



Edward ELGAR

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 61

Sir Edward William Elgar, (2 June 1857 – 23 February 1934) was an English composer, many of whose works have entered the British and international classical concert repertoire. Among his best-known compositions are orchestral works including the *Enigma Variations*, the *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, concertos for violin and cello, and two symphonies. He also composed choral works, including *The Dream of Gerontius*, chamber music and songs. He was appointed Master of the King's Musick in 1924. Although Elgar is often regarded as a typically English composer, most of his musical influences were not from England but from continental Europe. He felt himself to be an outsider, not only musically, but socially. In musical circles dominated by academics, he was a self-taught composer; in Protestant Britain, his Roman Catholicism was regarded with suspicion in some quarters; and in the class-conscious society of Victorian and Edwardian Britain, he was acutely sensitive about his humble origins even after he achieved recognition. He nevertheless married the daughter of a senior British army officer. She inspired him both musically and socially, but he struggled to achieve success until his forties, when after a series of moderately successful works his *Enigma Variations* (1899) became immediately popular in Britain and overseas. He followed the Variations with a choral work, *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900), based on a Roman Catholic text that caused some disquiet in the Anglican establishment in Britain, but it became, and has remained, a core repertory work in Britain and elsewhere. His later full-length religious choral works were well received but have not entered the regular repertory. In his fifties, Elgar composed a symphony and a violin concerto that were immensely successful. His second symphony and his cello concerto did not gain immediate public popularity and took many years to achieve a regular place in the concert repertoire of British orchestras. Elgar's music came, in his later years, to be seen as appealing chiefly to British audiences. His stock remained low for a generation after his death. It began to revive significantly in the 1960s, helped by new recordings of his works. Some of his works have, in recent years, been taken up again internationally, but the music continues to be played more in Britain than elsewhere. Elgar has been described as the first composer to take the gramophone seriously. Between 1914 and 1925, he conducted a series of acoustic recordings of his works. The introduction of the microphone in 1925 made far more accurate sound reproduction possible, and Elgar made new recordings of most of his major orchestral works and excerpts from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61, is one of his longest orchestral compositions, and the last of his works to gain immediate popular success. The concerto was composed for the violinist Fritz Kreisler, who gave the premiere in London in 1910, with the composer conducting. Plans by the recording company *His Master's Voice* to record the work with Kreisler and Elgar fell through, and the composer made a recording with the teenaged Yehudi Menuhin that has remained in the catalogues since its first release in 1932. Elgar's music was out of fashion in the middle of the twentieth century, but the concerto nevertheless continued to be programmed. By the end of the century, when Elgar's music was restored to the general repertoire, there had been more than twenty recordings of the concerto. In 2010, centenary performances of the concerto were given around the world.