CONCERT NIGHT PROGRAM PAGES
FOR
DECEMBER 1, 2025

This edition of "Concert Night" is devoted to a performance from the DPO's Classical Connections Series, which ran for 77 programs over 23 seasons until it was cancelled for budgetary savings.

These programs, which I always described as "young people's concerts for adults", were shamelessly inspired by Leonard Bernstein's televised New York Philharmonic Young People's Concerts. Those programs were my introduction to orchestral music, and I grew up thinking that all concerts were that way: a nice, fun conductor explains the music then performs it. At age 10 or 11, when I went to my first live orchestra concert, I discovered the awful truth: No Lenny. No explanations. No fun.

When, somehow, despite that horrible realization, I ended up as an orchestra conductor, I vowed to somehow set things right. In 1990, Gary Good, then Executive Director of the Milwaukee Symphony, gave me the green-light to turn my vow into actual concerts. I did six years of what the MSO called "Classical Conversations", then brought the idea to the Dayton (along with the name that I'd always wanted to use) when I became Music Director of the DPO.

The idea was to create a way to help listeners have a deeper, more engaged, more connected listening experience. So along the way, in addition to creating the in-concert explanations and demonstrations, I wrote a *Listener's Guide* for each program, with more detailed background information than what could be found in traditional program notes.

On this edition of "Concert Night" you'll be hearing a Classical Connections program that was actually performed twice—once in November 2001 at Memorial Hall and again in January 2014 at the Schuster Center. What follows are scans of both *Listener's Guide*s. If you read carefully, you'll see that I recycled some of the 2001 essays in 2014. But remember, Bach and Vivaldi and Handel and Mozart and many other composers recycled, too!

Classical Connections no. 2

Edward Elgar:
Pomp and Circumstance March no. 4, op. 39
Variations on an Original Theme,
op. 36 (*Enigma Variations*)

Saturday, November 10, 2001

Edward Elgar

1857 **June** 2, Edward Elgar, the fourth of seven children, is born near Worcester to piano tuner and organist William Elgar and Ann Greening Elgar.

1864 Elgar begins study of the piano at Miss Walsh's Catholic School.

1867 Elgar composes his first tune, which he later used in the 1907 *Wand of Youth* Suite.

1869 Carried away by the music at a rehearsal of Handel's *Messiah*, Elgar decides to take up the violin. Composes music for a school play.

1877 Elgar is named leader of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society. Learns to play the bassoon.

1879 Named music director for the Worcester City and County Pauper Lunatic Asylum. (I'm not making this up!)

1883 Travels to Leipzig, where he hears music of Brahms, Schumann and Wagner.

1886 Gives lessons in accompaniment to Caroline Alice Roberts, whom he marries three years later.

1890 Premiere of Elgar's first major orchestral piece, the concert overture *Froissart.*

1892 Travels to Bayreuth to hear Wagner's *Parsifal, Tristan and Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger.*

1898 Elgar gets the idea for a set of variations composed of character portraits of his friends and acquaintances — what will become the *Enigma Variations.*

1899 Noted German conductor Hans Richter conducts the premiere of the *Enigma Variations* in London on **June 21**. Elgar immediately begins work on a new, extended ending for the final variation, which he completes 10 days later.

1901 Composes the first two *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. The other marches in the five-march set follow in 1902, 1907 and 1930, respectively.

1908 Completion of Symphony no. 1.

1910 Composes Violin Concerto, with the enigmatic inscription "*Aquí esta encerrada el alma de...*" ("Here is enshrined the soul of..."). Begins work on Symphony no. 2.

1918 Concerto for Cello and Orchestra.

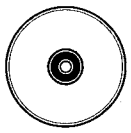
1920 Caroline Alice Elgar dies of cancer.

1928 Knighted by King George V.

1933 Starts sketching Symphony no. 3 (left unfinished at his death and completed by British composer Anthony Payne in 1999). Elgar is diagnosed with inoperable cancer.

1934 Dies on **February 23**.

Portrait of Elgar
Michael Kennedy
Oxford U. Press
ISBN 0198163657



Elgar
Pomp and
Circumstance Marches
Royal Philharmonic
Yehudi Menuhin
Virgin Classics
Ultraviolet
CUV 61199

Elgar
Enigma Variations
London Sympony
Pierre Monteux
London/Decca
2LH 452303

Excellent Jumping-Off Place for All Things Elgar:
http://www.elgar.org/

"Who's Who in Elgar?"

It has been said that Edward Elgar inherited his love of puzzles and riddles from his mother. If so, we owe her a great debt, because only a true puzzle-master could have created the *Enigma Variations*, a musical mystery that is unsolved to this day, and will probably remain so forever.

These variations, composed early in a long compositional career, have remained popular ever since, popular for their beautiful, exciting and varied music as well as for their — well — enigmatic attributes. Elgar himself claimed to be surprised at all the to-do. He teased his closest friends, dropping clues to the piece's unresolved mystery and declaring his utter shock that they couldn't figure it out.

Indeed there are many different enigmas to solve. The work is dedicated "To my friends pictured within" and each variation bears a set of initials or a cryptic nickname. Those easy-to-solve puzzles are the key to the piece's intrinsic charm. But "Who's Who?" is only the first of several layers of games that Elgar is playing here.

In other words, don't expect a clear solution to the *Enigma Variations* enigma on November 10th. We'll explore the many mysteries of this last orchestral masterpiece of the 19th century, and we'll solve quite a few of Elgar's puzzles and games. But barring some major, unexpected discovery, we'll leave Memorial Hall with some things still unresolved.

One thing that isn't unresolved is the reason why Elgar's *Enigma Variations* has delighted audiences for more than a century. It's great music, a great story and a great musical mystery. In the end, the answer to "Who's Who in the *Enigma Variations*" is, of course, Elgar himself. It's a self-portrait: a portrait of how he thought, how he amused himself and how he composed.

A One-Man British Revival

Due to our colonial history, we in the United States have a decidedly Anglocentric view of the world. We speak English. Our legal system is based on English law. The United States and Britain enjoy a "special relationship" in current-day international politics. Much North American folk music closely resembles the traditional musics of the British Isles. So it may come as a surprise to us that the Brits don't rate too high in the history of classical music.

Check out any standard music history text. The bulk of the narrative deals with musical styles and traditions of the European continent — France and the Low Countries, Italy, Austria and Germany. British music appears mostly as an afterthought. Although there were cultural exchanges between the British Isles and the continent throughout the 15 centuries that comprise "Western classical music," music developed somewhat differently on each side of the Channel. There were long periods of time when English music sounded distinctly different from the music of the rest of Europe.

Britain's geographical and cultural isolation led, inevitably, to a kind of musical inferiority complex. But facts are facts. Here's a century-by-century list of some of the most influential composers in music history:

Century	Major British Composers	Major European Composers
15th	Dunstable	Dufay, Ockeghem, Josquin, Obrecht
16th	Tallis, Byrd, Dowland	Willaert, Gombert, Clement, de Rore, Palestrina, Lassus, Victoria
17th	Purcell	Sweelinck, Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Schütz, Buxtehude
18th		L. Couperin, Corelli, F. Couperin, Vivaldi, Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven
19th		Schubert, Schumann, Liszt, Verdi, Wagner, Bruckner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Rimsky-Korsakov
20th	Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Walton, Tippett, Britten, Maxwell Davies, Tavener, Adès	Mahler, Debussy, Strauss, Bartok, Ravel, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Webern, Berg, Messiaen, Boulez, Stockhausen, Penderecki

Dunstable, Byrd, Tallis, Dowland and Purcell were all great composers, but they are vastly outnumbered. European domination peaked during the great "dark ages" of English classical music, between the death of Henry Purcell in 1695 and the great flowering of British composition in the 20th century.

A single piece of music ended those "dark ages" and began the great revival of British classical music: Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. The tremendous success of Elgar's variations — both in Britain and on the continent — seemed to prove to the people of the United Kingdom that they could be composers just like the Europeans. Indeed, the young Edward Elgar was beginning to despair of a career in composing until the *Enigma Variations* became a great hit.

What made the *Enigma Variations* so special? First and foremost, it followed the technical and stylistic conventions of continental music. That gave it legitimacy east of the English Channel. At the same time, Elgar's variations

had unmistakably British wit, humor and flair. It proved that classical music wasn't just a continental game anymore.

Sometimes a single piece of music by a single composer can turn the tide of music history. Edward Elgar was such a composer and his *Enigma Variations* was such a piece.

The Spice of Life

Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations* is in good company on this year's Classical Connections season. Brahms' *German Requiem* was a novel take on the idea of a "Mass for the Dead." Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* sparked the program music rage of the 19th and 20th centuries. Mahler's Symphony no. 5 was a radical new departure for the first great symphonist of the 20th century.

So Elgar's opus 36 must have equally significant credentials, right?

Wrong. There's nothing revolutionary about Elgar's variations. They're beautiful. They're intriguing. They're fun to play and delightful to hear. But instead of breaking new ground with his Variations on an Original Theme, Elgar was building on a tradition dating back to the Baroque Period and even earlier.

Here are the most common variation techniques:

Theme **and Variations:** This is the technique that Elgar used. A melody is presented, followed by a series of short movements, each of which presents some kind of variation on the tune. There is often a grand finale to bring the set to a close.

Chaconne: A continuous series of variations based a repeating series of harmonies.

Passacaglia (also called Ground): A continuous series of variations based on a repeating bass line.

Here are some of the most important pre-Elgar variations, all pieces that Elgar surely knew.

Corelli: It would be hard to imagine that Elgar, a violinist, had not played Corelli's Variations on "La Follia." "La Follia," also known as "La Follia d'Espagna" was a dance tune popular in Europe from the 16th through the 18th centuries. Many other composers besides Corelli also wrote variations on this tune, including Mozart's nemesis Antonio Salieri.

Bach: Another violin piece that Elgar certainly knew was the Chaconne from Bach's Partita no. 2 for solo violin. Other important Bach variations include the Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor for organ and the Goldberg Variations for solo keyboard, an hour-and-a-quarter long set of 30 complex variations on a simple melody.

Haydn: There are numerous Haydn theme-and-variations movements in his string quartets and symphonies. One of the best known is the slow movement from Haydn's Symphony no. 94, the *Surprise Symphony.*

Mozart: Probably the most famous Mozart variations are his piano variations on the French folk tune "*Ah vous dirai-je Maman.*" We know the tune as "Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star."

Antonio Diabelli

Beethoven: Diabelli Variations for solo piano. In 1819 the Austrian composer and music publisher Antonio Diabelli created a great public relations scheme. He wrote a waltz, then commissioned 50 great composers of the day to each write one variation on his waltz, which he would then publish as a kind of "Greatest of the Greatest" set of variations. But Beethoven didn't follow the rules. He wrote a complete set of 33 variations of his own, which completely eclipsed Diabelli's plan. Another important but often overlooked theme and variations is the finale to Beethoven's Symphony no. 9.

Paganini: The great violin virtuoso composed possibly the most famous variations of all, his Caprice op. 1, no. 24 for solo violin. It is a fiendishly difficult theme and variations, the theme of which was later used as the basis for works by Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Boris Blacher, Witold Lutoslawski, Andrew Lloyd Webber and others.

Schubert: Elgar knew (and had probably played) Schubert's lovely *Trout Quintet,* which closes with a set of variations on the melody of Schubert's song "The Trout."

Schumann: His opus 1, the *Theme and Variations on the Name Abegg* for solo piano is based less on than a melody than a series of notes: A, B-flat ("B" in the German note-naming system), E, G, G. Schumann went to school with two brothers named Abegg, and he dedicated the work to a fictitious girl, "Mademoiselle Pauline Comtesse d'Abegg." There clearly something of the "*Enigma* spirit" in Schuman's piece. Indeed, there are other Schumann-*Enigma* connections. Schumann's non-variations piano work *Carnaval* includes a series of character portraits. And three movements of Schumann's *Album for the Young* are entitled "***" — just like Elgar's Variation XIII.

Brahms: There are several Brahms variations for solo piano based on themes of composers whom he admired, including Handel, Paganini and Schumann. The finale of Brahms' *Fourth Symphony* is a chaconne (patterned after Bach's chaconne for solo violin), and his 1873 *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* is one of the obvious precursors of Elgar's *Enigma Variations.* In fact, Elgar heard a concert performance of the *Haydn Variations* shortly before he began composing his opus 36.

Dvořák: Symphonic Variations, op. 78 of 1877. Elgar knew this orchestral theme and variations well, and was certainly influenced by it.

Tchaikovsky: Suite no. 4 ("Mozartiana"). This orchestration of pieces by Mozart concludes with an elaborate theme and variations, which Elgar heard in concert shortly before composing the *Enigma Variations.* Better known is Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* for cello and orchestra.

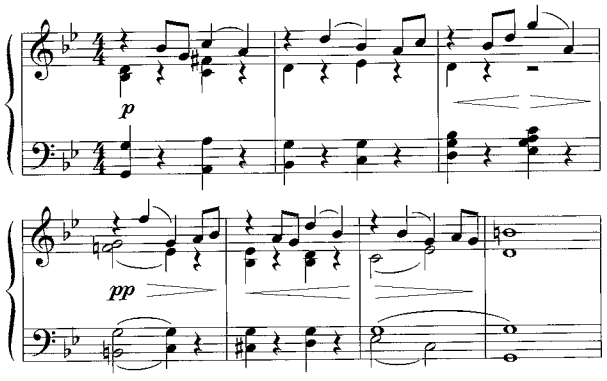
Parry: C. Hubert H. Parry (1848-1918) is almost unknown in the U.S. But this older contemporary of Elgar was famous throughout Britain, especially for his rousing setting of William Blake's poem *Jerusalem.* More importantly, Parry's *Symphonic Variations* — like Elgar's, variations on an original theme — preceded the *Enigma Variations* by only two years. Elgar knew Parry's work well, and may well have thought "I bet *I* could do that, too!"

And indeed, he could!

A Mystery Wrapped in an "Enigma"

On Friday, October 21, 1898 Edward Elgar returned home from a hard day giving violin lessons in Malvern, Worcestershire. After dinner, Alice Elgar said to her dog-tired husband, "Edward, you look like a good cigar." Elgar obligingly lit up a stogie, parked himself at the piano and started noodling. The story continues in his own words:

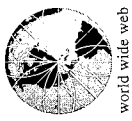
> I began to play, and suddenly my wife interrupted by saying: "Edward, that's a good tune." I awoke from the dream: "Eh? Tune? What tune?'" And she said, "Play it again, I like that tune." I played and strummed, and played, and then she exclaimed: "That's the tune!"



Enigma "Tune"

Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations
Patrick Turner
Thames Publishing
ISBN 0905211014

Good Elgar Site with Lots of Stuff on the *Enigma Variations:*
http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/4056/



Caroline Alice Elgar

Elgar's story continues: "The voice of C.A.E. [Caroline Alice Elgar] asked with a sound of approval, 'What is that?' I answered, 'Nothing — but something might be made of it…' "

Something indeed! That tune, noodled on that piano that evening with that cigar burning in that ashtray, was the genesis of the composition that put Elgar on the musical map and made him the pre-eminent British composer of his generation. The "something" that Elgar made of that "nothing" is the magnificent *Enigma Variations.*

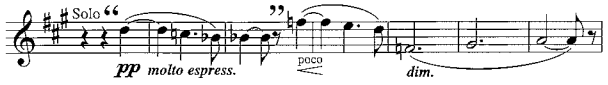
I could argue that Elgar's composition would be just as worthy, just as wonderful, just as beloved if the world had stuck to its original title: *Variations on an Original Theme,* op. 36. I could, but I won't. Everyone loves a good mystery, and *Enigma Variations* has a much better ring to it. So here's a summary of the various enigmas that swirl around the piece.

ENIGMA #1, THE THEME: In a typical set of variations, the composer begins with a theme which is to be varied, and this theme is called — hold on to your hats, folks — "Theme." Not so in Elgar's variations. The 17 measures of music which precede the First Variation are labelled not "Theme," but "Enigma." There's no explanation. (If there were, it wouldn't be an enigma, now would it?) SOLUTION: None on which everyone can agree!

ENIGMA #2, THE VARIATIONS' TITLES: Each variation bears a roman numeral, plus a name or set of initials in parentheses: C.A.E., H.D.S-P., R.B.T., W.M.B., R.P.A., Ysobel, Troyte, W.N., Nimrod, Dorabella, G.R.S., B.G.N., *** and E.D.U. The careful reader should already understand what's going on. (Not so careful? Just back up four paragraphs, and you'll find out what the first variation's initials mean!) An important clue appears on the title page, which bears the words "Dedicated to my friends pictured within." SOLUTION: Each variation is a character portrait of one of Elgar's friends. Between hints Elgar dropped over the years and the sleuthing of biographers and scholars, the true identities of friends hidden behind the initials and nicknames — with the important exception of *** — have all been revealed. ALTERNATE SOLUTION: Some interpreters prefer to think of each variation as a "solution" to the "enigma" in the style of each friend. Isabel Fitton, for instance, was a

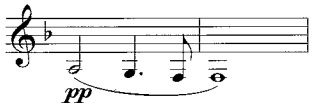
violist, so her variation features a viola solo. "B.G.N." features a cello solo, and guess what instrument Elgar's chum Basil G. Nevinson played? You get the idea...

ENIGMA #3, THE QUOTE IN VARIATION XIII: In the middle of Variation XIII the mood of the music suddenly changes as Elgar sets up a mysterious, static musical texture: the violas play an undulating rhythm, a solo cello holds a single note and the tympanist plays a very soft roll using snare drum sticks. Above that, a solo clarinet plays a lonely melody. Here is *exactly* how the music is notated in the clarinet part:



Even if you don't read music you can see the enigmatic quotation marks around the first few notes of the clarinet solo. **SOLUTION:** Read on to Enigma #4...

ENIGMA #4, THE IDENTITY OF *:** Some people think this is the true enigma of the *Enigma Variations.* Elgar dropped the following hint to the "enquiring minds" of his day: "The pretty Lady is on the sea and far away and I meant this (originally) as a little quotation from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage.*" So we turn to measure 379 of *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, and look what we find in the clarinet part:



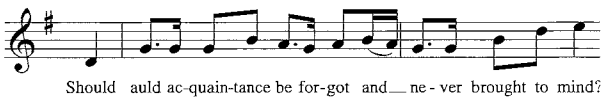
It's a different meter. It's a different key. It's a different register. But it's certainly the mystery quote of Enigma #3 above. Now go back to Elgar's hint: "The pretty Lady is on the sea and far away..." That explains the strange accompaniment to Elgar's clarinet solo — especially the unusual sound of the snare drum sticks on the tympani: Elgar is imitating the sound of the low rumble of the engine of the ocean liner on which "the pretty Lady" is voyaging. That's cool, but that's not what you want to know. You want to know the identity of "the pretty Lady" — and it can't be Elgar's wife, because Alice Elgar was the first variation! **SOLUTION:** An early manuscript of this variation bears the initials L.M.L. instead of the *** cipher. Early in the process of composing the variations, Elgar made a list of variations — planned, completed and in-process. The first few bars of Variation XIII appear there with the initial "L." Armed with that information, "the pretty Lady" is revealed to be a good friend of the Elgars, Lady Mary Lygon (L.M.L., get it?), who was, at that time, on an ocean liner heading for Australia. QED.

Not so fast! Go back to Elgar's hint again: "I meant this (originally) as a little quotation..." At the risk of sounding too Clintonian, I must point out that if Elgar "originally" meant it as this, that implies that he subsequently meant it as something else — as *someone* else. Rosa Burley, the headmistress of the Malvern school where Elgar taught violin, wrote in her memoir *Edward Elgar: The Record of a Friendship* that she knew Variation XIII was not about Lady Mary Lygon at all, but that it represented another woman, whom she discretely refused to identify. That has led to an **ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION:** At some time after composing this variation, Elgar changed the subject from Lady Mary Lygon (L.M.L) to the great lost love of his youth, Helen Weaver. A happily married man, his own sense of discretion led him to title the variation *** instead of H.W.

ENIGMA #5, THE DARK SAYING AND THE LARGER THEME: Here is Elgar, in his program note for the premiere (underscored emphasis is my own):

> "It *is* true that I have sketched for their amusement and mine, the idiosyncrasies of 14 of my friends... but this is a personal matter, and need not have been mentioned publicly. The variations should stand simply as a 'piece' of music... The Enigma I will not explain — its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the connexion [sic] between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes,' but is not played... So the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late dramas — e.g., Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and *Les sept Princesses* — [where] the chief character is never on the stage."

SOLUTION: No one has ever figured out what Elgar's "dark saying" might be, so he must have been right when he said that it "must be left unguessed"! The reference to a "larger theme" that "goes" "over the whole set" "but is not played" has sent Elgarian detectives — professional and amateur alike — scurrying in search of another melody which could be (but was not) combined musically with the tune of the "Enigma." An early favorite was



until Elgar rebuffed the idea with a brusque, "No. *Auld Lang Syne* won't do." Other candidates are *God Save the King, Loch Lomond,* and many others. Each of these melodies can, indeed be combined with the Enigma Tune, but the results aren't all that good. (I'll prove that by playing some of these hapless "combinations" at our

concert.) Some have suggested a non-musical "larger theme" such as Friendship. But there's nothing "dark" about that. Others think that in some way Elgar himself is the "larger theme." But Elgar is the final variation. ("E.D.U." is a red herring, a set of non-initials. Edu was Alice Elgar's pet name for her husband.) Since Elgar is E.D.U., he can't be the "larger theme" because "the principal Theme never appears"! So far, there is no solution. After all, how could there be? If there were, it wouldn't be the *Enigma Variations* anymore, just *Variations on an Original Theme, op. 36.*

This is no ordinary mystery. It's not a whodunit. We know that. (Elgar done it!) This mystery is a whatideedoo. And that, we may never know. Edward Elgar must be having a good laugh (and a good cigar) at our expense. I like to think of this as the great unsolved mystery of classical music — a musical analog to Fermat's Last Theorem, the three-centuries-old great unsolved mystery of mathematics.

POST SCRIPT: On October 6, 1994, British mathematician Andrew Wiles solved Fermat's Last Theorem. I doubt we'll have a solution to Elgar's Enigma by November 10, 2001, but you never know. So stay tuned!


Basil Nevinson


Hew Steuart Powell


Richard Townsend


George Sinclair with Dan


William Baker


Alice and Edward Elgar


Dora Penny


Richard Arnold


August Jaeger


Isabel Fitton


Winifred Norbury


Arthur Troyte Griffith

Elgar
Listener's Guide

Elgar and His Enigma Variations
Concert Three: Friday, January 10, 2014
Program: Pomp and Circumstance Marches No. 4 and No. 1 | Variations on an Original Theme ("Enigma")

It's been said that Edward Elgar inherited his love of puzzles and riddles from his mother. If so, we owe her a great debt, because only a true puzzle-master could have created the Enigma Variations, a musical mystery that is unsolved to this day and may remain so forever.

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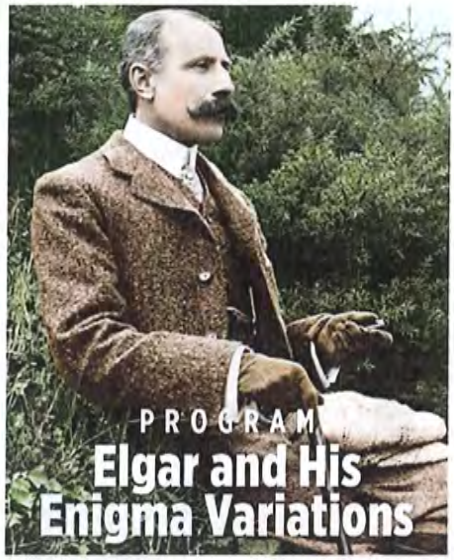
DAYTON *Philharmonic*

NEAL GITTLEMAN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR
DAYTON PHILHARMONIC

Indeed, there are many different enigmas to solve. The work is dedicated "To my friends pictured within," and each variation bears a set of initials or a cryptic nickname. Those easy-to-solve puzzles are the key to the piece's intrinsic charm. But "Who's Who?" is only the first level of this game.

In other words, don't expect a clear solution to the Enigma Variations enigma on January 10. We'll explore the many mysteries of this last orchestral masterpiece of the 19th century, and we'll solve quite a few of Elgar's puzzles and games. But barring some major, unexpected discovery, we'll leave the Schuster Center with some things still unresolved.

One thing that isn't unresolved is the reason that Elgar's Enigma Variations has delighted audiences for more than a century. It's great music, a great story and a great musical mystery. In the end, the answer to "Who's Who in the Enigma Variations?" is, of course, Elgar himself. It's a self-portrait: a portrait of how he thought, how he amused himself and how he composed.



DEMIRJIAN
CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS

Friday, January 10, 2014, 8:00 p.m.,
Schuster Center

Q&A after the concert

Neal Gittleman *conductor, presenter*

ELGAR Pomp and Circumstance
March No. 4

Enigma Variations
Discussion and Demonstration

ELGAR Pomp and Circumstance
March No. 1

ELGAR Variations on an
Original Theme ("Enigma")

NOTE: The program for this concert has recently changed and no longer includes Music from The Garden of Cosmic Speculation by composer Michael Gandolfi due to interruption of rehearsal schedules by severe weather. We hope to program Gandolfi's work on the 2015–2016 season. The Dayton Philharmonic apologizes for any inconvenience.

Broadcast on WDPR 88.1, May 24, 2014 at 10:00 a.m.

The Spice of Life

BY NEAL GITTLEMAN

Edward Elgar's Enigma Variations is in good company on this year's Classical Connections season. Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* was a breakthrough of modern music. Puccini's *Tosca* took the style of verismo opera to new heights. Saint-Saëns' Symphony No. 3 made ingenious use of the pipe organ, the orchestra, and cyclic thematic material.

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Wrong. There's nothing revolutionary about Elgar's variations. They're beautiful. They're intriguing. They're fun to play and delightful to hear. But instead of breaking new ground with his Variations on an Original Theme, Elgar was building on a tradition dating back to the Baroque period and even earlier.

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Passacaglia (also called Ground): A continuous series of variations based on a repeating bass line.

Here are some of the most important pre-Elgar variations, all pieces that Elgar surely knew.

Corelli: It would be hard to imagine that Elgar, a violinist, had not played Corelli's Variations on "La Follia." "La Follia," also known as "La Follia d'Espagna," was a dance tune popular in Europe from the 16th through the 18th centuries. Many other composers besides Corelli also wrote variations on this tune, including Mozart's nemesis Antonio Salieri.

Bach: Another violin piece that Elgar certainly knew was the Chaconne from Bach's Partita No. 2 for solo violin. Other important Bach variations include the Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor for organ and the Goldberg Variations for solo keyboard, a 75-minute set of 30 complex variations on a simple melody.

Haydn: There are numerous Haydn theme-and-variations movements in his string quartets and symphonies. One of the best known is the slow movement from Haydn's Symphony No. 94, the Surprise Symphony.

Mozart: Probably the most famous Mozart variations are his piano variations on the French folk tune "Ah vous dirai-je Maman." We know the tune as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

Beethoven: Diabelli Variations for solo piano. In 1819 the Austrian composer and music publisher Antonio Diabelli created a great public relations scheme. He wrote a waltz and then commissioned 50 great composers of the day to each write one variation on his waltz, which he would then publish as a kind of "Greatest

CORELLI

BACH

HAYDN

MOZART

BEETHOVEN

PAGANINI

SCHUBERT

SCHUMANN

BRAHMS

DVOŘÁK

TCHAIKOVSKY

PARRY

of the Greatest" set of variations. But Beethoven didn't follow the rules. He wrote a complete set of 33 variations of his own, which completely eclipsed Diabelli's plan. Another important but often overlooked theme and variations is the finale to Beethoven's Symphony No. 9.

NTONIO DIABELLI

Paganini: The great violin virtuoso composed possibly the most famous variations of all, his Caprice Op. 1, No. 24 for solo violin. It is a fiendishly difficult theme and variations, the theme of which was later used as the basis for works by Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Boris Blacher, Witold Lutosławski, Andrew Lloyd Webber and others.

Schubert: Elgar knew (and had probably played) Schubert's lovely Trout Quintet, which closes with a set of variations on the melody of Schubert's song "The Trout."

Schumann: His Opus 1, the Theme and Variations on the Name Abegg for solo piano, is based less on a melody than on a series of notes: A, B flat ("B" in the German note-naming system), E, G, G. Schumann went to school with two brothers named Abegg, and he dedicated the work to a fictitious girl, "Mademoiselle Pauline Comtesse d'Abegg." There clearly is something of the "Enigma spirit" in Schuman's piece. Indeed, there are other Schumann-Enigma connections. Schumann's non-variations piano work Carnaval includes a series of character portraits. And three movements of Schumann's Album for the Young are entitled "***" — just like Elgar's Variation XIII.

Brahms: There are several Brahms variations for solo piano based on themes of composers whom he admired, including Handel, Paganini and Schumann. The finale of Brahms' Fourth Symphony is a chaconne (patterned after Bach's chaconne for solo violin), and his 1873 Variations on a Theme of Haydn is one of the obvious precursors of Elgar's Enigma Variations. In fact, Elgar heard a concert performance of the Haydn Variations shortly before he began composing his variations.

Dvořák: Symphonic Variations, Op. 78 of 1877. Elgar knew this orchestral theme and variations well, and he was certainly influenced by it.

Tchaikovsky: Suite No. 4 ("Mozartiana").This orchestration of pieces by Mozart concludes with an elaborate theme and variations, which Elgar heard in concert shortly before composing the Enigma Variations. Better known is Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme for cello and orchestra.

Parry: C. Hubert H. Parry (1848–1918) is almost unknown in the U.S. But this older contemporary of Elgar was famous throughout Britain, especially for his rousing setting of William Blake's poem "Jerusalem." More importantly, Parry's Symphonic Variations—like Elgar's, variations on an original theme—preceded the Enigma Variations by only two years. Elgar knew Parry's work well and may well have thought, "I bet I could do that, too!"

And indeed, he could!

A One-Man British Revival

Because of our colonial history, we in the United States have a decidedly Anglocentric view of the world. We speak English. Our legal system is based on English law. So it may come as a surprise to us that the Brits don't rate too high in the history of classical music.

Check out any standard music history text. The bulk of the narrative deals with musical styles and traditions of the European continent—France and the Low Countries, Italy, Austria and Germany. British music appears mostly as an afterthought. Although there were cultural exchanges between the British Isles and the continent throughout the 15 centuries that comprise "Western classical music," music developed somewhat differently on each side of the Channel. There were long periods of time when English music sounded distinctly different from the music of the rest of Europe.

Britain's geographical and cultural isolation led, inevitably, to a kind of musical inferiority complex. But facts are facts. Here's a century-by-century list of some of the most influential composers:

	Major British	Major European
15th	Dunstable	Dufay, Ockeghem, Josquin, Obrecht
16th	Tallis, Byrd, Dowland	Willaert, Gombert, Clement, de Rore, Palestrina, Lassus, Victoria
17th	Purcell	Sweelinck, Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Schütz, Buxtehude
18th		L. Couperin, Corelli, F. Couperin, Vivaldi, Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven
19th		Schubert, Schumann, Liszt, Verdi, Wagner, Bruckner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Rimsky-Korsakov
20th	Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Walton, Tippett, Britten, Maxwell Davies, Tavener, Adès	Mahler, Debussy, Strauss, Bartók, Ravel, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Webern, Berg, Messiaen, Boulez, Stockhausen, Penderecki

Dunstable, Byrd, Tallis, Dowland and Purcell were all great composers, but they are vastly outnumbered. European domination peaked during the great "dark ages" of English classical music, between the death of Henry Purcell in 1695 and the great flowering of British composition in the 20th century.

A single piece of music ended those "dark ages" and began the great revival of British classical music: Edward Elgar's Enigma Variations. The tremendous success of Elgar's variations — both in Britain and on the continent — seemed to prove to the people of the United Kingdom that they could be composers just like the Europeans. Indeed, the young Edward Elgar was beginning to despair of a career in composing until the Enigma Variations became a great hit. What made the Enigma Variations so special? First and foremost, it followed the technical and stylistic conventions of continental music. That gave it legitimacy east of the English Channel. At the same time, Elgar's variations had unmistakably British wit, humor and flair. It proved that classical music wasn't just a continental game anymore.

Sometimes a single piece of music by a single composer can turn the tide of music history. Edward Elgar was such a composer, and his Enigma Variations was such a piece.

An Elgar Timeline

1857
June 2, Edward Elgar, the fourth of seven children, is born near Worcester to piano tuner and organist William Elgar and Ann Greening Elgar.

1864
Elgar begins study of the piano at Miss Walsh's Catholic School.

1867
Elgar composes his first tune, which he later used in the 1907 Wand of Youth Suite.

1869
Carried away by the music at a rehearsal of Handel's *Messiah*, Elgar decides to take up the violin. Composes music for a school play.

1877
Elgar is named leader of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society. Learns to play the bassoon.

1879
Named music director for the Worcester City and County Pauper Lunatic Asylum. (I'm not making this up!)

1883
Travels to Leipzig, where he hears music of Brahms, Schumann and Wagner.

1886
Gives lessons in accompaniment to Caroline Alice Roberts, whom he marries three years later.

1890
Premiere of Elgar's first major orchestral piece, the concert overture Froissart.

1892
Travels to Bayreuth to hear Wagner's *Parsifal*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger*.

1898
Elgar gets the idea for a set of variations composed of character portraits of his friends and acquaintances—what will become the Enigma Variations.

1899
Noted German conductor Hans Richter conducts the premiere of the Enigma Variations in London on June 21. Elgar immediately begins work on a new, extended ending for the final variation, which he completes 10 days later.

1901
Composes the first two Pomp and Circumstance marches. The other marches in the five-march set follow in 1902, 1907 and 1930, respectively.

1908
Completion of Symphony No. 1.

1910
Composes Violin Concerto, with the enigmatic inscription "Aquí esta encerrada el alma de..." ("Here is enshrined the soul of..."). Begins work on Symphony No. 2.

1918
Concerto for Cello and Orchestra.

1920
Caroline Alice Elgar dies of cancer.

1928
Knighted by King George V.

1933
Starts sketching Symphony No. 3 (left unfinished at his death and completed by British composer Anthony Payne in 1999). Elgar is diagnosed with inoperable cancer.

1934
Dies on February 23.