

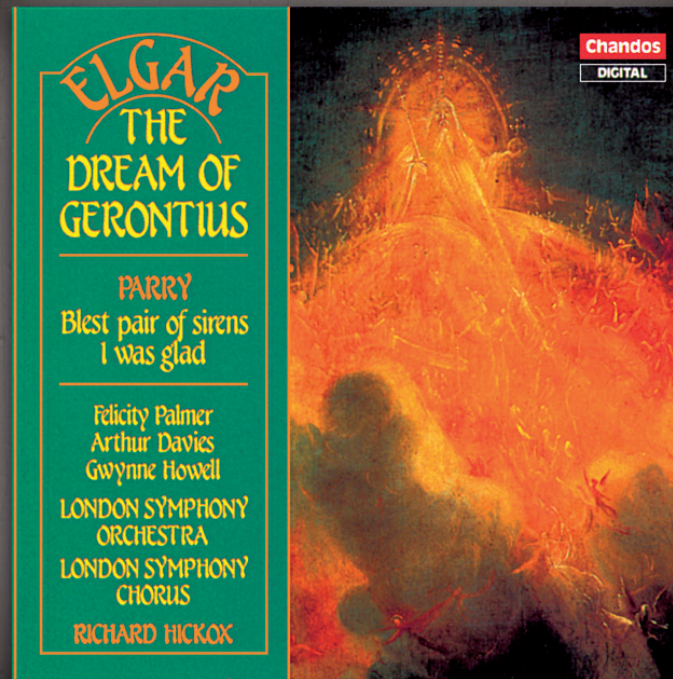
**CHANDOS** FOR 21

# ELGAR

## THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS

**PARRY**

BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS • I WAS GLAD



**Felicity Palmer** mezzo-soprano

**Arthur Davies** tenor

**Gwynne Howell** bass

**London Symphony Chorus**

**London Symphony Orchestra**

**Richard Hickox**





Greg Barrett

**Richard Hickox**  
(1948 - 2008)

COMPACT DISC ONE

## Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848–1918)

- |   |  |       |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | <b>Blest Pair of Sirens</b> (1887)<br>(At a Solemn Musick)<br>for Chorus and Orchestra<br>An Ode by Milton   | 11:54 |
| 2 | <b>I was glad</b> (1902, revised 1911)<br>Coronation Anthem for Edward VII<br>for Chorus and Orchestra<br>Revised for George V<br>Words from Psalm 122 | 7:02  |

## Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

**The Dream of Gerontius, Op. 38** (1900)\*  
for Mezzo-soprano, Tenor, Bass, Chorus, and Orchestra  
Words by Cardinal Newman

- |   |   |              |
|---|---|--------------|
|   | <b>Part I</b>   | <b>37:16</b> |
| 3 | Prelude –   | 10:17        |
| 4 | Gerontius: 'Jesu, Maria – I am near to death' –               | 3:40         |
| 5 | Assistants: 'Kyrie eleison' –                                 | 2:16         |
| 6 | Gerontius: 'Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play the man' – | 0:51         |

7	Assistants: 'Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord' -	3:07
8	Gerontius: 'Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus' -	4:49
9	Gerontius: 'I can no more; for now it comes again' -	1:56
10	Assistants: 'Rescue him, O Lord, in this his evil hour' -	2:16
11	Gerontius: 'Novissima hora est; and I fain would sleep' -	1:29
12	The Priest and Assistants: 'Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo!' -	1:59
13	Assistants: 'Go, in the name of Angels and Archangels'	4:30
		<b>TT 56:32</b>

COMPACT DISC TWO

<b>Part II</b>		<b>57:57</b>
1	Introduction. Soul of Gerontius: 'I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed' -	6:25
2	Angel: 'My work is done' -	3:10
3	Angel: 'All hail! My child and brother, hail!' -	5:44
4	Demons: 'Low-born clods of brute earth' -	1:54
5	Angel: 'It is the restless panting of their being' -	0:16
6	Demons: 'The mind bold and independent' -	2:20
7	Soul of Gerontius: 'I see not those false spirits' -	3:25
8	Choir of Angelicals: 'Praise to the Holiest in the height' -	2:40
9	Angel: 'We now have passed the gate, and are within...' -	0:27
10	Choir of Angelicals: 'Glory to Him, who evermore' -	0:30

11	Angel: 'They sing of thy approaching agony' -	0:47
12	Soul of Gerontius: 'But hark! a grand mysterious harmony' -	0:39
13	Angel: 'And now the threshold, as we traverse it' -	0:32
14	Choir of Angelicals: 'Praise to the Holiest in the height' -	6:56
15	Angel: 'Thy judgment now is near, for we are come' -	3:23
16	Angel of the Agony: 'Jesu! by that shuddering dread which fell on Thee' -	3:50
17	Soul of Gerontius: 'I go before my Judge' -	1:43
18	Angel: 'Praise to His Name!' -	1:34
19	Soul of Gerontius: 'Take me away, and in the lowest deep...' -	2:56
20	Souls in Purgatory: 'Lord, Thou hast been our refuge: in every generation' -	1:14
21	Angel: 'Softly and gently, dearly-ransomed soul'	7:19
		<b>TT 57:57</b>

**Felicity Palmer** mezzo-soprano (Angel)\*

**Arthur Davies** tenor (Gerontius)\*

**Gwynne Howell** bass (The Priest / Angel of the Agony)\*

**London Symphony Chorus**

**London Symphony Orchestra**

Roderick Elms organ

**Richard Hickox**

## Elgar: The Dream of Gerontius

The right work sometimes comes at the right time. It is appropriate that *The Dream of Gerontius* by Sir Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934) had its first performance three months before the end of the nineteenth century, for English composers had been much occupied with religious choral works since the success of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at the 1846 Birmingham Festival. One after another they were produced at Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Worcester, Gloucester, Hereford, and the Crystal Palace. None is heard today (except perhaps for Parry's *Job*). Bernard Shaw called it 'the oratorio market' and wrote in 1890 that

every year at the provincial festivals  
some dreary doctor of music wreaks his  
counterpoint on a string of execrable  
balderdash with *Mesopotamia* or some other  
blessed word for a title.

Frederick Delius, anti-Christian pagan among English composers of his day, remarked that Parry 'would have set the whole Bible to music had he lived long enough!' Elgar himself, with *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* in 1903 and 1906, assembled his libretti from the Bible and tried to combine the operatic methods of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* with

the ecclesiastical drama of Bach's Passions. Both these oratorios have survived because their music is palpably superior to that of his contemporaries, but they have struggled and needed much special pleading by believers in their splendour.

But in the dying days of Victoria's century and era came *The Dream of Gerontius* to prove that an English composer could write a religious choral work which could be mentioned in the same breath as those by the great masters. Its text was not biblical, and it was neither an oratorio nor a cantata. Elgar did not want it described 'by that dreadful term "sacred cantata"' and he permitted Novello's to include it in their oratorio list only because, as he put it, 'there's no word invented yet to describe it'. The score says merely 'set to music', and that is what it is: Cardinal Newman's poem about the journey of a man's soul to judgment and Purgatory set to the music of Elgar. This was the biggest irony of all: that the crown of a century's endeavour should arise not from the Anglican tradition but from the words of a famous convert to Roman Catholicism and the music of a Roman Catholic composer.

The most significant point about *The Dream of Gerontius*, which explains why the circumstances of its first performance have become part of the folklore of English music, is that Elgar instinctively knew he was writing something very special. When he finished it, he quoted Ruskin on the manuscript score: 'This is the best of me... this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory'. It was written 'from my insidest inside', he confided to a friend, and to another he wrote that

you will find *Gerontius* far beyond anything  
I've yet done... I have written my own  
heart's blood into the score.

From the solemn opening of the Prelude, on clarinet, bassoons, and violas, with the agonised entry of the cor anglais at the fifth bar, to the final pages where the Angel says her ecstatic farewell to the Soul of Gerontius over the chanting of voices in Heaven and on earth, the music creates an atmosphere which enshrouds the listener.

We cannot be sure when it began. For many years, it was probably in Elgar's mind only as something he might do some day. It is often said that Elgar was introduced to the poem when it was given to him as a wedding present in 1889. But that is not true. He had known it for years before that. It was published in 1865, when he was eight years

old, and we may surmise that he first read it in the 1870s. He certainly knew it in 1885, for that was the year in which General Gordon was killed at the Siege of Khartoum, to the shock of the nation and the fury of Queen Victoria, who blamed Gladstone for the delay in the dispatch of a relieving force. Gordon is one of the emotional links between Elgar and the music of *Gerontius*.

Before he left England for Egypt, Gordon had been given a copy of Newman's poem. It appealed to him particularly because it was dedicated to a man with the surname Gordon. In his copy he marked those passages which he found of especial solace and inspiration. When he ordered a newspaper reporter to leave Khartoum for safety, he gave this book to him. After the death of Gordon, his markings of the poem were widely circulated and Elgar added them to his own copy. Two years later, Elgar was engaged to Alice Roberts, daughter of a general, and when her mother died he lent her *Gerontius* so that she could transfer Gordon's markings into her own copy.

The death of Gordon – which Gordon had seemed almost to invite – haunted Elgar, who for several years pondered how to commemorate him in music. He talked in 1898 of a *Gordon Symphony* for the Three Choirs Festival and sketched a theme for it. But

although he did not then feel able to tackle a full-scale symphonic work, the theme was not wasted. It can be heard now in the 'Go forth' chorus that ends Part I of *The Dream of Gerontius*; so Gordon has a direct musical link with *Gerontius*. Later in 1898, after the success of *Caractacus* at the Leeds Festival, Birmingham asked Elgar to compose the principal new work for its 1900 festival. His first idea was *St Augustine*, but this was rejected. He then began a work about the Apostles, with the emphasis on Judas, but this too was not yet formulated. The matter was resolved on New Year's Day 1900 when G.H. Johnstone, chairman of the festival committee, a rich and cultured civic leader, called on Elgar in Malvern and reminded him that he had once mentioned setting Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius*. Why not make that the work for Birmingham? Elgar agreed and Johnstone made the financial arrangements with a reluctant Novello's. A theme intended for Judas became instead the imploring prayer of the Angel of the Agony.

Throughout the composition of the work, as his correspondence with Novello's publishing manager, A.J. Jaeger ('Nimrod'), testifies, Elgar was in a state of exaltation. Thereafter he descended into the depths of depression and pessimism. He was an idealist, almost naïve. He would have agreed

with Strauss's Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*: 'Music is a holy art.' His letters show how he detested the commercial side of music, and suddenly he and his beloved *Gerontius* were plunged into it: wrangles over royalties, trouble over payment for use of the libretto, pettiness over the fee to be paid to Jaeger for writing an analysis. When the first performance on 3 October 1900 did the work scant justice, even though it was conducted by the great Hans Richter who had so successfully launched the *Enigma Variations* in 1899, Elgar was demoralised.

There were several practical reasons for the *Gerontius* débâcle, chief among them Richter's failure to master the score and to appreciate its difficulties, and the stroke of ill luck that the sympathetic chorus master died before rehearsals began and his elderly and by then incompetent predecessor had to be recalled from retirement as an emergency measure. But it can now be seen that the principal cause was Elgar's own lateness in selecting a subject. Elgar composed a work in which the ebb and flow of the music was something no festival choir had then encountered, requiring thorough orchestral preparation and singers who really understood the quasi-operatic nature of the piece. This took him seven months, leaving only a few weeks – which included the August

holiday period – for the score and parts to be printed and corrected (and revised), and for the soloists, conductor, chorus, and orchestra to learn the music. Not surprisingly, they failed to do so. After all, the festival comprised more than just *Gerontius*. Elgar realised at the final rehearsals that all was lost, he insulted the choir, Richter tried to retrieve a hopeless situation – and the inevitable disaster followed. Elgar retreated to Malvern, saying God was against art and that he would never write another religious work. He then welcomed the twentieth century by composing the cheerful, optimistic overture *Cockaigne*.

*Gerontius* survived. Within a few years it had triumphed in Germany, and every British society was including it in its programmes. Today it fulfils an almost mystical role in the lives of those who know it and love it. No need in the late 1980s to detail its beauties, its moments of drama, its mixture of styles and influences from Gregorian chant to Wagner's *Parsifal*, nor to call attention to the masterly use of the orchestra, the plasticity and power of the choral writing, and the great music given to the soloists – they are as well known as the glories of *Messiah* and the St Matthew Passion.

But perhaps the chief mystery and magic of *The Dream of Gerontius* is the overpowering sense of Elgar's own presence in the score.

This is not fanciful. When we hear the three bars of orchestral music after the Demons' Chorus, which precedes Gerontius's 'I see not those false spirits', we may remember reference that Elgar made to them:

I meant that theme to mean an indefinable feeling that there's more around you than you know: have you ever been in a pitch dark room and have felt the presence of people or a person when you have had no proof or knowledge that anyone's there – I have and it feels like that.

It still does. Elgar is there, in every note of every bar.

#### **Parry: Blest Pair of Sirens**

We tend to think of Sir Hubert Parry (1848 – 1918) as belonging to the generation before that of Elgar, but he was in fact only nine years older and they may therefore be regarded as contemporaries. But with a background and education very different from Elgar's – scion of the squirearchy, Eton and Oxford – he was well launched into his career by the year 1880, when Elgar was still an unknown, struggling organist and violinist in Worcester. Later, Elgar played in the orchestra of the Three Choirs Festival in performances of Parry's works. With certain reservations, he admired Parry's music and there is no doubt that his ceremonial style,

with its nobility and loftiness, derived from a similar vein in Parry, as can be heard in the two works on this disc.

Elgar certainly had the highest regard for *Blest Pair of Sirens*, as had Vaughan Williams. This setting of words from Milton's ode *At a Solemn Musick* was composed for the Bach Choir, under Stanford's conductorship, in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. It has remained a favourite with choirs ever since and could equally aptly have been called *Serenade to Music*. The orchestral introduction anticipates an Elgarian sound in its broad ascending melodic phrases. The choir enters quietly but soon embarks on a more vigorous section leading to the return of the principal theme on the orchestra alone. The work has been called Brahmsian in its construction and its mingling of strength and sweetness. At the lines 'O may we soon again renew that song, / And keep in tune with Heav'n', the women's voices enter lyrically, and gradually the whole chorus builds a climax appropriate to the 'endless morn of light'.

**Parry: I was glad**

The anthem *I was glad* was composed for the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902 and has been sung at the three subsequent coronations (1911, 1937, and 1953) as the

sovereign enters Westminster Abbey. Its *Maestoso* opening is superbly appropriate – even Elgar wrote nothing finer in this line. The antiphonal setting of the lines 'Jerusalem is builded' is highly effective and – in the Coronation version only – Parry then incorporated the shouts of 'Vivat Rex (Regina)' by the Queen's Scholars of Westminster School. 'O pray for the peace of Jerusalem' rises from a devout quietness to a rousing, march-like finish.

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Since she became a mezzo-soprano in the early 1980s, **Felicity Palmer** has performed operatic roles that include Brangäne (*Tristan und Isolde*), Adriano (*Rienzi*), and Lyubov (*Mazeppa*) at English National Opera, and the title roles in *Agrippina*, at Kent Opera, and Gluck's *Armide*, at the Spitalfields Festival. More recently she has made operatic appearances in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Handel's *Tamerlano* at Opera North, the latter touring to Halle and Berlin as part of Handel's Tercentenary celebrations; Florence Pike (*Albert Herring*) at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and Andromache (*King Priam*) at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden. She made her debut as Kabanicha (*Kát'a Kabanová*) at Lyric Opera of Chicago and as Marguerita (the

world premiere of Flavio Testi's *Riccardo III*) at Teatro alla Scala, Milan. She has recently sung Herodias (*Salome*) and the Mother and the Witch (*Hänsel und Gretel*) at English National Opera, and Kabanicha at De Nederlandse Opera. In concert she has been engaged for performances on the South Bank and at the BBC Promenade Concerts as well as at major musical centres on the European continent. She took part in a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* conducted by Yevgeny Svetlanov at the Moscow Conservatory and undertook a European tour with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, singing Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* with Paavo Berglund. Felicity Palmer is an accomplished recitalist and has sung at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Musikverein in Vienna, and in The Hague, Paris, and Frankfurt. She has appeared often with the Songmakers' Almanac in London and at music festivals in England, and has given recitals in London and at the Bath Festival.

Born in Wrexham, North Wales, **Arthur Davies** studied at the Royal Northern College of Music. He first joined Welsh National Opera, where his roles included Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*), the title role in *Albert Herring*, Nadir (*Les Pêcheurs de perles*), Rodolfo (*La bohème*), and Don José (*Carmen*). He made his debut at The Royal Opera, Covent

Garden in Henze's *We Come to the River*, and has appeared there in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and as Alfredo (*La traviata*), the Italian Tenor (*Der Rosenkavalier*), and Števa (*Jenůfa*). With Scottish Opera at the Edinburgh International Festival he has sung the Fox (*The Cunning Little Vixen*) and David (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*). He has sung with English National Opera as the Duke (*Rigoletto*), Alfredo, and in the title roles of Gounod's *Faust* and Massenet's *Werther*. At Opera North his roles have included Jenik (*The Bartered Bride*), Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), and Don José. Abroad, Arthur Davies has appeared in Chicago, Cincinnati, Connecticut, Ghent, Leipzig, Lisbon, Moscow, New Orleans, New York (The Metropolitan Opera), Santiago di Chile, and Seville. Recently he appeared in performances of Verdi's Requiem at the Royal Festival Hall, London with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Carlo Maria Giulini.

One of the world's leading basses, **Gwynne Howell** was born near Swansea. He obtained degrees from the University College of Wales and the University of Manchester before pursuing his vocal studies at the Royal Northern College of Music. He joined Sadler's Wells Opera in 1968, and in 1972 moved to The Royal Opera, Covent Garden where he has sung most of the major bass

roles in the Italian, German, French, and Russian repertoire. He has returned regularly as a guest to English National Opera, most notably as Hans Sachs (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Philip II (*Don Carlos*), the title role in *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, and Gurnemanz (*Parsifal*) under Sir Reginald Goodall. He has also appeared as a guest with Welsh National Opera where he has sung King Mark (*Tristan und Isolde*), also conducted by Sir Reginald Goodall. His extensive international career in opera has taken him to The Metropolitan Opera in New York, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and opera companies in San Francisco, Santa Fe, Toronto, Hamburg, Paris, Geneva, and Brussels. He enjoys a highly successful concert career and has appeared all over the world with leading conductors such as Sir Colin Davis, Antal Doráti, Claudio Abbado, Daniel Barenboim, Pierre Boulez, Leonard Bernstein, Carlo Maria Giulini, Riccardo Muti, Lorin Maazel, Seiji Ozawa, Zubin Mehta, James Levine, Bernard Haitink, and Giuseppe Sinopoli. He has appeared with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Sir Georg Solti in concert performances of *Oedipus rex* and *Fidelio*, and with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Ozawa he has sung Bluebeard. Other concert engagements have taken Gwynne Howell to the Salzburg Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, and other leading festivals.

At the time of his untimely death at the age of sixty in November 2008, **Richard Hickox** CBE, one of the most gifted and versatile British conductors of his generation, was Music Director of Opera Australia, having served as Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales from 2000 until 2006 when he became Conductor Emeritus. He founded the City of London Sinfonia, of which he was Music Director, in 1971. He was also Associate Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, Conductor Emeritus of the Northern Sinfonia, and co-founder of Collegium Musicum 90.

He regularly conducted the major orchestras in the UK and appeared many times at the BBC Proms and at the Aldeburgh, Bath, and Cheltenham festivals, among others. With the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican Centre he conducted a number of semi-staged operas, including *Billy Budd*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, and *Salome*. With the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra he gave the first ever complete cycle of Vaughan Williams's symphonies in London. In the course of an ongoing relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra he conducted Elgar, Walton, and Britten festivals at the South Bank and a semi-staged performance of *Gloriana* at the Aldeburgh Festival.

Apart from his activities at the Sydney Opera House, he enjoyed recent engagements

with The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, English National Opera, Vienna State Opera, and Washington Opera, among others. He guest conducted such world-renowned orchestras as the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and New York Philharmonic.

His phenomenal success in the recording studio resulted in more than 280 recordings, including most recently cycles of orchestral works by Sir Lennox and Michael Berkeley and Frank Bridge with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the symphonies

by Vaughan Williams with the London Symphony Orchestra, and a series of operas by Britten with the City of London Sinfonia. He received a Grammy (for *Peter Grimes*) and five *Gramophone* Awards. Richard Hickox was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Jubilee Honours List in 2002, and was the recipient of many other awards, including two Music Awards of the Royal Philharmonic Society, the first ever Sir Charles Groves Award, the *Evening Standard* Opera Award, and the Award of the Association of British Orchestras.



Felicity Palmer

## Elgar: Der Traum des Gerontius

Manchmal kommt das richtige Werk zur rechten Zeit. So war es angemessen, daß *Der Traum des Gerontius* von Sir Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934) seine Uraufführung drei Monate vor dem Ende des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts erlebte, denn seit dem Erfolg von Mendelssohns *Elijah* auf den Birminghamer Festspielen 1846 hatten sich englische Komponisten religiösen Chorwerken intensiv gewidmet. Schlag auf Schlag wurden sie inszeniert, in Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Worcester, Gloucester, Hereford und Crystal Palace. Keines dieser Werke kommt heute noch zu Gehör (ausgenommen nur Parrys *Hiob*). Bernard Shaw sprach von einem "Oratoriumsmarkt" und schrieb 1890:

Jedes Jahr auf den Provinzfestspielen  
läßt irgendein oder Doktor der Musik  
seinen Kontrapunkt an einem Schwall  
scheußlichen Geschwätzes aus, unter  
dem Titel *Mesopotamien* oder sonst eines  
gesegneten Wortes.

Frederick Delius, dem antichristlichen Heiden unter den englischen Komponisten seiner Zeit zufolge hätte Parry "wohl die ganze Bibel vertont, wenn er lange genug gelebt hätte!" Elgar selbst bezog sich bei seinen Libretti für

*Die Apostel* und *Das Reich* 1903 bzw. 1906 auf die Bibel und versuchte, die Operntechnik von Wagners *Der Ring des Nibelungen* mit dem ekklesiastischen Drama der Bach-Passionen zu verbinden. Beide Oratorien haben überlebt, weil sie von der musikalischen Qualität her dem übrigen zeitgenössischen Material deutlich überlegen sind, aber leicht ist ihnen der Kampf nicht gefallen, und ohne besondere Plädoyers durch Befürworter ihrer Pracht wäre es wohl nicht gegangen.

Doch in den letzten Tagen des viktorianischen Jahrhunderts kam *Der Traum des Gerontius* als Beweis dafür, daß ein englischer Komponist durchaus zu einem religiösen Chorwerk imstande war, das mit den Werken der großen Meister in einem Atemzug genannt werden konnte. Es war kein biblischer Text, und von der Form her war das Werk weder Oratorium noch Kantate. Elgar lehnte die Beschreibung "durch diesen schrecklichen Begriff 'heilige Kantate'" ab und erlaubte Novello's die Aufnahme in die Oratoriumskategorie nur, weil "bisher noch kein Wort zu seiner Beschreibung erfunden worden ist". In der Partitur heißt es nur "vertont", und so ist es: Kardinal Newmans

Gedicht über die Seele eines Menschen auf dem Weg zum Jüngsten Gericht und Fegefeuer, vertont von Elgar. Das war überhaupt die größte Ironie – daß die Krönung im Streben eines englischen Jahrhunderts nicht auf der anglikanischen Tradition beruhte, sondern auf den Worten eines prominenten Überläufers zum Katholizismus und der Musik eines katholischen Komponisten.

Der bemerkenswerteste Aspekt am *Traum des Gerontius*, der auch erklärt, warum die Umstände der Uraufführung folkloristische Musikgeschichte gemacht haben, bestand in dem instinktiven Wissen Elgars, daß er im Begriff stand, etwas ganz Besonderes zu komponieren. Nach der Vollendung des Werks zitierte er auf dem Autographen Ruskin: "Hier ist mein Bestes ... wenn überhaupt etwas von mir, so ist dies Ihrer Erinnerung wert." Er habe es aus seinem "innersten Inneren" geschaffen, bekannte Elgar einem Freund, und einem anderen schrieb er:

Sie werden feststellen, daß *Gerontius* alles, was ich bisher getan habe, bei weitem übertrifft ... ich habe mein eigenes Herzblut in die Partitur geschrieben.

Von der trauervollen Eröffnung des Präludiums durch Klarinette, Fagotte und Violas und dem qualvollen Einsatz des Englischhorns im fünften Takt bis zu den

Schlußseiten, auf denen der Engel über den singenden Stimmen im Himmel und auf Erden die Seele des Gerontius ekstatisch verabschiedet, bannt die Musik den Hörer in ihrer Atmosphäre.

Wo der Anfang liegt, wissen wir nicht genau. Jahrelang trug sich Elgar wahrscheinlich nur mit dem Gedanken, sich eines Tages dem Projekt zu widmen. Oft heißt es, er habe das Gedicht kennengelernt, als er es 1889 als Hochzeitsgeschenk bekam. Das ist nicht so. Er kannte es schon Jahre vorher. Veröffentlicht wurde es 1865, als er acht Jahre alt war, und wir dürfen davon ausgehen, daß er es in den Siebziger Jahren zum erstenmal las. Ganz bestimmt war er dann 1885 damit vertraut, denn in jenem Jahr fiel General Gordon in der Belagerung von Khartoum, zur Erschütterung der Nation und zum Zorn Königin Viktorias, die Gladstone für die Verspätung der Entlastungstruppen verantwortlich machte. Gordon bildet eines der emotionalen Bindeglieder zwischen Elgar und der *Gerontius*-Musik.

Gordon war in den Besitz eines Exemplars des Newman-Gedichts gekommen, bevor er England in Richtung Ägypten verließ. Es sprach ihn besonders an, weil es einem Namensvetter gewidmet war. In seinem Exemplar strich er die Passagen, in denen er besonderen Trost und Inspiration fand, an. Als

er einem Journalisten befahl, Khartoum um seiner eigenen Sicherheit willen zu verlassen, vertraute er ihm das Buch an. Nach dem Tod Gordons fanden die angemerkten Passagen weite Verbreitung, und Elgar übertrug sie in sein eigenes Exemplar. Zwei Jahre später verlobte er sich mit der Generalstochter Alice Roberts, und als ihre Mutter starb, ließ Elgar ihr *Gerontius*, damit sie ihr eigenes Exemplar mit Gordons Anmerkungen versehen konnte.

Gordons Tod, den dieser fast herbeigebeten zu haben schien, ließ Elgar nicht zur Ruhe kommen; jahrelang überlegte er, wie er den General musikalisch verewigen konnte. 1898 sprach er von einer *Gordon-Sinfonie* für das Three Choirs Festival und skizzierte ein Thema dafür. Obwohl er sich dann nicht imstande fühlte, zu diesem Zeitpunkt ein volles sinfonisches Werk in Angriff zu nehmen, wurde das Thema nicht verschwendet. Man hört es nun im "Go forth"-Chor, der Teil I des *Traum des Gerontius* beschließt; Gordon steht also mit *Gerontius* in unmittelbarer musikalischer Verbindung. Im weiteren Verlauf des Jahres 1898, nach dem Erfolg von *Caractacus* auf dem Leeds Festival, beauftragte ihn Birmingham mit der Komposition des neuen Hauptwerkes für seine Festspiele im Jahr 1900. Zuerst dachte Elgar an *St. Augustus*, doch diese Idee wurde verworfen. Daraufhin begann er,

an einem Werk über die Jünger zu arbeiten, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Judas, aber auch dieser Gedanke reifte nicht aus. Das Problem löste sich am Neujahrstag 1900, als der Vorsitzende des Festival-Komitees, G.H. Johnstone, ein wohlhabender, kultivierter Kommunalpolitiker, Elgar in Malvern aufsuchte und ihn daran erinnerte, daß er einmal erwähnt habe, Newmans *Traum des Gerontius* zu vertonen. Warum nicht für Birmingham? Elgar erklärte sich einverstanden, und Johnstone traf die finanziellen Absprachen mit einem zögernden Novello's. Aus dem vorgesehenen Judas-Thema wurde stattdessen das flehende Gebet des Engels der Pein.

Wie seine Korrespondenz mit dem Verlagsleiter von Novello's, A.J. Jaeger ("Nimrod"), bezeugt, befand sich Elgar während dieser Kompositionszeit in einem ständigen Zustand des Hochgefühls. Danach verfiel er in tiefste Depression und Pessimismus. Er war Idealist, fast naiv. Er hätte Strauss' Komponisten in *Ariadne auf Naxos* ("Musik ist eine heilige Kunst") zugestimmt. Seine Briefe zeigen, wie sehr ihm die kommerzielle Seite der Musik verhaßt war, und plötzlich wurden er und seine Musik von diesem Strudel erfaßt: Streit über Tantiemen, Probleme mit der Benutzungsgebühr für das Libretto, Kleinkrämerei über das Honorar für

Jaeger und seinen analytischen Text. Als die Uraufführung am 3. Oktober 1900 dem Werk wenig Gerechtigkeit widerfahren ließ, obwohl es doch von dem großen Hans Richter, der 1899 so erfolgreich die *Enigma*-Variationen vorgestellt hatte, dirigiert wurde, war Elgar am Boden zerstört.

Das *Gerontius*-Debakel hatte verschiedene praktische Gründe, vor allem die Unfähigkeit Richters, der Partitur Herr zu werden und ihre Schwierigkeiten zu begreifen, sowie den unglücklichen Tod des verständnisvollen Chorleiters noch vor Beginn der Proben, so daß man gezwungen war, seinen greisen und zu dieser Zeit bereits inkompetenten Vorgänger aus dem Ruhestand zu holen. Inzwischen ist aber auch klar, daß Elgar durch seine Säumigkeit bei der Entscheidung auf ein Thema die Hauptschuld an der Affäre trug. Er komponierte ein Werk, dessen musikalische Gezeiten einem Festival-Chor völlig neu waren, gründliche Orchestervorbereitungen und Sänger erforderten, die den opernähnlichen Charakter des Stückes begriffen. Er brauchte dafür sieben Monate, so daß nur noch wenige Wochen – auch noch über die Ferien im August hinweg – für den Druck, die Korrektur (und Revision) der Partitur und Stimmen blieben, von der Einstudierung der Musik durch Solisten, Dirigent, Chor und Orchester

ganz zu schweigen. Kein Wunder, daß es nicht gelang. Schließlich bestanden die Festspiele nicht nur aus *Gerontius*. Bei den Abschlußproben schwante Elgar Schlimmes, er beleidigte den Chor, Richter versuchte, die hoffnungslose Situation zu retten – unweigerlich kam es zum Desaster. Elgar zog sich nach Malvern zurück, bezichtigte Gott der Kunstfeindlichkeit und erklärte, nie wieder werde er ein religiöses Werk schreiben. Sodann hieß er mit der ausgelassenen, optimistischen *Cockaigne*-Ouvertüre das neue Jahrhundert willkommen.

*Gerontius* überlebte. Innerhalb weniger Jahre feierte man das Werk in Deutschland, und jede britische Gesellschaft nahm es in ihr Programm auf. Heute spielt es eine geradezu mystische Rolle im Leben jener, die es kennen und schätzen. In den späten 1980er Jahren braucht man kaum noch seine Schönheit zu beschreiben, seine dramatischen Momente, die Verschmelzung von Stilrichtungen und Einflüssen vom Gregorianischen Gesang bis zu Wagners *Parsifal*. Ebenso wenig verkennt man den meisterhaften Einsatz des Orchesters, die Plastizität und Kraft der Chorpartien und die Großartigkeit der Solostimmen – sie reichen in ihrem Ruhm an den *Messiah* und die Matthäus-Passion heran.

Geheimnisvoller und rätselhafter als alles andere ist am *Traum des Gerontius* jedoch

vielleicht das überwältigende Gefühl, daß Elgar selbst in der Partitur lebt. Das ist keine Phantasterei. Wenn wir die drei Takte Orchestermusik nach dem Dämonenchor hören, der den Gerontius-Worten "I see not those false spirits" (Die falschen Geister erblicke ich nicht) vorausgeht, erinnern wir uns der Erklärung Elgars:

Ich wollte mit diesem Thema ein unerklärliches Gefühl auslösen, daß man mehr um sich herum hat, als man glaubt; haben Sie sich je in einem völlig dunklen Raum aufgehalten und die Anwesenheit einer oder mehrerer anderer Personen gespürt, wenn Sie weder Beweise dafür haben noch davon wissen? Mir ist es so ergangen, und so fühlt es sich an.

Immer noch. Elgar ist präsent, in jeder Note jedes Taktes.

#### **Parry: Blest Pair of Sirens**

Wir glauben gerne, daß Sir Hubert Parry (1848 – 1918) Elgars Vorgeneration angehörte, aber er war nur neun Jahre älter, so daß man beide als Zeitgenossen betrachten muß. Allerdings verdankte er seinem Milieu und seiner Erziehung – Landadelssproß, Eton und Oxford –, daß er 1880, als der aus völlig anderen Verhältnissen kommende Elgar noch als unbekannter Organist und Violinist in Worcester um seine Existenz rang, bereits

inmitten seiner Karriere stand. Später wirkte Elgar als Orchestermusiker auf dem Three Choirs Festival an der Aufführung von Parry-Werken mit. Unter gewissen Vorbehalten bewunderte er die Musik Parrys, und zweifellos leitet sich der zeremonienhafte Stil in seinem Edelmüt und seiner Erhabenheit von einer ähnlichen Tendenz Parrys ab, wie in den beiden Werken auf dieser CD zum Ausdruck kommt.

Ohne Frage zollte Elgar, wie ja auch Vaughan Williams, *Blest Pair of Sirens* höchste Anerkennung. Diese Vertonung von Auszügen aus Miltons Ode *At a Solemn Musick* entstand 1887, dem Jahr des Goldenen Jubiläums von Königin Viktoria, für den Bach Choir unter Leitung Stanfords. Seitdem hat es unter Chören an Popularität nichts eingebüßt. Ebenso gut hätte das Werk *Serenade to Music* betitelt werden können. Die Orchestereinführung nimmt mit ihren breit aufstrebenden melodischen Phrasen den Klang Elgars vorweg. Der Chor setzt leise ein, geht aber schon bald in einen energischeren Abschnitt über, der zur Rückkehr des Hauptthemas im Orchester führt. In seinem Aufbau und dem Gegenspiel von Kraft und Lieblichkeit hat man dem Werk Brahms'schen Charakter zugesprochen. Mit den Zeilen "O may we soon again renew that song, / And keep in tune with Heav'n" setzen lyrisch

die Frauenstimmen ein, und nach und nach strebt der gesamte Chor einem dem "endless morn of light" (endloser Morgen des Lichts) angemessenen Höhepunkt zu.

**Parry: I was glad**

Das Anthem *I was glad* entstand 1902 für die Krönung König Eduards VII., und wurde im Rahmen dreier weiterer Krönungsfeiern (1911, 1937, 1953) gesungen, während die Monarchen Westminster Abbey betraten. Trefflicher könnte die Eröffnung in *Maestoso*

nicht sein – selbst Elgar legte in dieser Beziehung nichts Schöneres vor. Die antiphonale Anlage der Zeilen "Jerusalem is builded" hat ungeheuren Effekt, und Parry nahm dann (nur in die Krönungsversion) die Salute "Vivat Rex (Regina)" der Queen's Scholars der Westminster School auf. "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem" erhebt sich aus frommer Andacht zu einem packenden, marschähnlichen Finale.

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## Elgar: Le Rêve de Gerontius

Une œuvre arrive parfois au bon moment. Il est tout à fait approprié que *Le Rêve de Gerontius* (*The Dream of Gerontius*) de Sir Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934) ait été exécuté pour la première fois trois mois avant la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, car les compositeurs anglais s'intéressaient beaucoup à la musique chorale religieuse depuis le succès du *Elijah* de Mendelssohn au festival de Birmingham de 1846. Leurs œuvres furent créées l'une après l'autre à Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Worcester, Gloucester, Hereford et au Crystal Palace à Londres. Aucune n'est jouée aujourd'hui (à l'exception peut-être de *Job* de Parry). Bernard Shaw décrivit ce "marché de l'oratorio", déclarant en 1890 que

chaque année aux festivals de province  
quelque ennuyeux docteur en musique  
décharge son contrepoint sur une série de  
fadaises excécrables avec *Mésopotamie*  
ou tout autre mot du même genre pour  
titre.

Frederick Delius, seul païen antichrétien parmi les compositeurs de son époque, observa que Parry "aurait mis en musique la Bible toute entière s'il avait vécu assez

longtemps!" Quant à Elgar, il assembla les livrets des *Apôtres* (*The Apostles*) et du *Royaume* (*The Kingdom*) en 1903 et 1906 à partir de la Bible et tenta d'allier la technique d'opéra de *Der Ring des Nibelungen* de Wagner au tragique ecclésiastique des Passions de Bach. Ces deux oratorios ont survécu parce que leur musique est sensiblement supérieure à celle de ses contemporains, mais il a fallu aussi pour cela les nombreux plaidoyers de ceux qui croyaient en leur splendeur.

Avec les derniers jours du siècle et de l'ère victorienne, *Le Rêve de Gerontius* vint néanmoins prouver qu'un compositeur anglais pouvait écrire une œuvre chorale religieuse comparable à celles des plus grands maîtres. Son texte n'était pas biblique, et ce n'était ni un oratorio, ni une cantate. Elgar ne voulait pas que son œuvre soit décrite "par ce terme affreux, cantate sacrée" et il ne permit à l'éditeur Novello de l'inclure dans sa liste d'oratorios que parce que, selon ses propres mots, "on n'a pas encore inventé un autre mot pour la décrire". La partition dit simplement "mis en musique", et c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit: le poème du

cardinal Newman sur le voyage d'une âme humaine vers le jugement et le purgatoire sur une musique d'Elgar. Par une ironie du sort, le couronnement des efforts du siècle est issu non pas de la tradition anglicane, mais du texte d'un célèbre converti au catholicisme et de la musique d'un compositeur catholique.

Fait important à noter au sujet du *Rêve de Gerontius*, et qui explique pourquoi les circonstances de la première exécution font maintenant partie du folklore de la musique anglaise, Elgar était conscient d'écrire quelque chose de très spécial. Quand il l'eut terminé, il cita Ruskin sur la partition manuscrite: "C'est le meilleur de moi-même... ceci, plus qu'aucune autre de mes œuvres, mérite que vous vous en souveniez." L'œuvre était écrite "du plus profond de moi-même", confia-t-il à un ami, et à un autre il écrivit que

vous trouverez que *Gerontius* va bien  
au-delà tout ce que j'ai fait jusque-là... J'ai  
écrit la partition avec mon propre sang.

De l'ouverture solennelle du Prélude, à la clarinette, bassons et altos, avec l'entrée déchirante du cor anglais à la cinquième mesure, jusqu'aux dernières pages où l'Ange fait ses adieux extatiques à l'Âme de Gerontius sur la psalmodie des voix au ciel et sur la terre, la musique crée une atmosphère qui enveloppe l'auditeur comme un linceul.

On n'est pas certain de la date de l'origine de l'œuvre. Pendant de nombreuses années, Elgar y pensa probablement comme à quelque chose qu'il pourrait faire un jour. On dit souvent qu'il découvrit le poème quand il lui fut donné comme cadeau de mariage en 1889. Mais c'est faux. Il le connaissait depuis de nombreuses années. Il avait été publié en 1865, alors qu'il avait huit ans, et l'on peut supposer qu'il le lut dans les années 1870. Il le connaissait certainement en 1885, l'année de la mort du général Gordon lors du siège de Khartoum, qui choqua la nation et remplit de colère la reine Victoria, qui blâma Gladstone pour le retard à envoyer des renforts. Gordon est l'un des liens émotifs entre Elgar et la musique de *Gerontius*.

Avant de quitter l'Angleterre pour l'Égypte, Gordon avait reçu en cadeau un exemplaire du poème de Newman. Il lui plaisait particulièrement parce qu'il était dédié à un homme du nom de Gordon. Il marqua dans son livre les passages dans lesquels il trouvait consolation et inspiration. Lorsqu'il ordonna à un journaliste de quitter Khartoum pour des raisons de sécurité, il lui confia ce livre. Après la mort de Gordon, ses annotations du poème furent portées à la connaissance du public, et Elgar les ajouta à son exemplaire du poème. Deux ans plus tard, Elgar se fiança à Alice Roberts, fille de

général, à laquelle, quand sa mère mourut, il prêta son *Gerontius* pour qu'elle puisse transférer les annotations de Gordon sur son exemplaire à elle.

La mort de Gordon – que celui-ci avait semblé presque inviter – affecta Elgar, qui se demanda pendant plusieurs années comment le commémorer en musique. Il parla en 1898 d'une *Symphonie Gordon* pour le festival "Three Choirs" (les chœurs des trois cathédrales de Gloucester, Hereford et Worcester) et en esquissa un thème. Il ne se sentit pas capable à l'époque d'aborder une œuvre symphonique à grande échelle, mais le thème ne fut pas perdu. On peut l'entendre maintenant dans le chœur "Go forth" qui termine la première partie du *Rêve de Gerontius*; tel est donc le lien musical direct entre Gordon et *Gerontius*. Plus tard cette même année, après le succès de *Caractacus* au festival de Leeds, Birmingham demanda à Elgar de composer l'œuvre nouvelle principale pour son festival de 1900. Sa première idée fut *Saint Augustin*, mais elle fut rejetée. Il commença alors une œuvre sur les Apôtres, avec l'accent sur Judas, qui n'eut pas de suite non plus. Le problème fut résolu le 1er janvier 1900 lorsque G.H. Johnstone, président du comité du festival, et conseiller municipal riche et cultivé, rendit visite à Elgar à Malvern et lui rappela qu'il avait parlé

une fois de mettre en musique *Le Rêve de Gerontius* de Newman. Pourquoi ne pas en faire l'œuvre commandée par Birmingham? Elgar acquiesça et Johnstone régla les détails financiers avec un Novello hésitant. Le thème écrit à l'intention de Judas devint l'implorante prière de l'Ange de l'Agonie.

Elgar vécut toute la composition de l'œuvre dans un état d'exaltation, comme le témoigne sa correspondance avec le directeur de la publication de Novello, A.J. Jaeger. Il sombra ensuite dans une dépression et un pessimisme profond. C'était un idéaliste, presque naïf. Il aurait été d'accord avec le Compositeur d'*Ariadne auf Naxos* de Strauss: "La musique est un art sacré." Ses lettres montrent combien il détestait le côté commercial de la musique, où lui et son *Gerontius* bien-aimé se trouvèrent soudain plongés: querelles sur les droits d'auteur, difficultés de paiement pour l'utilisation du livret, mesquineries sur la somme à verser à Jaeger pour l'écriture d'une analyse de l'œuvre. La première, le 3 octobre 1900, bien que dirigée par le grand Hans Richter qui avait créé les *Variations Enigma* avec tant de succès en 1899, fit insuffisamment justice à l'œuvre, et Elgar fut démoralisé.

Plusieurs raisons expliquent la débâcle de *Gerontius*, en particulier le fait que Richter

ne parvint pas à maîtriser la partition, ni à apprécier ses difficultés, et la malchance qui fit que le maître de chœur qui comprenait l'œuvre mourut avant le début des répétitions et que son prédécesseur, alors très âgé et incompetent, dut être tiré d'urgence de sa retraite. Mais on se rend compte avec le recul que la principale raison était le retard d'Elgar lui-même à choisir un sujet. Il composa une œuvre dans laquelle le flux et le reflux de la musique était quelque chose qu'aucun chœur de festival n'avait rencontré jusque-là, exigeant une préparation orchestrale minutieuse et des chanteurs qui en comprennent vraiment la nature de quasi-opéra. La composition lui prit sept mois, laissant quelques semaines seulement – y compris la période de vacances du mois d'août – pour que la partition et les parties d'orchestre soient imprimées, corrigées (et révisées), et pour que les solistes, chef d'orchestre, chœur et orchestre apprennent la musique. Leur échec n'est guère surprenant. Après tout, *Gerontius* n'était pas la seule œuvre du festival. Elgar réalisa aux dernières répétitions que tout était perdu, il insulta le chœur, Richter essaya de sauver une situation désespérée – et le désastre inévitable s'ensuivit. Elgar se retira à Malvern, déclarant que Dieu était contre l'art et que jamais plus il n'écrirait d'œuvre religieuse.

Il accueillit ensuite le vingtième siècle en composant l'ouverture *Cockaigne*, œuvre joyeuse et optimiste.

*Gerontius* survécut. En l'espace de quelques années, l'œuvre fit un triomphe en Allemagne et toutes les Sociétés britanniques l'inclurent dans leurs programmes. Elle remplit aujourd'hui un rôle presque mystique dans la vie de ceux qui la connaissent et l'apprécient. Nul n'est besoin de nos jours d'énumérer ses beautés, ses moments dramatiques, son mélange de styles et d'influences du chant grégorien au *Parsifal* de Wagner, ni d'attirer l'attention sur l'utilisation magistrale de l'orchestre, la plasticité et la puissance de l'écriture chorale et la beauté de la musique donnée aux solistes – tout ceci est aussi connu que les splendeurs du *Messiah* et de la Passion selon Saint Matthieu.

Mais le principal mystère et la magie du *Rêve de Gerontius* tiennent peut-être au sentiment irrésistible de la présence d'Elgar dans la partition. Il n'y a là rien d'imaginaire. Quand on entend les trois mesures de musique orchestrale après le chœur des Démons qui précède l'air "I see not those false spirits" de Gerontius, on se souvient de la manière dont Elgar y a fait référence:

Mon intention est que ce thème donne  
le sentiment indéfinissable qu'il y a

d'avantage autour de vous que ce que vous connaissez: avez-vous jamais été dans une pièce noire et senti la présence d'une ou plusieurs personnes sans avoir la preuve, ni la certitude qu'il y a quelqu'un – cela m'est arrivé et c'est cela que j'ai ressenti.

Le sentiment est toujours le même. Elgar est présent, dans chaque note de chaque mesure.

#### **Parry: Blest Pair of Sirens**

On a tendance à considérer Sir Hubert Parry (1848 – 1918) comme appartenant à la génération qui précède celle d'Elgar, mais il n'avait en fait que neuf ans de plus et on peut donc les considérer comme contemporains. Mais grâce à son milieu (la noblesse terrienne) et son éducation (Eton et Oxford) très différents de ceux d'Elgar, sa carrière était déjà bien lancée en 1880, alors qu'Elgar n'était encore qu'un organiste et violoniste inconnu à Worcester. Plus tard, Elgar interpréta des œuvres de Parry dans l'orchestre du festival des "Three Choirs". Il admirait la musique de Parry, avec quelques réserves, et il n'y a aucun doute que son style solennel, avec sa noblesse et son élévation, est de la même veine, comme on peut le constater dans les deux œuvres de cet enregistrement.

Elgar, comme Vaughan Williams, avait certainement la plus grande estime pour *Blest Pair of Sirens*. Cette mise en musique

de passages de l'ode de Milton *At a Solemn Musick* fut composée pour le Bach Choir, dirigé par Stanford, en 1887, l'année du cinquantième jubilé de la reine Victoria. Cette œuvre a toujours été depuis une favorite des chœurs, et aurait pu tout aussi justement être appelée *Serenade to Music*. L'introduction orchestrale, par ses larges phrases mélodiques ascendantes, annonce le son elgarien. Le chœur commence doucement, mais aborde rapidement une section plus vigoureuse qui mène au retour du thème principal à l'orchestre seul. L'œuvre a été qualifiée de brahmsienne par sa construction et son mélange de force et de douceur. Les voix de femmes font une entrée lyrique au vers "O may we soon again renew that song, / And keep in tune with Heav'n", et le chœur entier progresse vers une apothéose appropriée à l'"infini matin de lumière".

#### **Parry: I was glad**

L'anthem *I was glad*, composé pour le couronnement d'Édouard VII en 1902, a été chanté aux trois couronnements suivants (1911, 1937, 1953) au moment de l'entrée du souverain dans l'abbaye de Westminster. Sa superbe ouverture *Maestoso* est tout à fait de circonstance – même Elgar n'a rien écrit de plus beau dans le genre. La forme alternée

de "Jerusalem is builded" est d'un effet puissant; Parry y introduisit – dans la version du couronnement seulement – les cris de "Vivat Rex (Regina)" par les Queen's Scholars de l'école de Westminster. "O pray for the

peace of Jerusalem" passe progressivement d'une quiétude dévote à la vibrante marche de conclusion.

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COMPACT DISC ONE

1 **Blest Pair of Sirens**

(At a Solemn Musick)

Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of heav'n's joy,  
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and  
[Verse,  
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed pow'r  
[employ,  
Dead things with inbreathed sense able to  
[pierce.

And to our high-raised phantasy present  
That undisturbèd song of pure concert,  
Aye sung before the sapphire-coloured  
[throne

To Him that sits thereon,  
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;  
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row,  
Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow,  
And the cherubic host in thousand quires,  
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,  
With those just Spirits that wear victorious  
[palms,

Hymns devout and holy psalms  
Singing everlastingly:  
That we on earth with undiscording voice  
May rightly answer that melodious noise;  
As once we did, till disproportioned sin  
Jarred against nature's chime, and with

[harsh din  
Broke the fair music that all creatures made  
To their great Lord, whose love their motion  
[swayed

In perfect diapason, whilst they stood  
In first obedience, and their state of good.  
O may we soon again renew that song,  
And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long  
To His celestial concert us unite,  
To live with Him, and sing in endless morn  
[of light.

John Milton (1608 – 1674)

2 **I was glad**

I was glad when they said unto me,  
we will go into the house of the Lord.  
Our feet shall stand in thy gates,  
[O Jerusalem.  
Jerusalem is builded as a city,  
that is at unity in itself.

Vivat Regina Elizabetha!

O pray for the peace of Jerusalem,  
they shall prosper that love thee.  
Peace be within thy walls, and plenteousness.

Psalm 122: 1 – 3, 6, 7

## The Dream of Gerontius

### 3 Prelude

#### Part I

Gerontius..... tenor

Assistants ..... chorus

The Priest ..... bass

#### Gerontius

4 Jesu, Maria – I am near to death,  
And Thou art calling me; I know it now.  
Not by the token of this faltering breath,  
This chill at heart, this dampness on  
[my brow,  
(Jesu, have mercy! Mary, pray for me!)  
'Tis this new feeling, never felt before,  
(Be with me, Lord, in my extremity!)  
That I am going, that I am no more.  
'Tis this strange innermost abandonment,  
(Lover of souls! great God! I look to  
[Thee,)  
This emptying out of each constituent  
And natural force, by which I come to be.  
Pray for me, O my friends; a visitant  
Is knocking his dire summons at my  
[door,  
The like of whom, to scare me and to daunt,  
Has never, never come to me before;  
So pray for me, my friends, who have not  
[strength to pray.

#### Assistants

5 Kyrie eleison.  
Holy Mary, pray for him.  
All holy Angels, pray for him.  
Choirs of the righteous, pray for him.  
All Apostles, All Evangelists, pray for him.  
All holy Disciples of the Lord, pray for him.  
All holy Innocents, pray for him.  
All holy Martyrs, all holy Confessors,  
All holy Hermits, all holy Virgins,  
All ye Saints of God, pray for him.  
Kyrie eleison.

#### Gerontius

6 Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play  
[the man;  
And through such waning span  
Of life and thought as still has to be trod,  
Prepare to meet thy God.  
And while the storm of that bewilderment  
Is for a season spent,  
And, ere afresh the ruin on me fall,  
Use well the interval.

#### Assistants

7 Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord.  
Be merciful, be gracious; Lord, deliver him.  
From the sins that are past;  
From Thy frown and Thine ire;  
From the perils of dying;  
From any complying  
With sin, or denying  
His God, or relying

On self, at the last;  
From the nethermost fire;  
From all that is evil;  
From power of the devil;  
Thy servant deliver,  
For once and for ever.

By Thy birth, and by Thy Cross,  
Rescue him from endless loss;  
By Thy death and burial,  
Save him from a final fall;  
By Thy rising from the tomb,  
By Thy mounting up above,  
By the Spirit's gracious love,  
Save him in the day of doom.

**Gerontius**

**[8]** Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,  
De profundis oro te,  
Miserere, Judex meus,  
Parce mihi, Domine.  
Firmly I believe and truly  
God is Three, and God is One;  
And I next acknowledge duly  
Manhood taken by the Son.  
And I trust and hope most fully  
In that Manhood crucified;  
And each thought and deed unruly  
Do to death, as He has died.  
Simply to His grace and wholly  
Light and life and strength belong,  
And I love, supremely, solely,  
Him the holy, Him the strong.

Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,  
De profundis oro te,  
Miserere, Judex meus,  
Parce mihi, Domine.  
And I hold in veneration,  
For the love of Him alone,  
Holy Church, as His creation,  
And her teachings, as His own.  
And I take with joy whatever  
Now besets me, pain or fear,  
And with a strong will I sever  
All the ties which bind me here.  
Adoration aye be given,  
With and through the angelic host.  
To the God of earth and heaven,  
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,  
De profundis oro te,  
Miserere, Judex meus,  
Mortis in discrimine.

**[9]** I can no more; for now it comes again,  
That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain,  
That masterful negation and collapse  
Of all that makes me man. And, crueller still,  
A fierce and restless fright begins to fill  
The mansion of my soul. And, worse and  
[worse,  
Some bodily form of ill  
Floats on the wind, with many a loathsome  
[curse  
Tainting the hallowed air, and laughs, and  
[flaps

Its hideous wings,  
And makes me wild with horror and dismay.  
O Jesu, help! pray for me, Mary, pray!  
Some Angel, Jesu! such as came to Thee  
In Thine own agony.....  
Mary, pray for me. Joseph, pray for me.  
[Mary, pray for me.

**Assistants**

**10** Rescue him, O Lord, in this his evil hour,  
As of old so many by Thy gracious power: –  
Noe from the waters in a saving home;  
[(Amen.)  
Job from all his multiform and fell distress;  
[(Amen.)  
Moses from the land of bondage and despair;  
[(Amen.)  
David from Golia and the wrath of Saul;  
[(Amen.)  
– so, to show Thy power,  
Rescue this Thy servant in his evil hour.

**Gerontius**

**11** Novissima hora est; and I fain would sleep,  
The pain has wearied me.... Into Thy hands,  
O Lord, into Thy hands....

**The Priest and Assistants**

**12** Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc  
[mundo!  
Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!  
Go from this world! Go, in the Name of God  
The Omnipotent Father, who created thee!

Go, in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
Son of the living God, who bled for thee!  
Go, in the Name of the Holy Spirit, who  
Hath been poured out on thee!

**13** Go, in the name  
Of Angels and Archangels; in the name  
Of Thrones and Dominations; in the name  
Of Princedoms and of Powers; and in the name  
Of Cherubim and Seraphim, go forth!  
Go, in the name of Patriarchs and Prophets;  
And of Apostles and Evangelists,  
Of Martyrs and Confessors; in the name  
Of holy Monks and Hermits; in the name  
Of holy Virgins; and all Saints of God,  
Both men and women, go! Go on thy course;  
And may thy place to-day be found in peace,  
And may thy dwelling be the Holy Mount  
Of Sion; through the same, through Christ  
[our Lord.

COMPACT DISC TWO

**Part II**

**Soul of Gerontius** ..... tenor  
**Angel** ..... mezzo-soprano  
**Angel of the Agony** ..... bass  
**Demons, Angelicals, and Souls** ..... chorus

**Soul of Gerontius**

**1** I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed.  
A strange refreshment: for I feel in me







Dread of hell-fire,  
Of the venomous flame,  
A coward's plea.  
Give him his price,  
Saint though he be,  
Ha! ha!  
From shrewd good sense  
He'll slave for hire;  
Ha! ha!  
And does but aspire  
To the heaven above  
With sordid aim,  
And not from love.  
Ha! ha!

**Soul of Gerontius**

7 I see not those false spirits; shall I see  
My dearest Master, when I reach His throne?

**Angel**

Yes, - for one moment thou shalt see thy  
[Lord,  
One moment; but thou knowest not, my child,  
What thou dost ask: that sight of the Most  
[Fair  
Will gladden thee, but it will pierce thee too.

**Soul of Gerontius**

Thou speakest darkly, Angel! and an awe  
Falls on me, and a fear lest I be rash.

**Angel**

There was a mortal, who is now above  
In the mid glory: he, when near to die,  
Was given communion with the Crucified, -  
Such, that the Master's very wounds were  
[stamped  
Upon his flesh; and, from the agony  
Which thrilled through body and soul in that  
[embrace,  
Learn that the flame of the Everlasting Love  
Doth burn ere it transform.

**Choir of Angelicals**

8 Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
And in the depth be praise:

**Angel**

...Hark to those sounds!  
They come of tender beings angelical,  
Least and most childlike of the sons of God.

**Choir of Angelicals**

Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
And in the depth be praise:  
In all His words most wonderful;  
Most sure in all His ways!

To us His elder race He gave  
To battle and to win,  
Without the chastisement of pain,  
Without the soil of sin.

The younger son He willed to be  
A marvel in His birth:  
Spirit and flesh His parents were;  
His home was heaven and earth.

The Eternal blessed His child, and armed,  
And sent Him hence afar,  
To serve as champion in the field  
Of elemental war.

To be His Viceroy in the world  
Of matter, and of sense;  
Upon the frontier, towards the foe,  
A resolute defence.

**Angel**

[9] We now have passed the gate, and are  
[within  
The House of Judgment.

**Soul of Gerontius**

The sound is like the rushing of the wind –  
The summer wind – among the lofty pines.

**Choir of Angelicals**

[10] Glory to Him, who evermore  
By truth and justice reigns;  
Who tears the soul from out its case,  
And burns away its stains!

**Angel**

[11] They sing of thy approaching agony,  
Which thou so eagerly didst question of.

**Soul of Gerontius**

My soul is in my hand: I have no fear, –

[12] But hark! a grand mysterious harmony:  
It floods me, like the deep and solemn sound  
Of many waters.

**Angel**

[13] And now the threshold, as we traverse it,  
Utters aloud its glad responsive chant.

**Choir of Angelicals**

[14] Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
And in the depth be praise:  
In all His words most wonderful;  
Most sure in all His ways!

O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
A second Adam to the fight  
And to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood  
Which did in Adam fail,  
Should strive afresh against the foe,  
Should strive and should prevail;

And that a higher gift than grace  
Should flesh and blood refine,  
God's Presence and His very Self,  
And Essence all divine.

O generous love! that He who smote  
In man for man the foe,  
The double agony in man  
For man should undergo;

And in the garden secretly,  
And on the cross on high,  
Should teach His brethren and inspire  
To suffer and to die.

Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
And in the depth be praise:  
In all His words most wonderful;  
Most sure in all His ways!

**Angel**

<sup>15</sup> Thy judgment now is near, for we are come  
Into the veiled presence of our God.

**Soul of Gerontius**

I hear the voices that I left on earth.

**Angel**

It is the voice of friends around thy bed,  
Who say the 'Subvenite' with the priest.  
Hither the echoes come; before the Throne  
Stands the great Angel of the Agony,  
The same who strengthened Him, what  
[time He knelt  
Lone in the garden shade, bedewed with  
[blood.  
That Angel best can plead with Him for all  
Tormented souls, the dying and the dead.

**Angel of the Agony**

<sup>16</sup> Jesu! by that shuddering dread which fell  
[on Thee;  
Jesu! by that cold dismay which sickened  
[Thee;  
Jesu! by that pang of heart which thrilled  
[in Thee;  
Jesu! by that mount of sins which crippled  
[Thee;  
Jesu! by that sense of guilt which stifled  
[Thee;  
Jesu! by that innocence which girdled Thee;  
Jesu! by that sanctity which reigned in Thee;  
Jesu! by that Godhead which was one with  
[Thee;  
Jesu! spare these souls which are so dear  
[to Thee,  
Souls, who in prison, calm and patient, wait  
[for Thee;  
Hasten, Lord, their hour, and bid them come  
[to Thee,  
To that glorious Home, where they shall ever  
[gaze on Thee.

**Soul of Gerontius**

<sup>17</sup> I go before my Judge.

**Voices on Earth**

Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord.  
Be merciful, be gracious; Lord, deliver him.

**Angel**

<sup>18</sup> ...Praise to His Name!  
O happy, suffering soul! for it is safe,

Consumed, yet quickened, by the glance  
[of God.

Alleluia!

#### **Soul of Gerontius**

[19] Take me away, and in the lowest deep  
There let me be,  
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,  
Told out for me.  
There, motionless and happy in my pain,  
Lone, not forlorn, –  
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,  
Until the morn,  
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,  
Which ne'er can cease  
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possess  
Of its Sole Peace.  
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love: –  
Take me away,  
That sooner I may rise, and go above,  
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.

#### **Souls in Purgatory**

[20] Lord, Thou hast been our refuge: in every  
[generation;  
Before the hills were born, and the world  
[was: from age to age Thou art God.  
Bring us not, Lord, very low: for Thou hast  
[said, Come back again, ye sons of Adam.  
Come back, O Lord! how long: and be  
[entreated for Thy servants.

#### **Angel**

[21] Softly and gently, dearly-ransomed soul,  
In my most loving arms I now enfold thee,  
And, o'er the penal waters, as they roll,  
I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold  
[thee.

And carefully I dip thee in the lake,  
And thou, without a sob or a resistance,  
Dost through the flood thy rapid passage  
[take,  
Sinking deep, deeper, into the dim  
[distance.

Angels, to whom the willing task is given,  
Shall tend, and nurse, and lull thee, as  
[thou liest;  
And Masses on the earth, and prayers in  
[heaven,  
Shall aid thee at the Throne of the Most  
[Highest.

Farewell, but not for ever! brother dear,  
Be brave and patient on thy bed of  
[sorrow;  
Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,  
And I will come and wake thee on the  
[morrow.

#### **Souls**

Lord, Thou hast been our refuge, &c.  
Amen.

John Henry (Cardinal) Newman (1801–1890)



Clive Barba

Arthur Davies



Gwynne Howell



The premature death of Richard Hickox on 23 November 2008, at the age of just sixty, deprived the musical world of one of its greatest conductors. The depth and breadth of his musical achievements were astonishing, not least in his remarkable work on behalf of British composers. An inspiring figure, and a guiding light to his friends and colleagues, he had a generosity of spirit and a wonderful quality of empathy for others.

For someone of his musical achievements, he was never arrogant, never pompous. Indeed there was a degree of humility about Richard that was as endearing as it was unexpected. He was light-hearted and, above all, incredibly enthusiastic about those causes which he held dear. His determination to make things happen for these passions was astonishing – without this energy and focus his achievements could not have been as great as they were. He was able to take others with him on his crusades, and all in the pursuit of great music.

Richard was a completely rounded musician with a patience, kindness, and charisma that endeared him to players and singers alike. His enthusiasm bred its own energy and this, in turn, inspired performers. He was superb at marshalling

large forces. He cared about the development of the artists with whom he worked and they repaid this loyalty by giving of their best for him.

An unassuming man who was always a delight to meet, Richard was a tireless musical explorer who was able to create a wonderful sense of spirituality, which lifted performances to become special, memorable events. For these reasons, Richard was loved as well as respected.

The Richard Hickox Legacy is a celebration of the enormously fruitful, long-standing collaboration between Richard Hickox and Chandos, which reached more than 280 recordings. This large discography will remain a testament to his musical energy and exceptional gifts for years to come. The series of re-issues now underway captures all aspects of his art. It demonstrates his commitment to an extraordinarily wide range of music, both vocal and orchestral, from the past three centuries. Through these recordings we can continue to marvel at the consistently high level of his interpretations whilst wondering what more he might have achieved had he lived longer.

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**CHANDOS** DIGITAL

2-disc set **CHAN 241-46**

COMPACT DISC ONE

**Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry**  
(1848–1918)

- |   |                                 |       |
|---|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Blest Pair of Sirens (1887)     | 11:54 |
| 2 | I was glad (1902, revised 1911) | 7:02  |

**Sir Edward Elgar** (1857–1934)

The Dream of Gerontius, Op. 38 (1900)\*

- |        |        |          |
|--------|--------|----------|
| 3 - 13 | Part I | 37:16    |
|        |        | TT 56:32 |

COMPACT DISC TWO

- |         |         |          |
|---------|---------|----------|
| 14 - 21 | Part II | 57:57    |
|         |         | TT 57:57 |

**Felicity Palmer** mezzo-soprano (Angel)\*

**Arthur Davies** tenor (Gerontius)\*

**Gwynne Howell** bass (The Priest / Angel of the Agony)\*

**London Symphony Chorus**

**London Symphony Orchestra**

**Roderick Elms** organ

**Richard Hickox**

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ELGAR: THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS – Soloists / LSC / LSO / Hickox

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