

EDWARD ELGAR'S *SONATA IN G MAJOR*:  
A BACKGROUND OF ITS COMPOSITION,  
AN ANALYSIS OF ITS COMPOSITIONAL STYLE,  
AND A CONSIDERATION OF ITS RELATION TO  
THE ORGANS AT WORCESTER CATHEDRAL

エドワード・エルガー作曲 ソナタ ト長調  
作品の背景・作曲形式分析  
ウスター大聖堂のオルガンとの関係の考察

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English composer Edward Elgar (1857-1934) is widely known as a composer of light classical music: marches, piano music and songs. The classical music fan may also know of his more serious music: the symphonies, concertos and large choral works. It would be safe to say, however, that his *Organ Sonata in G Major Op. 28* is almost entirely unknown to the general public. Aside from a core of organists familiar with English organ music, most professional organists have never heard the Sonata; few have performed it. Yet, Elgar's biographers mention the *Sonata* as one of his most important instrumental works before the breakthrough *Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma')*.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately for organists, this *Sonata* is the only large-scale work composed for organ by Elgar.<sup>2</sup> This paper will examine three aspects of the *Sonata*: its place in Elgar's life, its relation to the organs of Worcester Cathedral, and its compositional style.

Elgar was born on June 2, 1857, in a cottage in the village of Broadheath, Worcestershire, England. His family moved some three miles to the city of Worcester in 1859, where his father ran a piano tuning service, and later, a music store. From 1863 the family lived at 10 High Street, in rooms over the music store ran by Edward's

father.<sup>3</sup> Several aspects of Elgar's life seem to have been determined by his status at birth. Except for his father, Elgar's immediate family was Roman Catholic, a fact in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Anglican England that was a source of discrimination. His own comments to Rosa Burley show that Elgar keenly felt such discrimination. Ms. Burley wrote, "He told me of post after post which would have been open to him but for the prejudice against his religion, of golden opportunities snatched from his grasp by inferior men of more acceptable views. It was a subject on which he evidently felt very bitter..."<sup>4</sup> His father's background as piano tuner, amateur violinist, church organist and music shop owner clearly pointed Edward towards a musical career. Yet the status "son of a shopkeeper" in class-conscious Victorian England can also be said to have had a negative effect upon Elgar's professional career during the first half of his life. To quote Ms. Burley again, "This determination to divorce himself from the class from which he sprang, though it did not involve the lies and deceptions practised for the same reason by Thomas Hardy, manifested itself in his physical appearance. His heavy moustache suggested a military background, his clothes were those of a country gentleman or of the middle-class professional man who had taken up golf. He avoided carrying a violin case because it gave away that he was a professional musician, which was not a respectable status in 1890."<sup>5</sup> The third determining factor of his early life was the proximity of his father's music store to Worcester Cathedral. A brief walk down the High Street of Worcester, the Cathedral was much loved by Elgar. As a child he played in its grounds; as a young man he was inspired by the new organ installed in 1874 and attended all of the dedication concerts.<sup>6</sup> As a young musician, he took part in the Three Choirs Festival as a violinist.<sup>7</sup> His first appearance in the festival orchestra took place in 1878 when he was 21.

When Elgar reached his professional peak in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century he was England's most famous musician – a great composer, conductor, and musical educator. Given this, one would assume that his musical background was similar to other English composers of his day: private musical studies in his youth, compositional studies at university followed by a term of overseas study. Surprisingly, Elgar had none of these advantages; he was a totally self-taught composer. He described his own compositional background thus, "When I resolved to become a composer and found that the exigencies of life would prevent me from getting any tuition, the only thing to do was to teach myself. I read everything, played everything, and heard everything I possibly could . . . I am self-taught in the matter of harmony, counterpoint, form, and, in short, the whole of the 'mystery' of music."<sup>8</sup> The details of his early musical childhood can be found in any number of Elgar biographies. Due to the fact his father

ran a music shop selling scores and musical instruments, he was surrounded from his earliest days by music. He received some piano lessons from age six. At age 12 he heard a performance of Handel's *Messiah* at Worcester Cathedral that moved him to study violin. Aside from a few lessons with a local musician he was self-taught, becoming a competent performer on the instrument. In 1872 at age 15 Elgar first played the organ for Mass at St. George's Roman Catholic Church, the family parish. It may be that he received a few lessons from his father, who was organist at St. George's from 1846-1885. That same year Edward's formal schooling was over. His own post-graduation dream was to study composition in Leipzig. As the son of a shop keeper, however, he was expected to work; to this end his father found him employment in a lawyer's office. Already determined to become a composer, however, Elgar quit after a year and turned instead to helping in the family shop. His determination to become a composer prevented him from giving up his dream when formal study became impossible. He used his access to the musical scores in the family store to his advantage, studying anything that came into the establishment. As Elgar himself put it, "I saw and learnt a great deal about music from the stream of music that passed through my father's establishment...I read everything, played everything, and heard everything that I possibly could..."<sup>9</sup>

Just exactly what it was that Elgar "read, played and heard" in his formative years as a composer is an important question when trying to determine the roots of his own compositional style. Fortunately for scholars, the Elgar Birthplace Museum has preserved a great number of Elgar's papers. Included in these are many concert programs retained by the composer himself. Both programs that Elgar attended as a listener and those he participated in as a performer are represented. A study has been made of these by Peter Dennison.<sup>10</sup> The composers included in the programs show several important trends.

Elgar's most frequently heard or performed musical genre was that of 19<sup>th</sup>-century German Romantic works, with over 300 performances listed. Among these, Richard Wagner was the composer whose works Elgar heard most often – he is represented by seventy-seven performances, a number that is closely followed by Felix Mendelssohn with seventy-four. This comes as no surprise, given that the music of this period is that of Elgar's youth or slightly earlier, and that England in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century was heavily influenced by the music of Germany.

The second most numerous category is that of the German Classical period with three composers and over 150 listings. For students of music in Elgar's day, as well as the present, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven form the core canon of studies. In fact,

Beethoven was the single composer Elgar most often heard or performed; represented by 101 listings.

The third most numerous category is the English Romantic period. This being Elgar's own era it is logical that he should have frequently heard and performed the music of his English contemporaries. In stark contrast with the names found in the German Classical and Romantic lists, the composers of this group are mainly little-known to present day musicians and audiences. There are 116 listings and nine composers. Names such as Parry, Stanford and Sullivan may be recognized by some audiences today, but the others on the list have mostly faded into obscurity.

Also generously represented are the French Romantic period (92 listings), "other European Romantic composers" (those other than German, French or Italian) (79), Italian Romantic (43), and English Baroque (43).

While these numbers do not demonstrate a direct correlation between the number of times Elgar heard or performed music of a given genre and the relative weight that that genre had on his own composition, they do illuminate trends. Elgar's most often encountered genres were German (Romantic and Classical). The third most frequently encountered music was that of his own era, the English Romantic period, followed by French Romantic, other European Romantic and Italian Romantic. Numerically last was the music of Handel and Bach. From these trends it is clear that Elgar was very familiar with the European classical music of his own period, particularly that of Germany. One would then expect to find these influences in his music when analyzing it. This will be discussed below in the section concerning the analysis of the *Sonata in G*.

Elgar's first big success as a composer did not come until 1899 with the premiere of the *Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma')*. (Hereafter called *Variations*.) He was forty-two at the time. Between his early successes as a violinist, organist, composer and conductor in Worcestershire and the recognition that came with the premiere of the *Variations* was a long struggle. What was it that held him back until his early forties? As was mentioned above, his birth status certainly contributed. He found it difficult to be taken seriously by the upper classes due to his standing as a Roman Catholic son of a merchant. An example of this discrimination was the opposition his future wife's family put to his engagement with Caroline Alice Roberts. They considered that her marrying a music teacher and son of a shopkeeper was below her social standing and opposed the union. Experiences of this type in early life contributed to Elgar's bouts of melancholy that plagued him until his death.

On the bright side, his performing and compositional skills continued to improve

through his own efforts. Throughout his twenties Elgar continued to arrange music for local performing groups. He composed simple choral works for his church, St. George's, that are still in the repertory of church choirs. It is also during this period that he showed a talent for conducting. Originally accompanist for the Worcester Glee Club, at age twenty-two he became its conductor. To broaden his horizons, he also made trips to London and Leipzig to hear concerts. In order to help support himself he taught violin and piano privately, an undertaking he hated, in that it took time away from his composing. If Elgar had never progressed past these local activities, he would be known today only to specialists in English regional music of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century. The label "talented local composer" was one that Elgar detested, however, so he continued to struggle for recognition in broader circles. It seems he sensed from an early age that he had the talent to join the ranks of the great composers.

In his thirties Elgar broadened his scale of activities, performing throughout the English midlands as a violin soloist and in orchestras, as well as continuing his teaching and composing. His substantial compositions of this period include *Froissart* (1890, age thirty-three), the cantatas *King Olaf* (1896, age thirty-nine) and *Caractacus* (1898, age forty-one). With these works his reputation began to spread beyond Worcestershire. With the 1899 premiere of the *Variations* and the recognition that came with it, the early, struggling period in Elgar's life concluded.

Where does the organ sonata fit in the context of Elgar's early output? It was composed in 1895, just four years before the success and recognition that came with *Variations*. British organ scholar Peter Williams describes the two organ sonatas by Elgar as being "amongst the organ's most striking and idiomatic works between Franck and Messiaen..."<sup>11</sup> The occasion of its composition was a request by the organist of Worcester Cathedral, Hugh Blaire. Blaire wanted the work in order to demonstrate the cathedral organ to a group of 100 visiting American organists. The premiere was to take place on July 8, 1895. Though he started work on the sonata by sketching out the second movement on April 10,<sup>12</sup> the entire work was completed on July 3, just five days before the premiere performance. On the opening page of the manuscript Elgar wrote "Friday June 28, 9 pm. Finished the Sonata July 3, 1 pm (one week's work)."<sup>13</sup> Apparently, illness, other commitments, and his customary tendency to procrastinate caused him to finish the work so close to its premiere. That it took only one week to compose, however, is a matter of debate. Moore has traced the origins of some of the themes used by Elgar in the sonata and found that several date from far earlier than 1895. The main theme of the third movement, for example, first appeared in an Elgar sketchbook of 1887.<sup>14</sup> And while not a recycled theme, the opening melody of

movement one shows remarkable similarities to the opening theme of his earlier work *The Black Knight*.<sup>15</sup> The ‘week’ Elgar noted in his score covered the time it took to actually put the sonata together; work on it had begun earlier.

The *Sonata* is of massive proportions, requiring roughly thirty minutes to perform. The score as it is published in a reprint version by Kalmus is thirty-one pages long. Its demanding character is illustrated by the fact that Novello originally refused to publish the work due to its technical difficulty.<sup>16</sup> One wonders that Blaire even attempted to perform so large a work under such adverse circumstances. In any case, the premiere is widely known to have been an unmitigated disaster.

At this point it will be useful to consider the type of organ for which the *Sonata* was composed. Unlike a piano, with its standard keyboard length and dimensions, pipe organs vary from one another depending upon historical period, locale and builder. Indeed, a composition intended for a modern organ might well not be performable on an organ from an earlier period. The opposite is also often the case. It is important, therefore, to understand what organ Elgar had in mind when he composed the *Sonata*. As was noted above, the work was commissioned to be performed on a specific organ; one that Elgar knew well. A description of this particular organ then, will be included here.

Worcester Cathedral had an organ as early as the 13<sup>th</sup>-century, but there is no extant description of what type of organ it may have been.<sup>17</sup> The earliest organ for which detailed specifications exist was installed by Thomas Dallam in 1613.<sup>18</sup> As is often the case in English cathedrals, Worcester has a history of housing multiple organs. There were often three different organs installed in different parts of the building. Each organ would serve a specific purpose – accompanying services in a chapel, accompanying the choir in the chancel, or accompanying congregations in the nave. Even in Elgar’s day two large organs were in use in the cathedral. Though the history of organs in the cathedral leading up to the Commonwealth, as well as the story of their renaissance after the Restoration, is a fascinating one, it is outside the scope of this paper and will not be covered here.<sup>19</sup>

The cathedral records describe repairs and additions made on one of the organs in 1752, and then are silent until the installation of a new organ by William Hill in 1842. It is fortunate for the student of Elgar’s *Sonata* that records of this particular organ exist, for this is the instrument that directly preceded the one for which Elgar wrote his *Sonata*. This is an important fact. Elgar wrote his *Sonata* for a specific organ. The organ that he required for the performance of his sonata did not exist at Worcester until 1874. The 1842 organ that he knew as a teenager could not have inspired him to

write the same sonata as the 1874 organ. A comparison of these two instruments will illustrate this point.

The organ installed by William Hill in 1842 was revolutionary in its day. English organs until the 1830's were a unique type found nowhere else in Europe. Though they commonly had several manuals (keyboards for the hands), these were not of a standard length. By the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century organs in Germany, for example, already possessed manuals of the same length – they universally began on a C two octaves below middle C. Though the treble range would vary, this bottom range was a given. Additionally, virtually all organs had foot pedals controlling the largest pipes of the organ. English organs until the 1830's, on the other hand, rarely had foot pedals or independent bass pipes. The manual compass varied depending upon the keyboard. The bottom two manuals commonly descended to a G below the German compass low C and extended for fifty-one keys. This extra range gave a certain degree of bass sound, but was not comparable to contemporary German organs with their bass pedal pipes. The third manual was much shorter in range, beginning on a G directly below middle C and extending for only thirty-two keys. Obviously, a manual of this type could only be used for right hand solo passages, as there were few keys for the left hand to play.

A look at Elgar's *Sonata* reveals that the composer called for three complete manuals beginning on C two octaves below middle C, as well as a full set of foot pedals to carry the bass line. As has been shown, English organs of the 1830's and earlier would have been totally incapable of realizing this work.

By the 1830's and 1840's English organists began to realize that with the limited organs available to them they could not perform the music of J. S. Bach, which at that time was enjoying a revival. This awareness came from many sources: the recital tours of Felix Mendelssohn and his performances of Bach's work were instrumental. Native organists and scholars also began to realize that in order to perform the music of Bach as it was written they would need a new type of organ. Organ builders responded to this move toward a continental European organ by building a new type of English organ. William Hill was one of the leaders of this revolution in English building. In fact, his 1842 organ for Worcester was one of his earliest large-scale instruments to be built according to the German plan.<sup>20</sup> His publicity brochure called it the "Bach, or Lutheran Plan," emphasizing its complete pedal division.<sup>21</sup> Other changes included standard German-type manual compasses for the first and second keyboards. The third manual, however, remained short compass, with a span of 42 notes beginning on tenor C. This technical limitation would have been one of the biggest stumbling blocks to a performance of the *Sonata in G*, which calls for three full

manuals. The stoplist for this organ is given in Fig. A.

**Figure A. Worcester Cathedral William Hill organ of 1842<sup>22</sup>**

<b>Great</b> (manual II, C-f3)		<b>Swell</b> (manual III, c-f3)		<b>Choir</b> (manual I, C-f3)		<b>Pedal</b> (C-e1)	
Tenoroon (treble)	16'	Double Dulciana	16'	Dulciana	8'	Open Diapason	16'
Tenoroon (bass)	16'	Open Diapason	8'	Clarabella	8'	Violon	16'
Large Open Diapason (West)	8'	Stopped Diapason	8'	Stopped Diapason	8'	Principal	8'
Small Open Diapason (East)	8'	Dulciana	8'	Principal	4'	Fifteenth	4'
Stopped Diapason	8'	Principal	4'	Stopped Flute	4'	Sesquialtera	V
Quint	5 1/3'	Suabe Flute	4'	Oboe Flute	4'	Trombone	16'
Principal	4'	Flageolet	2'	Fifteenth	2'		
Wald Flute	4'	Doublette	II	Cremona	8'		
Twelfth	2 2/3'	Echo Cornet	III				
Fifteenth	2'	Oboe	8'				
Sesquialtera III	1 3/5'	Cornopean	8'				
Mixture II	2/3'						
Doublette II	2'						
Posaune	8'						

The location of the 1842 organ in the cathedral is also important. As was stated above, the cathedral had a tradition of organs being located in various parts of the building. The 1842 organ was originally located on the choir screen, where it could speak freely and unobstructed down the nave of the building. Unfortunately for this organ, the cathedral underwent a major restoration beginning in 1855 that continued until 1874.<sup>23</sup> During this period the organ was removed to the Lady Chapel where it was used for services. As part of the “restoration” the original screen was destroyed, opening the chancel to the nave. This necessitated finding a new home for the Hill organ. Much to the organ’s detriment, its new home was on the north side of the chancel, stuffed into the second arch from the tower. Far from the original location on the screen, where its sound could emanate without obstruction, the new location gave the organ a muffled sound. Now useful for little more than chancel services and choir accompaniment, the cathedral authorities realized that a new organ closer to the congregation in the nave was required to lead singing. This new organ of 1874 is the one for which Elgar wrote his *Sonata in G*. It is also the one that Elgar was excited by as a seventeen-year-old youth when it was dedicated in a series of organ recitals. The stoplist for this organ can be seen in Fig. B.

**Figure B. Worcester Cathedral Hill & Sons Organ of 1874<sup>24</sup>**

Great (manual II, C-a3)		Swell (manual III, C-a3)		Choir (manual I, C-a3)		Solo (manual IV, C-a3)		Pedal (C-f1)	
Double Open Diapason	16	Bourdon	16	Open Diapason	8	Vox Angelica II	8	Double Open Diapason	32
Bourdon	16	Open Diapason	8	Dulciana	8	Harmonic Flute	4	Open Diapason	16
Gamba	8	Keraulophon	8	Salicional	8	Tuba Mirabilis	8	Open Diapason	16
Stopped Diapason	8	Stopped Diapason	8	Hohl Flöte	8	Vox Humana	8	Bourdon	16
Open Diapason (1)	8	Principal	4	Principal	4			Violone	16
Open Diapason (2)	8	Lieblich Flute	4	Wald Flöte	4			Principal	8
Principal	4	Twelfth	2 2/3	Flautina	2			Violoncello	8
Harmonic Flute	4	Fifteenth	2	Dulciana Mixture	II			Twelfth	5 1/3
Twelfth	2 2/3	Mixture	III	Clarinet	8			Fifteenth	4
Fifteenth	2	Double Trumpet	16					Mixture	III
Full Mixture	III	Cornopean	8					Trombone	16
Sharp Mixture	IV	Oboe	8					Clarion	8
Posaune	8	Clarion	4						
Clarion	4								

Hill also built the new organ of 1874. It was located in the south transept in a freestanding case. Interestingly, the cathedral now had two large organs standing a few meters from each other. What was the sound of this new organ? Apart from its case and façade pipes it no longer exists, so one must study the stoplist and imagine its sound. A glance will show that it had four manuals and pedal. It should be noted that there are a large number of stops marked 8'. This infers the length of the longest pipe in each particular set, or rank, of pipes. 8' is the so-called unison pitch of the organ and corresponds to the pitch of a piano keyboard. Any smaller numbers denote higher pitched pipes, while 16' and 32' stops are the organ's bass sound. This large number of 8' stops (twenty-one out of a total of fifty-two) tells us that the organ had a rich, round sound at the unison pitch level. It was also blessed with eleven stops of lower than unison pitch (16' and 32'), giving the organ a full bass sound. Another feature one can discern from the stoplist is a plethora of color stops. Names such as Gamba, Harmonic Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Tuba Mirabilis, etc., tell us that there were many stops imitative of orchestral instruments. Unlike organs of the later 19<sup>th</sup>-century, however, it also had the higher pitched stops necessary for the performance of earlier music. It must have been a musically satisfying instrument. Sadly, this organ was destroyed in an ill-advised rebuild the year following the premiere of the *Sonata*. Thus, the ideal organ for the performance of Elgar's 1895

*Sonata in G* disappeared within a year of its premiere performance.

Though it does not bear directly on the topic at hand, a brief explanation of the fate of the 1874 Hill organ may be considered at this point. With two large Romantic-style organs so close together in the cathedral it must have been tempting to play them simultaneously. There are records of just this sort of performance taking place with two organists.<sup>25</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century advances in electric actions for organs made it tempting to cathedral authorities to have the two mechanical organs wired together electrically so that a single organist could control them both from a single console. A relatively untested organ builder by the name Robert Hope-Jones was hired for this purpose. Instead of simply wiring them together, however, Hope-Jones completely rebuilt the two organs, throwing out most of the Hill pipework and replacing it with his own entirely non-traditional scheme.<sup>26</sup> Not everyone agreed with the plan, one writer of the day going so far as to call the rebuild “an act of vandalism.”<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately for Worcester Cathedral, the Hope-Jones rebuild was a disaster, and the organ was mostly unplayable within twenty-five years. Scandals forced Hope-Jones to flee England for the United States in 1903. Continuous questionable business deals and personal problems lead to his suicide there in 1914.<sup>28</sup>

It would not be fair to state categorically that Elgar disliked the Hope-Jones rebuild, especially when it was all in working order. There is even some indication that he liked certain aspects of the new organ.<sup>29</sup> It is most likely, however, that had he written a sonata expressly for the Hope-Jones organ it would have been a different composition than the one he created for the 1874 Hill organ. See Fig. C for the Hope-Jones organ stoplist.

**Fig C. Worcester Cathedral Hope-Jones organ of 1896<sup>30</sup>**

\*reused pipework from two earlier Hill organs.

<b>Great</b>		<b>Swell</b>		<b>Choir</b>		<b>Solo</b>		<b>Pedal</b>	
Diapason Phonon	16'	Contra Viola	16'	Double Open Diapason*	16'	Diaphonic Horn	8'	Gravissima {Resultant}	64'
Tibia Plena	8'	Violas Celestes	8'	Open Diapason	8'	Rohr Flute	8'	Double Open Diapason	32'
Diapason Phonon	8'	Tibia Clausa	8'	Cone Lieblich Gedackt	8'	Bombarde	16'	Tibia Profunda	16'
Hohl Flute*	8'	String Gamba	8'	Viol d'Orchestre	8'	Tuba Mirabilis	8'	Open Diapason*	16'
Viol d'Amour	8'	Quintadena	8'	Tiercina	8'	Tuba Sonora	8'	Violone*	16'
Octave Diapason	4'	Gambette	4'	Dulciana*	8'	Orchestral Oboe	8'	Bourdon	16'
Quintadena	4'	Harmonic Flute*	4'	Flute*	4'			Octave Violone*	8'
Harmonic	2'	Harmonic	2'	Flautina*	2'			Flute*	8'

Piccolo		Piccolo						
Tuba Profunda	16'	Double English Horn	16'	Cor Anglais	8'		Diaphone	32'
Tuba	8'	Cornopean	8'	Clarinet*	8'		Diaphone	16'
		Oboe	8'				Tuba Profunda	16'
		Cor Anglais	8'				Tuba	8'
		Vox Humana*	8'					
		Clarion	4'					

Keeping in mind the organ for which the *Sonata in G* was written, the work itself shall now be examined. The work ranks as one of the largest 19<sup>th</sup>-century organ compositions. It comprises four movements and requires approximately thirty minutes to perform. Many writers and performers have called it a “symphony for organ,” and indeed, it has aspects in common with Elgar’s later symphonic compositions. Kennedy states “...of all Elgar’s pre-1900 works this sonata is the surest pointer to his eventual success as a symphonist.”<sup>31</sup> These precedents include an abundance of contrasting themes, quick and frequent registration and dynamic changes, as well as harmonic writing similar to what can be found in his later orchestral works. All of these aspects combine not only to create the beauty of the work, but also to make extreme demands of the performer. It is no wonder Hugh Blaire was unable to give a satisfactory performance after less than a week of practice. It is a difficult work to perform even after months of preparation.

A full analysis of the entire Sonata would require a paper unto itself. Rather, the first movement will be examined in some detail to demonstrate Elgar’s compositional technique. This movement was composed using sonata-allegro form, a technique with its roots in the works of the German Classical period; particularly those of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. It is a natural form for Elgar to have used, considering his own early studies of these three composers. He was particularly familiar with the works of Beethoven from an early age.<sup>32</sup> It might not be immediately clear to the listener that the first movement of the Sonata is indeed in this form. Its rich use and development of themes, as well as frequent changes in sound color and dynamics give the impression of a rather freely conceived composition. Further inspection, however, reveals a form thoroughly grounded in the style of the German Classicists.

The exposition section of movement one is seventy-five measures long and encompasses two main themes and two important sub-themes. The first, and main, theme of the movement is a grandiose one consisting of three contrasting sections. This is the melody that bears significant similarities with the opening melody of *The Black Knight*.<sup>33</sup> The melodic material contained in this theme alone would provide enough fabric for an entire movement. This writer has divided the themes of movement one into four basic types. Although a purely subjective observation, it does

appear that each theme corresponds to an aspect of Elgar's personality. That he tended to represent himself, or at least his moods, in his compositions is a fact commented on at length by both Kennedy and Moore in their Elgar biographies.

Theme one is Elgar's confident public persona. This is the side of Elgar the British public knew – Elgar conducting concerts in London, receiving awards, dining with royalty, etc. The theme has a broad overall rhythmic movement in 3/4 time, the melody is easily committed to memory, and while exuding confidence it has a tinge of melancholy towards its end. See fig. D.

**Fig. D. Movement I, theme 1**



Theme two of the sonata is an example of the bombastic Elgar type. Due to its brevity, it may be considered a sub theme, rather than a full-fledged theme. This melody reveals the patriotic face of Elgar – the listener is reminded of Great Britain's late 19<sup>th</sup>-century status as a world empire brimming with confidence. Another example can be found in the introductory section of *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1 in D Major*. In ensemble writing this type of theme is usually meant for brass instruments. In the case of the organ it is played on the reed stops. Its outline is sharp, including melodic jumps, and its rhythm is strong and sharp. See Fig. E.

**Fig. E. Movement 1, theme 2**



The third theme of movement one reveals Elgar's melancholy side. It may also be

considered a sub theme, due to its length. This theme portrays a side of Elgar that shows frequently in his correspondence. It was a well-known aspect of his personality for people close to him. It appears in the sonata in minor, accompanied by pulsating left-hand chords. See Fig. F. Another such melancholy theme can be found in opening cello statement of the *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra, Op. 85*.

**Fig. F. Movement 1, theme 3**



The final theme of the exposition is the pastoral Elgarian type. His childhood background in, and lifelong love of, the Worcestershire countryside are revealed in this type of melody. Lilted triplet melodies are characteristic of this type. Many other examples can be found in Elgar's works; movements three and ten of the *Variations* have elements in common with theme four. See Fig. G.

**Fig. G. Movement 1, theme 4**



The area following the exposition of the sonata is termed the development section. Like the exposition, the development is seventy-five measures in length. It is here that the melodies introduced in the exposition are used in whole or part, and developed through melodic manipulation and/or harmonic change. Elgar makes use of the following themes, or parts thereof, in his development. Theme one: repeated appearances of the first three measures; it is treated motivically. Theme two: also used motivically, and at one point its bombastic personality is converted by its use as a legato soprano melody (bb. 116-150). Theme three: appears in various guises; originally in its full form (bb. 82-85, pedals) and later considerably shortened (bb. 106-111). Theme four: this is the only melodic element of the Exposition that does not appear in the Development. It does return in the Exposition (b. 183), however.

Just as in a Classical-period composition, the recapitulation follows the development in Elgar's sonata. It is here that the themes of the exposition return in a form near to their original appearance. This section is also seventy-five measures in length,

providing perfect balance to the exposition and development.

The closing area of the sonata is a Coda, which is thirty-eight measures long, (or thirty-nine, if one counts the last tied quarter-note as a measure) or roughly half the length of each of the preceding three sections. It leads the listener to a final statement of theme one (b. 252) that closes the movement.

It can be seen that Elgar's approach to the composition of this movement is a two-fold one. The underlying structure is purely Classical in form. By providing the three major sections of the sonata form with identical lengths assures balance for the work. Yet his four major themes are 19<sup>th</sup>-century in mood, and, depending upon the interpretation of the listener, can be seen to reflect Elgar's own personality.

The *Sonata for Organ* is certainly one of the great works composed for the instrument in the late Romantic period. It is unfortunate that it is the only such example in Elgar's output. For organists it stands as a lone signpost; what could have been an entirely new genre of English organ music remains a single burst of creative genius. For all musicians the *Sonata* points the way forward to the great artistic and popular successes of the *Variations* and the *Symphony No. 1 in A-flat major*. It shows Elgar's ease with classical forms as well as his flair for melodic invention. For those familiar with the various faces of the composer, this *Sonata* reveals the true Edward Elgar within its varied moods. It is to be hoped that this work will find a more secure place in the repertoire of organists in the future.

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993; reprint ed., 1995), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> The so-called *Organ Sonata No. 2, Op. 87A* is a transcription of the *Severn Suite*, which was originally composed in 1930 as a test piece for the National Brass Band Championship. It was not transcribed for organ until 1933, the year before Elgar's death. The remaining works for organ are few in number and small in scale, comprising the youthful *Eleven Vesper Voluntaries Op. 14*, and three other miscellaneous pieces.

<sup>3</sup> Jerrold N. Moore, *Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984; reissued Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23

<sup>7</sup> The Three Choirs Festival was an annual musical festival that rotated between the

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three cathedrals of Worcester, Hereford and Gloucester. The annual event spanned four days and included two daily concerts.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Dennison, "Elgar's Musical Apprenticeship," in *Elgar Studies*, ed. Raymond Monk, (Scolar Press, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Dennison, "Elgar's Musical Apprenticeship," pp. 16-30.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Williams, review of *Edward Elgar: Music for Organ*, in *The Organ Yearbook*, XX (1989), 118-119.

<sup>12</sup> Moore, *Elgar: A Creative Life*, p. 188.

<sup>13</sup> Moore, *Elgar: A Creative Life*, p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, review cited.

<sup>17</sup> Vernon Butcher, *The Organs and Music of Worcester Cathedral* (n.p., 1981), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> For further reading on the history of English organs, see Steven Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 197.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 193

<sup>22</sup> Butcher, *The Organs and Music of Worcester Cathedral*, p. 19. There are minor discrepancies between stoplists given for this organ. These differences may arise from the fact that some lists give the organ as it was in 1842, while others give its stoplist after it was moved into the Quire in 1872. Minor stop changes seem to have taken place at this time. For a comparison, see Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p. 460, and James Boeringer, *Organa Britannica: Organs in Great Britain 1660-1860* (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1989), vol. 3, p. 316.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 20. There are minor discrepancies between sources listing the 1874 organ stoplist. The British Institute of Organ Studies' *National Pipe Organ Register*, for example, shows a Violone 16' stop in the pedal that Butcher does not. Since it is supposed to have been reused by Hope-Jones, I have included it here. Other minor discrepancies exist between the lists.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 21. The two organs were played simultaneously by two organists for the celebration of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887.

<sup>26</sup> Relf Clark, "Elgar and the Three Cathedral Organists" in *Elgar and the Three Cathedral Organists* (Oxford: Positif Press, 2002), p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> David H. Fox, *Robert Hope-Jones* (Richmond: Organ Historical Society, 1992), p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> Clark, "Elgar and the Three Cathedral Organists," p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Fox, *Robert Hope-Jones*, p. 227.

<sup>31</sup> Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> Clark, "Elgar and the Three Cathedral Organists," p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Moore, *Elgar: A Creative Life*, p. 189.

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