduction: Worcester Castle

Pomposo ♩ = 112

B♭ Trumpet or Cornet 1
B♭ Trumpet or Cornet 2
Horn in F
Trombone Euphonium
Tuba

11

legato
mf
legato
mf
legato
mf
legato
mf

22

4

Musical score for measures 22-34. The score consists of five staves. Measure 22 is marked with a box containing the number 4. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). There are several accents and slurs throughout the passage.

35

5

6

Musical score for measures 35-46. The score consists of five staves. Measure 35 is marked with a box containing the number 5, and measure 46 is marked with a box containing the number 6. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *espress.* (espressivo), and *pp* (pianissimo). There are accents and slurs throughout the passage.

47

7

poco allargando

8

a tempo

Musical score for measures 47-56. The score consists of five staves. Measure 47 is marked with a box containing the number 7, and measure 56 is marked with a box containing the number 8. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), and *ff* (fortissimo). There are accents and slurs throughout the passage. The tempo marking *poco allargando* is present above measure 56, and *a tempo* is present above measure 57.

II. Toccata: Tournament Grounds

12

Allegro molto ♩ = 104

Con sord.

The musical score consists of five staves. The first staff (treble clef) begins with a rest and then enters with a melodic line starting at measure 5, marked *mf*. The second staff (treble clef) starts with a half note on G4, marked *p*, and has a slur over the next two measures. The third staff (treble clef) starts with a half note on G4, marked *p*, and has a slur over the next four measures. The fourth staff (bass clef) starts with a half note on G3, marked *p*, and has a slur over the next four measures, with the word *legato* above it. The fifth staff (bass clef) contains a steady eighth-note accompaniment, marked *p lightly*. Dynamics change to *mf* in the final measures of the first four staves. The piece concludes with a final *mf* dynamic in the fifth staff.

9 *Senza sord.* 13

f *p* *p* *scherzo* *Con sord.* *Senza sord.* *f* *p* *f* *p* *legato* *scherzo* *mf* *f* *pp lightly* *mf*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 9 through 13. It features five staves: two treble clefs, two bass clefs, and a double bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. Measure 9 is marked *f*. Measure 10 has a dynamic shift to *p*. Measure 11 is marked *p*. Measure 12 is marked *scherzo* and *Con sord.*. Measure 13 is marked *Senza sord.*. The double bass clef staff has dynamics *f*, *p*, *mf*, *f*, and *pp lightly* across measures 9-13. The bottom-most staff has dynamics *f* and *mf*.

17 14

f *p* *f* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *cresc.* *pp* *cresc.* *pp* *cresc.*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 17 through 21. It features five staves: two treble clefs, two bass clefs, and a double bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. Measure 17 is marked *f*. Measure 18 has a dynamic shift to *p*. Measure 19 is marked *f*. Measure 20 is marked *pp*. Measure 21 is marked *pp*. The double bass clef staff has dynamics *f*, *pp*, *pp*, *pp*, and *pp* across measures 17-21. The bottom-most staff has dynamics *f*, *pp*, and *cresc.*.

Andante ♩ = 82

Musical score for measures 36-37. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo is Andante with a metronome marking of ♩ = 82. The score consists of five staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Treble 3, Bass 1, and Bass 2. Measure 36 shows the beginning of the fugue with various dynamics including *p*, *p legato*, and *pp*. Measure 37 continues the fugue with dynamics such as *p*, *pp*, and *p legato*.

Musical score for measures 38-41. The score continues from the previous page. It consists of five staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Treble 3, Bass 1, and Bass 2. Measure 38 starts with a dynamic of *mp*. Measures 39-41 show the fugue developing with dynamics including *p*, *pp*, and *mp*. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

IV. Minuet: the Commandery

44 Moderato ♩ = 112

Musical score for measures 44-45. The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It consists of five staves: two treble clefs and three bass clefs. The tempo is Moderato with a metronome marking of ♩ = 112. The dynamic marking is *p* (piano) for the first two measures of each staff. In the second treble staff, there is a *lead* marking above a slur. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and some longer note values.

12

45

46

Musical score for measures 45-46. The score continues from the previous page. It consists of five staves: two treble clefs and three bass clefs. The dynamic markings are *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano) for the first two measures of each staff. In the second treble staff, there is a *mp* (mezzo-piano) marking above a slur. In the third treble staff, there is a *lead* marking above a slur. In the fourth bass staff, there is a *mf* marking above a slur. The music continues with similar rhythmic patterns and note values as the previous page.

213 69 *ritard* **Lento** ♩ = 80 *ritard*

ff *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

(16:34)