

Program subject to change

ELGAR

Serenade in E minor, Op.20

Allegro piacevole

Larghetto

Allegretto

MORLOCK

Solace

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Serenade in E minor, Op.20

Edward Elgar

(b. Broadheath, nr. Worcester, 1857 / d. Worcester, 1934)

First performed: The second movement alone was performed in Hereford on April 7, 1893. The first performance of the complete work was on July 23, 1896 in Antwerp.

Last ESO performance: November 1995

Edward Elgar was no overnight sensation. While he would eventually be hailed as the greatest English composer since Purcell, his early works were met with, shall we say, limited interest – until the great “*Enigma*” *Variations* finally broke through to achieve worldwide acclaim. Certainly, his earlier works were absolutely necessary in shaping his art, and of all his pre-*Enigma* pieces, his *Serenade for String Orchestra* has gone on to become a popular work.

But maybe there’s a good reason why this work stands out among his earlier pieces. The *Serenade* is widely held as a re-working of another piece, premiered on May 7, 1888, called *Three Pieces for String Orchestra*. The manuscript for that work is now lost, “but there seems every reason to suppose that, in a revised form, it became the well-known *Serenade for Strings*,” writes Michael Kennedy in *Portrait of Elgar*.

As the *Serenade*, the piece was well received at its first complete performances in Antwerp; but it would not be presented in its entirety in England until 1899, the same year that the “*Enigma*” *Variations* premiered. The three movements seem to adhere to the movement titles of the earlier *Three Pieces*: “Spring Song,” “Elegy,” and “Finale.” Elgar always maintained a fondness for this work, and in fact it was one of the last pieces of his that he conducted for a recording session on August 29, 1933, five months before he died.

Solace

Jocelyn Morlock

(b. Winnipeg, 1969)

Composed in 2001; substantially revised 2005.

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Program note by the composer:

In my first year of university, having made a sudden jump away from a planned career in sciences and towards composition, I heard all kinds and styles of music that I'd never known existed before. It was thrilling, like seeing a new colour for the first time.

In particular, the profound joy and beauty of Josquin's *Missa L'Homme Armé* is what inspired me to write my piece, *Solace*, some years later. Unlike most string orchestra works, "Solace" requires the group to be divided into three smaller sub-ensembles:

1. the "early music" ensemble, consisting of two violins, two violas, cello and double bass, playing music that is partially derived from the Agnus Dei of Josquin's *L'Homme Armé* (sexti toni) Mass.
2. the more ethereal sounding group of five violins, positioned above the rest of the ensemble, playing very long, slow harmonics.
3. the violin and cello soloists, whose music is meant to be a response to that of the "early music" ensemble.

Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis

Ralph Vaughan Williams

(b. Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, 1872 / d. London, 1958)

First performed: September 6, 1910 in Gloucester

Last ESO performance: November 2015

Thomas Tallis (1505-1585) was an important English Renaissance composer. Ralph Vaughan Williams was avidly interested in the music of Britain's past. He dedicated much of his time to rediscovering and archiving traditional music of his native land, preserving it for posterity. But he also genuinely enjoyed ancient music, and its influence colours more than a few of his pieces.

In 1910, he received a commission from The Three Choirs Festival for a work to be performed in Gloucester Cathedral. The open, vaulted space, and Tallis' vast amount of sacred works, inspired him to compose a work for antiphonal strings, based on a hymn from a 1567 psalm by Tallis. It was acclaimed from its first performance, and is still regarded as one of Vaughan Williams' finest pieces. Tallis, a master of counterpoint, would have admired the structure of the latter composer's treatment, in which the strings' counterpoint weaves textures ranging from



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Elgar, Morlock & Vaughan Williams
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sturdy to gossamer, in a work that continuously unfolds in lush, warm textures and an ethereal sense of the work's sacred roots.

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