

GCDSA 922204
 New release information
 September 2007

Edward Elgar Symphony No. 1



Edward Elgar
Symphony No. 1 – The Kingdom: Prelude

Flemish Radio Orchestra
Martyn Brabbins

Glossa GCDSA 922204
 Hybrid SACD
 Full-price digipak

Programme

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

The Kingdom, op. 51: Prelude

Symphony No. 1, op. 55
 I. Andante. Nobilmente e semplice – Allegro
 II. Allegro molto
 III. Adagio
 IV. Lento – Allegro

Production details

Total playing time: 58'23

Recorded at Studio 4, Flagey, Brussels,
 in September 2006
 Engineered and produced by Manuel Mohino
 Executive producer: Carlos Céster

Design by Valentín Iglesias (00:03:00)
 Booklet essay by Colin Anderson
 English Français Deutsch Español



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NOTES (ENG)

Elgar on Glossa? And why not, when it brings together one of the UK's leading conducting talents in Romantic music, Martyn Brabbins with the committed advocacy of an orchestra rising superbly to the technical challenges of the *First Symphony* with both spontaneity and energy: the Flemish Radio Orchestra, who here make their second appearance on the label.

Brabbins is an ideal director to be at the helm of a work that sits comfortably in the Late Romantic European tradition of orchestral music and for marshalling the forces which can shed new light on a work from outside the grand performing practice of the British orchestras. In this 150th anniversary year of Edward Elgar's birth it is surely right – as well as artistically exciting – to hear how musicians from outside the UK approach one of the masterpieces of the composer, the son of a piano-tuner and born in the village of Broadheath outside Worcester in England. Indeed, Colin Anderson's perceptive booklet article has more to say on the positioning of Elgar in the general scheme of European musical history.

To accompany the *First Symphony* conductor and orchestra have added an engaging rendition of the Prelude to *The Kingdom*, Elgar's oratorio, completed in 1906, two years before he finished his *First Symphony*; both mature statements from Britain's finest.

NOTAS (ESP)

¿Elgar en Glossa? Y porqué no, tratándose de juntar a uno de los directores británicos con mayor talento para la música romántica con una orquesta sobresaliente, que resuelve con gran autoridad, energía, sensibilidad y espontaneidad el reto de interpretar la *Primera Sinfonía*. Se trata del segundo disco de la Flemish Radio Orchestra (Orquesta de la Radio Flamenca) para el sello.

Brabbins es un director ideal a la hora de conducir una obra inmersa en la tradición orquestal tardorromántica europea, y de hacerlo al frente de un conjunto que arroja nueva luz sobre una obra casi siempre atada a la práctica interpretativa de orquestas británicas. En este 150 aniversario del nacimiento del compositor, parece apropiado y estimulante escuchar el acercamiento de músicos no británicos a esta obra maestra de un compositor que fue hijo de un afinador de pianos, nacido en el pueblo de Broadheath, a las afueras de Worcester. De hecho, el perceptivo artículo de Colin Anderson para el libreto sitúa la música de Elgar dentro de un amplio contexto europeo.

Y para acompañar a esta *Primera Sinfonía*, director y orquesta han elegido el *Preludio* del oratorio *The Kingdom*, completado por Elgar en 1906, dos años antes de la composición de la sinfonía. Por lo tanto, se trata de dos obras de gran madurez de la mejor música británica.

NOTES (FRA)

Elgar chez Glossa? Pourquoi pas ? Il s'agit en effet de réunir un orchestre remarquable et l'un des chefs d'orchestre britanniques le plus de talentueux et ayant le plus d'affinité avec la musique romantique, afin de pouvoir relever avec grande autorité, énergie, sensibilité et spontanéité le défi d'interpréter la *Première Symphonie*. C'est là le second disque de la Flemish Radio Orchestra (Orchestre de la Radio Flamande) chez Glossa.

Brabbins est un chef idéal à l'heure de diriger une œuvre appartenant à la tradition orchestrale du romantisme européen tardif, et il le fait à la tête d'un ensemble capable de projeter un nouvel éclairage sur une œuvre appartenant presque en exclusivité au domaine très réservé des orchestres britanniques. Dans le cadre de ce 150e anniversaire de la naissance du compositeur, fils d'un accordeur de pianos, né à Broadheath, dans les environs de Worcester, il semble approprié et stimulant de pouvoir apprécier ce chef-d'œuvre dans une approche effectuée par des musiciens non britanniques. De fait, l'article sensible de Colin Anderson pour le livret du disque, situe la musique de Elgar dans un ample contexte européen.

Et pour accompagner cette *Première Symphonie*, le chef et l'orchestre ont choisi le *Prélude* de l'oratorio *The Kingdom*, complété par Elgar en 1906, deux ans avant la composition de la symphonie. Il s'agit donc de deux œuvres de grande maturité de la meilleure musique britannique.

NOTIZEN (DEU)

Elgar bei Glossa? Warum eigentlich nicht, wenn das eines der führenden britischen Dirigententale auf dem Gebiet der Musik der Romantik, Martyn Brabbins, mit einem Orchester wie dem Flämischen Radioorchester zusammenbringt, das den technischen Anforderungen der *Ersten Sinfonie* sowohl mit Spontaneität als auch mit Elan ganz hervorragend gewachsen ist? Dieses Ensemble hat hier seinen zweiten Auftritt bei unserem Label.

Brabbins ist ein idealer Dirigent, der das Ruder fest in der Hand hält bei einem Werk, das recht gemütlich am Ende der spätrömantischen Tradition europäischer Orchestermusik steht. Er führt seine Truppen in einer Weise, die neues Licht auf dieses Werk fallen lässt und neue Aspekte außerhalb der Aufführungsgewohnheiten der großen britischen Orchester aufzeigt. In diesem Jubiläumsjahr des 150. Geburtstages von Edward Elgar ist es sicher angebracht – und überdies künstlerisch anregend – darauf zu hören, wie Musiker, die nicht aus dem Vereinigten Königreich stammen, sich einem der Meisterwerke dieses Komponisten nähern, der der Sohn eines Klavierstimmers war und in dem Dorf Broadheath bei Worcester in England geboren wurde. In Colin Andersons erhellendem Bookletartikel ist einiges Grundsätzliche über Elgars Stellung in der europäischen Musikgeschichte zu erfahren.

Der *Ersten Sinfonie* haben Dirigent und Orchester eine mitreißende Interpretation des Präludiums zu Elgars Oratorium *The Kingdom* zur Seite gestellt. Dieses wurde 1906 geschrieben, zwei Jahre vor der Vollendung der *Ersten Sinfonie*, und beide Werke sind reife Vertreter des Besten, das in Großbritannien geschaffen wurde.

Martyn Brabbins on the performance of Elgar

by Mark Wiggins



Elgar on Glossa? And why not, when it brings together one of the UK's leading conducting talents in Romantic music, Martyn Brabbins with the committed advocacy of an orchestra rising superbly to the technical challenges of the First Symphony with both spontaneity and energy: the Flemish Radio Orchestra, who here make their second appearance on the label. Brabbins is an ideal director to be at the helm of a work that sits comfortably in the Late Romantic European tradition of orchestral music and for marshalling the forces which can shed new light on a work from outside the grand performing practice of the British orchestras. In this 150th anniversary year of Edward Elgar's birth it is surely right – as well as artistically exciting – to hear how musicians from outside the UK approach one of the masterpieces of the composer, the son of a piano-tuner and born in the village of Broadheath outside Worcester in England. Indeed, Colin Anderson's perceptive booklet article has more to say on the positioning of Elgar in the general scheme of European musical history. To accompany the First Symphony conductor and orchestra have added an engaging rendition of the Prelude to *The Kingdom*, Elgar's oratorio, completed in 1906, two years before he finished his First Symphony; both mature statements from Britain's finest.

If Martyn Brabbins has made significant appearances – on record as well as on stage – with orchestras such as the BBC Scottish Symphony, London Sinfonietta and the Philharmonia, his conducting currently takes him well beyond the British Isles and also into the realms of contemporary music. He has been to Hamburg for Peter Eötvös' *I Tri Sestri* and to Amsterdam for Jonathan Harvey's *Wagner Dream*, to Frankfurt for Ernest Bloch's *Macbeth*, returning there early next year for Puccini's *Tosca*. The Flemish Radio Orchestra (the Vlaams Radio Orkest or VRO) dates back to 1935 and is now based in Brussels. For its first Glossa release it recorded Stravinsky's *L'oiseau de feu* and the *Chant du rossignol* under the direction of its Principal Conductor, Yoel Levi.

The music of Edward Elgar has formed an important part of your conducting career. When and how did you first discover his music and who (or what) have been the strongest influences on you in terms of your interpretations of his music?

My early musical experiences were as a member of a pretty good brass band, and the music of Elgar certainly featured in the band's performances. Not only arrangements of the well known shorter works, but also his one original piece for brass band, *The Severn Suite*. Many of the composers of brass band original works were heavily influenced by Elgar, both harmonically and melodically – Eric Ball in particular – therefore, I was saturated in the Elgarian idiom, albeit by a somewhat circuitous, second-hand sort of way! In terms of my interpretations of Elgar, I rely on my instincts plus a surgically precise knowledge of the scores. Boult, Barbirolli and Elgar himself though, have given me a lot of guidance in their recorded legacies, but the scores themselves reveal so much to the conductor. They are littered with useful instructions, carefully graded dynamic and tempo indications, and the most appropriate orchestrations I know. Very, very few composers so perfectly notate their sounding intentions.

The 150th anniversary of Elgar's birth offers a new opportunity to address the importance of Elgar both in terms of British music and more broadly in terms of Western Romantic music. Where do you regard his position as being and how do you rate his influence today – inside the UK and outside it?

There are composers in the history of music who have exerted a strong influence over those that follow. These are usually composers of great originality whose music is above all innovative and groundbreaking. Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky and Schoenberg could be in this category. The music of Elgar falls into another category. That is not to say that his music has not exerted a profound influence on many succeeding composers, but, that his creative personality was not one concerned with pushing the boundaries of the language of music. Elgar did though explore ways and means of expression within a defined harmonic, melodic and structural musical world that was entirely personal and original. He did make original sounds and create unforgettably beautiful melodies. Elgar's music is full of surprises. Harmonic twists, melodic distortions, leitmotivic subtleties, new instrumental colours, emotional challenge. So much to explore, so many details to unravel – even excluding his private life!! – that I think only in the most caring performances does the real essence of the originality of Elgar have a chance to really register with listeners.

The First Symphony was written by an Elgar mature in years, yet still full of creative energy. Do you think that he was successful in portraying the emotions that he was aiming to achieve?

Composers today generally emerge on to 'the scene' in their 20s. The musical world does display a rather excessive devotion to youth, and the glamour and energy that goes with artists of tender years. Elgar, writing his *First Symphony* at age 52, and achieving his first major successes only in his 40s, would today be a rarity indeed. More's the pity some may say! Elgar served a long and fruitful musical apprenticeship. During his formative years certainly his thoughts turned to the challenges of symphonic writing. Thus when the time and opportunity arrived Elgar was sure-footed in how he wanted to proceed. The *First Symphony* is

indeed masterful, with not a wasted note to be found! I feel that is the music of a young man. Vigorous, passionate, bold, highly charged and yet tender too. A pretty nigh perfect synthesis of intellect and inspiration, technique and creative freedom. It is no surprise that the *First Symphony* is the favourite Elgar work of so many musicians, professional and amateur alike, so well does it hit its expressive target!

How has working outside that performance tradition of Elgar's music (one closely associated with a number of British orchestras) with the Flemish Radio Orchestra helped you – and the orchestra – to view the First Symphony?

Working towards a performance or recording of a large Elgar work with an orchestra that has never before performed this music brings a whole set of challenges. The music is technically demanding, particularly so for the strings. Elgar being himself an accomplished violinist had the gift to write music that although sometimes fiendishly difficult, is ultimately possible to play! So no faking is allowed, nor indeed required! But what is required is time. Time to rehearse, to assimilate and to deliver. An orchestra unfamiliar with the subtleties of Elgarian orchestration can miss some very important and telling musical details. British orchestras, being familiar with the style, demand less attention from the conductor, as they are, generally speaking, fully paid up members of the Elgar Expert Performers Club!! Attention to detail pays enormous rewards in Elgar interpretation, in terms of balance and orchestration, and with regard to tempo. Ignore his written instructions and his recorded legacy at your peril. The great joy of working with the VRO on this recording was the very fact that they were Elgar virgins!! No performance tradition to fight against, just a clean slate waiting to be filled in...

Does the music in Prelude from The Kingdom represent a different Elgar to you? Does its spirit foreshadow the Elgar of the First Symphony?

I do believe that in the large choral works – *Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom* – Elgar does take on a somewhat different approach to that he took in his symphonies. There is a definite and urgent dramatic undercurrent. One is constantly aware of Elgar the storyteller, of his desire to illuminate and project the narrative. This is most definitely apparent in the – wordless – Prelude to *The Kingdom*, a tightly structured encapsulation of the two-and-a-half-hour story that subsequently unfolds in the oratorio.

Beyond Elgar and other music from the Romantic period you have a strong inclination towards and dedication to music from the present day. Why do you believe that artists such as yourself need to provide such commitment to contemporary music?

An artist has an obligation to be of-the-time in which he or she lives. Thus, for me *not* to conduct music written by my contemporaries would be an abrogation of duty! Music is a living art, not a historical display in a museum. I also approach older music in a similar manner, trying to present a fresh-minted reading of well-known repertoire. Always respecting the composer's intentions and trying to find the essence of a work as seen through my eyes and ears today!