

## ELGAR & MYSTERY

February 24, 2023 • 8:00 PM

Featuring:  
**Brett Mitchell**, conductor

This performance does not include an intermission.

*Please hold your applause until the end of each piece.*

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### MENDELSSOHN

*A Midsummer Night's Dream Overture, Op.21* (11')\*

### ESTACIO

*Wondrous Light* (6')\*

### ELGAR

*Variations on an Original Theme, Op.36 "Enigma"* (32')\*

*Theme: Andante*

*Variation 1 - C.A.E. (L'istesso tempo)*

*Variation 2 - H.D.S.-P. (Allegro)*

*Variation 3 - R.B.T. (Allegretto)*

*Variation 4 - W.M.B. (Allegro di molto)*

*Variation 5 - R.P.A. (Moderato)*

*Variation 6 - Ysobel (Andantino)*

*Variation 7 - Troyte (Presto)*

*Variation 8 - W.N. (Allegretto)*

*Variation 9 - Nimrod (Adagio)*

*Variation 10 - Intermezzo: Dorabella (Allegretto)*

*Variation 11 - G.R.S. (Allegro di molto)*

*Variation 12 - B.G.N. (Andante)*

*Variation 13 - Romanza \*\*\* (Moderato)*

*Variation 14 - Finale: E.D.U. (Allegro - Presto)*

*Program subject to change.*

\*indicates approximate performance duration

## ***A Midsummer Night's Dream Overture, Op.21***

**Felix Mendelssohn**

(b. Hamburg, 1809 / d. Leipzig, 1847)

First performed: February 1, 1827, in Stettin

Last ESO performance: October 2012

Felix Mendelssohn wrote his enchanting overture inspired by Shakespeare's fantasy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when he was only 17, yet he had already composed several masterful works before. With it, Mendelssohn was simply fulfilling his youthful fascination with the Shakespeare comedy. As it turned out however, this work, and the *Octet* written the year before, announced to the world that a major new talent had arrived. Written originally for piano duet (which Felix played with his gifted sister Fanny), Mendelssohn orchestrated the work and conducted its first orchestral performance.

"The most striking example I know of a very young composer astonishing the world by a musical style at once fascinating, original, and perfectly new, is Mendelssohn's exploit at 17 with the *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture," wrote no less than George Bernard Shaw (in *The World*, June 1, 1892). "One can actually feel the novelty now, after 66 years." Another annotator noted of the overture: "After a few evocative chords, it opens with a rippling staccato figure that instantly sets the scene in Fairyland ... no mortal could dance to this ethereal rhythm."

## ***Wondrous Light*** (1997 ESO commission)

**John Estacio**

(b. Newmarket, ON, 1966)

First performed: April 17, 1997 (under its original title, *Scherzo*)

Last ESO performance: April 17, 1997

Program note by the composer:

Officially, *Wondrous Light* is the second movement of (1997 ESO commission) *Borealis*. However, *Wondrous Light* can also be played on its own. The title change was made in 2004.

*Wondrous Light* is designed to be a celebration of the Aurora Borealis, also known as the "northern lights." Being inspired by the notion of dancing celestial lights, the music is fervent and animated. *Wondrous Light* is perhaps less of a literal musical representation of the borealis and is, instead, inspired by their energy and the speed at which the lights seem to zip through the evening skies. A nimble melody introduced by the oboe is developed intervallically and rhythmically throughout the composition. Sudden swells in volume accompanied by quick glissandos were inspired by the swirling curtains of green light which twist and turn and vanish suddenly in the night sky. Towards the conclusion of this movement the nimble theme is transformed into a noble melody performed as a traditional chorale by the trombones, and then repeated by the full orchestra. The conclusion of this piece attempts to capture the majesty of the borealis — they have graced our northern skies since time began and will continue to dance ever more.

## ***Variations on an Original Theme, Op.36 “Enigma”*** **Edward Elgar**

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

First performed: June 19, 1899, in London

Last ESO performance: November 2019

After a tiring day spent teaching, Edward Elgar returned home, and daydreamingly sat at the piano, making up a tune. That’s nice, his wife Alice said, play it again. So, he did, only making up variations on the tune as he did so, in little musical portraits of their friends. This was the genesis of the “*Enigma*” *Variations*, the work which would eventually establish Elgar as a major new composer. He ultimately wrote 14 variations, orchestrating them over the course of 1898-99. So, what is the Enigma?

Not the tune – that’s presented at the outset, prior to the set of variations. Not the identities of all the friends – we have the names behind the initials and affectionate nicknames. Rather, Elgar has said, there is another theme, but one which is “never played.” Whether he meant a theme as a musical idea, or an overall “meaning,” Elgar never said, and despite decades of speculation as to the identity, Elgar took the answer with him to the grave.

Following the G minor theme, variation one is for Elgar’s wife. Variation two is named for H.D. Steuart-Powell, a pianist friend of Elgar’s. The Allegretto third variation in G Major is for R.B. Townsend, an amateur actor whose vocal gifts for sudden changes in pitch is gently parodied. Variation four is W. Heath Baker. The fifth is named for R.P. Arnold, son of the famous poet, who was noted for his sense of humour. “Ysobel” was the nickname for violist Isabel Fitton, so her instrument is given prominence in variation six. Arthur Troyte Griffiths was a more willing pianist than an able one, and his enthusiasm colours the seventh variation. Elgar said that, while the eighth variation is named for Winifred Norbury, the music itself is meant to depict an eighteenth-century house.

The most famous variation, often excerpted as a stand-alone moment, is the serene “Nimrod” ninth variation, named in tribute to Elgar’s friend A.E. Jaeger. Variation ten teases Dora Penny (“Dorabella”) and her tendency to speak hesitatingly. Organist G.R. Sinclair is depicted throwing a stick into a river for his bulldog to retrieve – listen for the bark – in the eleventh variation. The cello spotlight in number twelve is for cellist Basil Nevinson. No initials are given for variation 13, though the reference to Mendelssohn’s *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* was a nod to Lady Mary Trefusis, who was on a sea excursion at the time. Elgar gave himself the last word with the final variation – “Edu” was a nickname for himself.

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