

In the South, Concert Overture for Orchestra, Op.50

EDWARD ELGAR

B. June 2, 1857, Broadheath (near Worcester),
England

D. February 23, 1934, Worcester, England

Premiered at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, March 16, 1904.

Scored for two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, two harps and strings (approx. 20 minutes).

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Edward Elgar, born in the Cotswolds village of Broadheath near the cathedral city of Worcester. Elgar's father William Henry lived and worked in Worcester from 1841, first tuning pianos, and later in 1863 opening a music shop. Edward Elgar was brought up in Worcester, but spent vacations at Broadheath, a beautiful small village with views of the Malvern Hills, a landscape with which Elgar is still associated today.

As a composer, Elgar's breakthrough came with two large works, the Variations on an Original Theme "Enigma," directed at its first performance by the celebrated German conductor Hans Richter at St. James's Hall, London in 1899, and the magnificent oratorio "The Dream of Gerontius," premiered in 1900. These two works almost immediately established Elgar as the leading English composer of his time and marked the beginnings of a strong renaissance in composition in Great Britain in the twentieth century. His remarkable ascendance was marked by an extraordinary and unique occasion, a three-day Elgar Festival, devoted solely to his music, at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, from March 14 -16, 1904. It was on the last day of that festival that Elgar himself conducted Hallé Orchestra in the first performance of "In the South."

It was dedicated to Leo Schuster, a friend and supporter of Elgar. In addition to "In the South (Alassio)," Elgar composed two other concert overtures, "Froissart" and "Cockaigne (In London Town)." Of the three, "In the South," an extended work of some 20 minutes, is better understood as a tone poem in the tradition of composers such as Richard Strauss than a concert overture as such. After the first performance of "The Apostles" in 1903, Elgar and his wife went for a vacation on the Italian Riviera. During this vacation Elgar had planned to compose a symphony, but instead the result was "In the South," with the subtitle Alassio, recording the name of the small town on the coast of the Gulf of Genoa where the Elgars stayed for most of their trip. "In the South" is a single movement in an extended sonata form. It shows the influence of Richard Strauss in both the expansive opening theme (which originally dates from 1899, composed by Elgar to describe the organist G.R. Sinclair's bulldog Dan), and in the rich and expansive orchestration. It would be a mistake, however, to consider this piece as merely an imitation of Richard Strauss. Elgar establishes his personal style early in the piece, and the two episodes midway through the work are typical of the composer.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Elgar, *In the South (Alassio)*, Op. 50, *Symphony No.2 in E flat*, Op.63, Sir Andrew Davis conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Warner Apex 0927-495-86-2.

Program note by David Kidger, associate professor of music history at Oakland University.