

Elgar

Coronation Ode
The Spirit of England

Teresa Cahill • Anne Collins
Anthony Rolfe-Johnson • Gwynne Howell
Scottish National Orchestra and Chorus
Sir Alexander Gibson

collect

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

	Coronation Ode, Op. 44	36:03
	words by Arthur Christopher Benson	
1	I Introduction. Crown the King	9:51
	<i>Soli and chorus</i>	
2	II (a) The Queen	2:36
	<i>Chorus</i>	
3	II (b) Daughter of Ancient Kings	2:24
	<i>Chorus</i>	
4	III Britain, Ask of Thyself	3:50
	<i>Bass solo and male chorus</i>	
5	IV (a) Hark, upon the Hallowed Air	
	<i>Soprano and tenor soli</i>	
	(b) Only Let the Heart Be Pure	8:46
	<i>Soli</i>	
6	V Peace, Gentle Peace	4:05
	<i>Soli and chorus a cappella</i>	
7	VI Finale. Land of Hope and Glory	4:10
	<i>Contralto solo and chorus</i>	

The Spirit of England, Op. 80 **30:32**

words by Laurence Binyon

8	I The Fourth of August	8:42
9	II To Women	6:34
10	III For the Fallen	15:02
	TT	66:45

Teresa Cahill soprano

Anne Collins contralto

Anthony Rolfe-Johnson tenor

Gwynne Howell bass

Scottish National Orchestra Chorus

John Currie chorus master

Scottish National Orchestra

Sir Alexander Gibson

Elgar: Coronation Ode/The Spirit of England

Elgar: Coronation Ode/The Spirit of England

The composer as much as any man is the creature of his time. The time shares equally with the individuality in shaping an expression to define them both. This disc contains the first recordings ever published of two major works by Elgar. They are his largest and finest works of ceremonial music. Yet each was deeply felt, and the contrast between them makes the very sharpest measure of Elgar's response to the two worlds of his life in our century: the world of peace and empire, and the world of war and loss.

Coronation Ode

The contrast emerges clearly enough in the two texts. Arthur Christopher Benson's *Coronation Ode* was written not only for the special occasion of Edward VII's Coronation in 1902, but actually with Elgar's music in mind. And its beginning hymns all the assurance which would become so intolerable for later generations to whom its sovereign security would be denied:

God shall save the King,
God shall make him great,
God shall guard the state;
All that hearts can pray,

All that lips can sing,
God shall hear to-day; –
God shall save the King!
Yet the sense of threatening fate and threatening violence runs deep in Benson's *Ode*. After greeting the King and Queen, he turns in the very next section to picturing what would follow from beginning another war:

Under the drifting smoke, and the scream
of the flying shell,
When the hillside hisses with death...
The difference from modern experience comes at the end of the line:
...and never a foe in sight.

Benson's next section invokes the arts in order, beginning with Music:

Fiery secrets, winged by art,
Light the lonely listening soul...

There Elgar's prescience was greater; his setting would repeat the word 'Light', turning the simple declaration into a prayer. But Benson's concluding words in themselves struck a retrospective note:

As the golden days increase,
Crown your victories with peace!
The lines were being written at the end of the South African War; the words which follow implore the return of peace:

When comest thou? Our brethren long for thee.

Yet the famous 'Land of Hope and Glory' Finale actually anticipates the end:

Tho' thy way be darkened, still in splendour drest,
As the star that trembles o'er the liquid West.

When Benson asks, 'How may we extol thee, praise thee, honour thee?', then, his question conveys a concern to realise a moment of incredible good fortune in the flux of history – and to preserve the moment, at least in the language of art, against any future entry upon what can only be a downward path.

Benson was the eldest son in an eminent literary family. His friendship with Elgar had begun about the time of King Edward's accession in January 1901. And when the *Coronation Ode* was formally commissioned by the Covent Garden Syndicate in the autumn of that year, that friendship proved a splendid working relationship; for Benson himself was a keen amateur musician and a sensitive listener to music.

But the keynote for the entire piece was given by the King himself. Hearing Elgar's new *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1*, Edward VII said that the tune of the Trio ought to have words so that it could be sung. Elgar decided to implement the King's idea as the climax of the *Coronation Ode*. He set Benson

the task of matching verses to the melody already existing, and Benson evolved the words which all the world was to know.

Through the early months of 1902 Elgar wrote the music for the present sections 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Then it was realised that there was no mention of the Queen. So Benson wrote the poem 'Daughter of Ancient Kings' about Alexandra, whose father was King of Denmark. This Elgar set on 4 April, and inserted it to follow the opening chorus. The first performance was fixed for 30 June with the Sheffield Choir, then considered the finest amateur chorus in the country. Then, almost on the eve of the Coronation, the King was taken seriously ill. He recovered, but the premiere of the *Coronation Ode* together with all the festivities had to be put back to the autumn.

The reign of Edward VII did not outlast the decade, and for the Coronation of George V in 1911 the *Ode* was revived. But as 'Daughter of Ancient Kings' had referred specially to Alexandra, an entirely new chorus was created to replace it: a hymn to Queen Mary – 'True Queen of British Homes and Hearts'. Already the changing attitudes of the century were beginning to emerge:

Oh kind and wise, the humblest heart
That beats in all your realms today
Knows well that it can claim its part
In all you hope, in all you pray.

The Spirit of England

The War poems of Laurence Binyon were written in far different circumstances, and they envisioned no musical setting. But Binyon's purpose in them was the same as Benson's in the *Coronation Ode* – to provide a focus of expression for an outstanding event in the nation's history. Many composers responded to the quality of Binyon's verses, and Elgar was not alone in feeling moved to set them to music. But his is the setting which survives. And that is as it should be; for all the themes in Benson's *Coronation Ode* reappear in the most remarkable way through Binyon's War poems:

Now in thy splendour go before us,
Spirit of England, ardent-eyed...

But this is a 'Coronation Ode' for a different King:

...Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.

The 'queen of British homes and hearts' is now the whole of sorrowing womanhood:

Your hearts are lifted up, your hearts
That have foreknown the utter price.

And Benson's lonely star trembling in a darkened West has become a midnight galaxy of the dead:

As the stars that are starry in the time of
our darkness,

To the end, to the end, they remain.

As the forty-four-year-old Elgar had

responded to Benson's hymn at the meridian of his own career, so the fifty-seven-year-old Elgar could meet himself again in Binyon's elegies. From them he shaped the last of the great choral works which had begun with *The Dream of Gerontius* in 1900. The music for *The Spirit of England* was slowly achieved: 'To Women' and 'For the Fallen' were mostly written in 1915, but 'The Fourth of August' was not completed until two years later. As if to signify this movement's position at the beginning of the end, as it were, a reminiscence of the 'Demons' Chorus' from *Gerontius* was set against words that could condemn the war-making of every nation:

The barren creed of blood and iron,
Vampire of Europe's wasted will...

At the beginning of the War Elgar had made a setting of the Belgian poem *Carillon*, with an *idée fixe* of four descending tones quickly ringing across the orchestral landscape to evoke a mending of shattered hopes. 'For the Fallen', by contrast, is dominated by a two-note figure slowly tolling an open fifth at the bottom of the whole ensemble: following the tonic note, the lower sub-dominant opens up a bottomless void into which all the carefully wrought harmonies of the late civilisation echo as they empty through its hollowness.

© Jerrold Northrop Moore

You can now purchase Chandos CDs directly from us. For further details please telephone +44 (0) 1206 225225 for Chandos Direct. Fax: +44 (0) 1206 225201. Chandos Records Ltd, Chandos House, Commerce Way, Colchester, Essex CO2 8HQ, UK
E-mail: chandosdirect@chandos.net Website: www.chandos.net

Any requests to license tracks from this or any other Chandos disc should be made directly to the Copyright Administrator, Chandos Records Ltd, at the above address.

Recording producer Brian Couzens

Sound engineer Brian Couzens

Recording venue Paisley Abbey, Scotland; December 1976

Design Tim Feeley

Booklet typeset by Michael White-Robinson

© 1977 Chandos Records Ltd

© 2003 Chandos Records Ltd

Chandos Records Ltd, Colchester, Essex CO2 8HQ, England

Printed in the EU

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)**Coronation Ode, Op. 44**

words by Arthur Christopher Benson

36:03

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--|------|
| 1 | I | Introduction. Crown the King | 9:51 |
| | | <i>Soli and chorus</i> | |
| 2 | II | (a) The Queen | 2:36 |
| | | <i>Chorus</i> | |
| 3 | II | (b) Daughter of Ancient Kings | 2:24 |
| | | <i>Chorus</i> | |
| 4 | III | Britain, Ask of Thyself | 3:50 |
| | | <i>Bass solo and male chorus</i> | |
| 5 | IV | (a) Hark, upon the Hallowed Air | |
| | | <i>Soprano and tenor soli</i> | |
| | | (b) Only Let the Heart Be Pure | 8:46 |
| | | <i>Soli</i> | |
| 6 | V | Peace, Gentle Peace | 4:05 |
| | | <i>Soli and chorus a cappella</i> | |
| 7 | VI | Finale. Land of Hope and Glory | 4:10 |
| | | <i>Contralto solo and chorus</i> | |

The Spirit of England, Op. 80

words by Laurence Binyon

30:32

- | | | | |
|----|-----|-----------------------------|-------|
| 8 | I | The Fourth of August | 8:42 |
| 9 | II | To Women | 6:34 |
| 10 | III | For the Fallen | 15:02 |

TT 66:45

'...represents one of the finest Elgar choral records in the catalogue – the sound is both brilliant and expansive...'

Gramophone**Teresa Cahill** soprano**Anne Collins** contralto**Anthony Rolfe-Johnson** tenor**Gwynne Howell** bass**Scottish National Orchestra Chorus****John Currie** chorus master**Scottish National Orchestra****Sir Alexander Gibson**

Printed in the EU



© 1977 Chandos Records Ltd © 2003 Chandos Records Ltd

Chandos Records Ltd • Colchester • Essex • England