



ELGAR
ENIGMA
VARIATIONS

VAUGHAN
WILLIAMS
THE WASPS
GREENSLEEVES



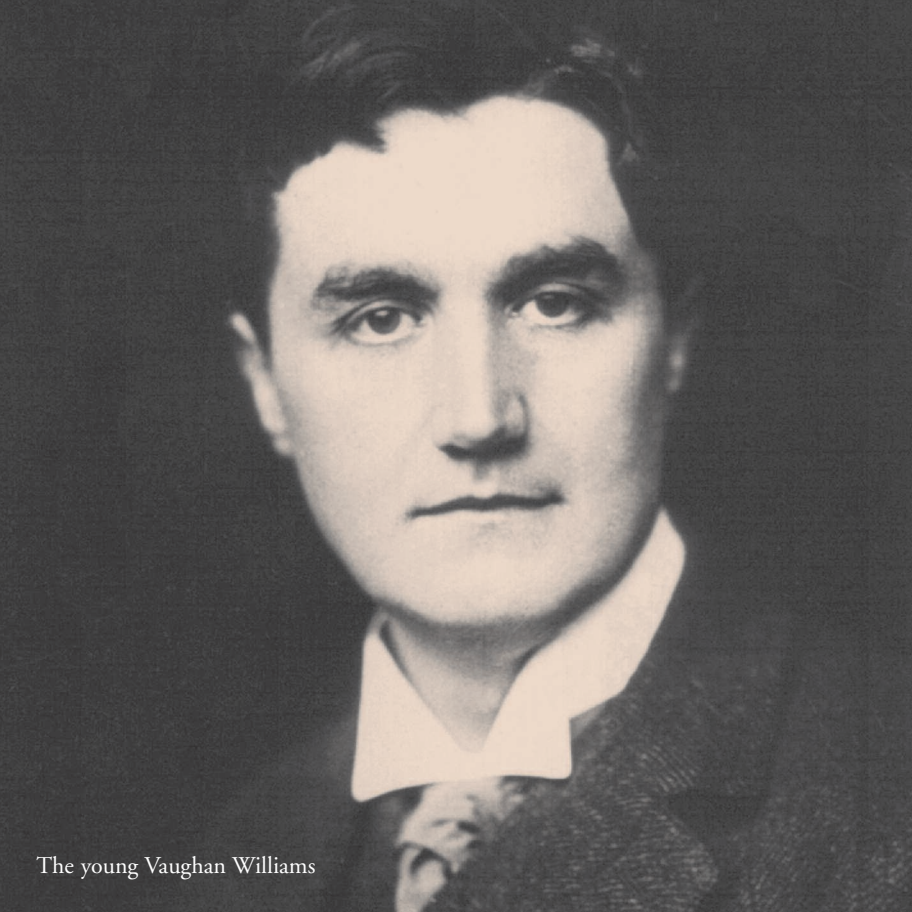
MICHAEL STERN

KANSAS CITY
SYMPHONY

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RECORDING



The young Vaughan Williams

THE WASPS – ARISTOPHANIC SUITE

Early in 1908, Vaughan Williams, sated with folksong collecting and hymnal editing, went off to Paris to polish his French and study orchestration with Maurice Ravel. “We became great friends and I learned much from him,” Vaughan Williams boasted. In June, after returning home to England, Vaughan Williams conducted his Whitman-based choral piece *Toward the Region Unknown* at his *alma mater*, Cambridge University, and he was invited to compose some incidental music for a production there of Aristophanes’ comedy *The Wasps*. There was a long tradition at both Cambridge and Oxford of presenting plays by the Greek dramatists in English with no attempt to recreate the ancient staging. “These productions are always backed by classical scholarship,” wrote Vaughan Williams’ biographer Frank Howes, “but they are infused with the spirit of amateur theatricals.” Busy at the time with completing and revising his vast *A Sea Symphony* for chorus and orchestra, Vaughan Williams could not compose the *Wasps* music until the following year, when, in addition to the Overture, he wrote seventeen items for tenor and baritone soloists, male chorus and orchestra. Except for the now-lost incidental music for Ben Jonson’s masque *Pan’s Anniversary*, presented as part of the Shakespeare Birthday Celebration at Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1905, *The Wasps* was

Vaughan Williams' first work for the stage. In 1912, he created a suite comprising the Overture and four additional movements for concert presentation.

In *The Wasps*, Aristophanes, an affluent aristocrat who hated the democratic leveling of Greek society, hurled his satiric barbs at the Athenian passion for litigation. Day after day, Greek men would flock to the trials to form a jury while neglecting their personal affairs. *The Wasps* tells of one such man, Philocleon, who abandons his family every day to serve as a jurymen. His son, Bdelycleon, locks him in the house, which is unsuccessfully stormed by Philocleon's fellow jurymen, dressed in the ancient productions, according to the text, as a "chorus of wasps ... whose acrimonious, stinging, exasperated temper is meant to typify the character fostered among Athenian citizens by excessive addiction to forensic business." To calm his father's distress at being denied his jury duty, Bdelycleon stages a mock trial at home for him. In a travesty of the Athenian system of justice, the family dog is arraigned for stealing a piece of cheese but acquitted on a technicality.

Vaughan Williams' Overture to *The Wasps* captures the bright spirits and sharp wit of Aristophanes' comedy with no attempt to incorporate ancient musical devices. Indeed, the piece is bursting with hearty, folk-inspired themes that grew from Vaughan Williams' long experience with England's traditional songs and dances. (The eminent English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey

contended that Vaughan Williams could “invent better tunes than any that will ever be discovered by research.”) The Overture opens with an introductory buzzing and twittering appropriate to the play’s title before it launches into a main theme reminiscent of a sea shanty. Other folkish phrases follow, including a striding theme in the orchestra’s middle regions and a brief, nostalgic tune from the woodwinds, before a majestic melody of Elgarian sweep provides contrast. “[The Overture’s] main sentiment,” summarized Tovey, “is that the Athenians are good-natured, healthy people.”

The first of the suite’s two Entr’actes is the gossamer march that precedes Act II; the noble character of the second Entr’acte (Act III) is balanced by a wistful central episode. The *March-past of the Kitchen Utensils* — which are called as witnesses for the defense during the absurdist trial — is a swaggering piece with a folkish middle section that sets the tone for the mock trial which forms the comedy’s denouement. *Ballet and Final Tableau* accompanies the closing scene, in which Philocleon engages in a dance contest with Carcinus and his three sons (Aristophanes’ theatrical rivals), prolific authors of tragedies that won little success among Greek audiences.

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FANTASIA ON “GREENSLEEVES”

If John Bull had been a balladeer, his greatest hit would be *Greensleeves*, the haunting melody whose text sings of the timeless sadness of lost love: *Alas my love, you do me wrong/To cast me off discourteously*. The ancient melody has been inextricably linked with the English pastoral tradition since at least 1580, when it was mentioned in the Stationers' Company's Register as “a new Northern Dittye.” (The legend that Henry VIII, a competent musician to whom are ascribed some three dozen brief vocal and instrumental pieces, wrote *Greensleeves* around 1530 during his courtship of Anne Boleyn is apparently without factual foundation.) The song had gained so much popularity by the turn of the 17th century that Shakespeare mentioned it twice by name in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It appeared in song and lute publications regularly in the early 17th century, and during the Civil War was fitted with new, politically meaningful words by the Cavaliers. In the late 19th century, the American clergyman William Chatterton Dix fitted the ancient melody with a new Christmas text, *What Child Is This?*.

Ralph Vaughan Williams encountered *Greensleeves* frequently during his folksong researches in 1904-1906, when he was preparing a new edition of the *English Hymnal*, and he published it in the *Oxford Book of Carols*. It was

therefore fitting that during his tenure in April and May of 1913 as music director for Frank Benson's Shakespeare company at Stratford-upon-Avon, he should have incorporated *Greensleeves* into his incidental music for *Merry Wives* and *Richard II*. In the *Merry Wives*, he used *Greensleeves* as an entr'acte, and filled out the movement with a middle section based on another folksong, *Lovely Joan*, which he had collected in Norfolk in 1908. Fifteen years later, when he was composing his opera *Sir John in Love*, based on Shakespeare's amorous knight, Falstaff, Vaughan Williams again turned to *Greensleeves*. He used as its text the verses that had appeared with it in William Ballet's lute song book of 1584, *A Handefulle of Pleasant Delites*, and assigned it to Mrs. Ford to sing in Act III, just as Falstaff arrives for their tryst. *Greensleeves* also appears later in the opera, in a lovely instrumental arrangement for flute, harp and strings, as the entr'acte before the closing scene in Windsor Forest. In 1934, five years after *Sir John* was premiered at the Royal College of Music, London, Ralph Greaves created the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* by joining the entr'acte with the passage sung by Mrs. Quickly in Act II based on *Lovely Joan*. The *Fantasia* in its now-familiar concert version was introduced in London on September 27, 1934 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the composer's direction.

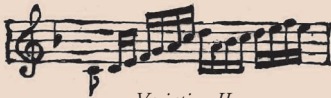


ENIGMA VARIATIONS

Throughout his life Edward Elgar had a penchant for dispensing startling or mystifying remarks just to see what response they would elicit. Turning this trait upon his music, he added the sobriquet “Enigma” above the theme of the splendid set of orchestral variations that he composed in 1898-1899. He posited not just one puzzle in the *Enigma Variations*, however, but three. First, each of the fourteen sections was headed with a set of initials or a nickname that stood for the name of the composer’s friend portrayed by that variation. The second mystery dealt with the theme itself, the section that bore the legend “Enigma.” It is believed that the theme represented Elgar himself (note the



Variation I
Alice



Variation II
Hew David Stuart-Powell



Variation III
Richard Baxter Townsend

similarity of the opening phrase to the speech rhythm of his name — Ed-ward EL-gar), thus making the variations upon it portraits of his friends as seen through his eyes. The final enigma, the one that neither Elgar offered to explain nor for which others have been able to find a definitive solution, arose from a statement of his: “Furthermore, through and over the whole set another and larger theme ‘goes’ but is not played... So the principal theme never appears, even as in some recent dramas — *e.g.*, Maeterlinck’s *L’Intruse* and *Les Sept Princesses*: the chief character is never on stage.” Conjectures about this unplayed theme that fits each of the variations have ranged from *Auld Lang Syne* (which guess Elgar vehemently denied) to a phrase from Wagner’s *Parsifal*. One theory was published in 1975 by the



Variation IV
William Meath Baker



Variation V
Richard Penrose Arnold



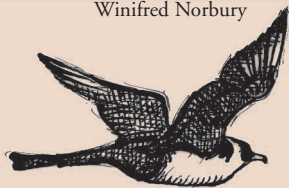
Variation VI
Isabel Fitton



Variation VII
Arthur Troyte Griffiths



Variation VIII
Winifred Norbury



Variation IX
Augustus J. Jaeger

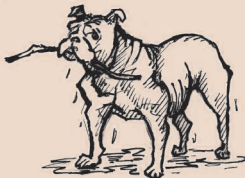
Dutch musicologist Theodore van Houten, who speculated that the phrase “never, never, never” from the grand old tune *Rule, Britannia* fits the requirements, and even satisfies some of the baffling clues that Elgar had spread to his friends. (“So the principal theme *never* appears.”) We shall never know for sure. Elgar took the solution to his grave.

Variation I (C.A.E.) is a tender depiction of the composer’s wife, Alice. *Variation II (H.D. S.-P.)* represents the warming-up finger exercises of H.D. Steuart-Powell, a piano-playing friend. *Variation III (R.B.T.)* utilizes the high and low woodwinds to portray the distinctive voice of Richard Baxter Townsend, an amateur actor with an unusually wide vocal range. *Variation IV (W.M.B.)* suggests the considerable energy of William Meath

Baker. *Variation V (R.P.A.)* reflects the frequently changing moods of Richard Penrose Arnold, son of the poet Matthew Arnold. *Variation VI (Isabel)* gives prominence to the viola, the instrument played by Elgar's pupil Isabel Fitton. *Variation VII (Troyte)* describes the high spirits of Arthur Troyte Griffiths. *Variation VIII (W.N.)* denotes the grace of Miss Winifred Norbury. *Variation IX (Nimrod)* is a moving testimonial to A.J. Jaeger, Elgar's publisher and close friend. *Variation X (Dorabella): Intermezzo* describes Dora Penny, a friend of hesitant conversation and fluttering manner. *Variation XI (G.R.S.)* portrays the organist George R. Sinclair and his bulldog, Dan, out for a walk by the River Wye. *Variation XII (B.G.N.)* honors the cellist Basil G. Nevinson. *Variation XIII (* * *)*:



Variation X
Dora Penny



Variation XI
George Robertson Sinclair



Variation XII
Basil G. Nevinson

Romanza was written while Lady Mary Lygon was on a sea journey. The solo clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage Overture* and the hollow sound of the timpani played with wooden sticks suggests the distant rumble of a ship's engines. *Variation XIV (E.D.U.): Finale*, Elgar's self-portrait, recalls the music of earlier variations.

— Richard E. Rodda



Variation XIII
Lady Mary Lygon



Variation XIV
Edward Elgar

A note on the *Elgar Variations*: We asked noted San Francisco Bay Area artist Joel Fontaine for ideas. During his research he created a small drawing for each variation, and we are pleased to present them here.

THE KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY

The Kansas City Symphony is the region's only full-time professional symphony orchestra, setting the standard for musical excellence. Led by Music Director Michael Stern since 2005, the Symphony has experienced impressive artistic growth, garnering national and international acclaim. The orchestra's 80 full-time musicians are area residents, and each season they touch the hearts of more than a million people through our Classical, Pops and Family concerts; special holiday events; chamber concerts; major civic gatherings such as Bank of America *Celebration at the Station*, which draws over 55,000 people, and the Symphony in the Flint Hills annual concert. During its 42-week season, the orchestra also presents educational programs, community outreach performances, and serves as the orchestra for the Lyric Opera and the Kansas City Ballet.

The Symphony's concerts with internationally celebrated mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato were featured on the national PBS Summer Arts Series in July 2012. The DVD, titled *Homecoming: The Kansas City Symphony Presents Joyce DiDonato*, is available at kcsymphony.org and selections from the concert may be downloaded from iTunes. The Symphony's second CD for award-winning audiophile label Reference Recordings, *Britten's Orchestra*, released in 5.1 surround sound as a dual-layer, multi-channel super-audio CD, won a Grammy® Award in February 2011 for the "Best Surround Sound" category and producer David Frost won the Grammy® for "Best Producer, Classical" with *Britten's Orchestra* in his credits. The initial collaboration between the Kansas City Symphony and Reference Recordings, *Shakespeare's Tempest*, was released in July 2008 to critical acclaim. The Symphony and Michael Stern have also recorded for the Naxos label. The Symphony has taped three nationally broadcast PBS television specials and performed on National Public Radio, including the prestigious SymphonyCast series. Highlights of Classical Series performances are broadcast Thursdays at 9 p.m. on KCUR-FM 89.3, Kansas City's National Public Radio affiliate.

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MICHAEL STERN

Conductor Michael Stern is in his eighth season as music director of the Kansas City Symphony, hailed for its remarkable artistic growth and development since his tenure began. Mr. Stern and the orchestra, joined by an amazing collection of guest artists, have performed to critical acclaim and sold-out audiences in their new world-class performance home, Helzberg Hall at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

Mr. Stern is also the founding artistic director and principal conductor of IRIS Orchestra in Germantown, Tennessee. This unique group, now in its second decade, has been widely praised for its virtuosity and programming, and has produced a string of recordings and acclaimed commissioned new works by American composers. Other positions include a tenure as the

chief conductor of Germany's Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra (the first American chief conductor in the orchestra's history) and as Permanent Guest Conductor of the Orchestre National de Lyon in France, a position which he held for five years, and a stint as the Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre National de Lille, France.

Michael Stern has led orchestras throughout Europe and Asia, including the London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, Helsinki Philharmonic, Budapest Radio Symphony Orchestra, Israel

Philharmonic, Moscow Philharmonic, National Symphony of Taiwan, Tokyo's NHK Symphony and the Vienna Radio Symphony, among many others.

In North America, Mr. Stern has conducted the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Houston Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Montreal Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, and the National Symphony in Washington, D.C. He has also appeared regularly at the Aspen Music Festival.

Mr. Stern received his music degree from The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where his major teacher was the noted conductor and scholar Max Rudolf. Mr. Stern co-edited the third edition of Rudolf's famous textbook, *The Grammar of Conducting*, and also edited a new volume of Rudolf's collected writings and correspondence. He is a 1981 graduate of Harvard University, where he earned a degree in American history.



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THE WASPS – ARISTOPHANIC SUITE 25:18

- 1 Overture 8:53 2 Entr'acte, molto moderato 2:46
- 3 March Past of the Kitchen Utensils 3:03
- 4 Entr'acte, andante 4:10
- 5 Ballet and Final Tableau 6:24

6 *FANTASIA ON "GREENSLEEVES"* 4:34

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SIR EDWARD ELGAR

7–20 *VARIATIONS ON AN ORIGINAL THEME*

"ENIGMA," OP. 36 31:16