

CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Elgar & Beethoven: Part 1
Symphony Hall
Wednesday 21 February, 2024
2:15pm

CBSO.CO.UK

KAZUKI GONDOUGTS
ELGAR &
BEEETHOVEN

Concert programme £4





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INTRODUCTION

From the profound and challenging realm of Beethoven's compositions, to the evocative melodies of Walton, and the enigmatic power of Elgar's Enigma Variations - enjoy an unforgettable experience brimming with passion and intrigue.

There's a unique excitement that comes with each performance. Here we have two concerts featuring different soloists. Part 1 features pianist Alice Sara Ott and Part 2 features violinist Maria Dueñas. Beethoven's music is regarded as the most profound and challenging for any soloist or musician, as it requires a philosophical approach to making music. Both soloists are fantastic performers, and I'm excited to play with them for the very first time.

I used to believe that Beethoven should be very serious music somehow. But then I had an increased sentiment, why not to play the funny things? I'm sure Beethoven put his humour in his music. If we look, we can find those moments. They exist and can really be enjoyed.

This year, we have been playing a lot of Walton's music, including the Walton Symphony No. 1, Walton's Violin Concerto, and Walton's Spitfire Prelude and Fugue which we played as our encore piece for the Japan tour, and the Japanese audience particularly enjoyed it. The Spitfire is a popular melody that evokes emotion and is very compact, making it easy to enjoy. It is also a symbol of England, as the Spitfire airplane played a crucial role in England's victory in World War II.

The Enigma Variations is also a very English piece of music composed by Elgar. It is a mysterious piece, and the meaning behind the variation names is unclear. Each variation is named after a person, sometimes only with initials and is a representation of that person. It is a very mysterious piece of music, and each person can interpret it in a unique way. Playing the Enigma Variations is like telling a story with many chapters, and it's a joy to perform it again.

I hope you enjoy your afternoon.



Walton, Spitfire Prelude and Fugue,
7mins

Beethoven, Piano Concerto No.3,
34mins

Interval

Elgar, Enigma Variations, 31mins

Kazuki Yamada, Conductor
Charlotte Corderoy, Assistant Conductor
Alice Sara Ott, Piano

FREE PRE-CONCERT EVENT

Join us for a pre-concert chat with University of Birmingham Professor, Dr Paul Rodmell. The event will take place in the Jennifer Blackwell Performance Space from 1:15pm.

We are very happy for you to take photographs and short video clips at our concerts, but please refrain from recording the whole performance. We'd love you to share them with us @TheCBSO.

We do ask that you are mindful of disturbing other audience members and therefore ask that you dim the brightness on your phone, take pictures during applause breaks and do not use your flash.

We also regularly take photographs for promotional use, so you may see a professional photographer at our concerts. Please ask a member of the front of house team if you have any questions about this.

To ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the performance, please make sure your mobile phone is set to silent.

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KAZUKI CONDUCTS ELGAR & BEETHOVEN: PART 1

Kazuki Yamada has fallen in love with British music, and it doesn't get much more British than Walton's stirring *Spitfire* prelude. As for Elgar's *Enigma Variations*; well, let's just say that the famous *Nimrod* is far from being their best-kept secret. This is music that never gets any less fresh – the perfect complement to the brilliant Alice Sara Ott, in Beethoven's stormiest piano concerto.

Sir William Walton (1902-1983)

PRELUDE AND FUGUE (THE SPITFIRE)

No-one in Britain was left untouched by the Second World War, and that included composers. Having volunteered – unsuccessfully – as an ambulance driver, William Walton received his call-up papers early in 1941. He was willing to fight, but the government had other ideas: Walton was exempted from active service to work on films “of national importance”, including Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944).

But Walton would also become the man who made the *Spitfire* sing. *The First of the Few* (1942) isn't a war film as such: more a lump-in-throat biopic of the *Spitfire*'s designer, R.J. Mitchell (1895-1937). Leslie Howard directs and stars as the brilliant engineer who battled cancer to see his plane fly, with Celia Johnson as his devoted wife. David Niven, as an RAF fighter pilot,

tells the story in flashback, and it's still the sort of film that makes grown men pretend they've got something caught in their eye. “Very good” was Walton's typically blunt verdict; he began composing on 31st May 1942 and the film opened across a blitz-torn Britain on 14th September that year.

Walton worked quickly, and by the end of the year he'd created this *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* from the score. Premiered in Liverpool on 2nd January 1943, it incorporates two sequences from the film. A stirring fanfare introduces a noble march theme as the opening titles roll. Then comes a brilliant orchestral fugue – music that's assembled bit-by-bit, just as engineers bustle round the clock to build the prototype aircraft. A tearful violin solo accompanies the scene where the overworked Mitchell admits to his wife that he has only months to live. Walton salutes his victory with ringing trumpets, as the finished *Spitfire* soars triumphantly into the sky.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

PIANO CONCERTO NO.3 IN C MINOR, OP.37

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Largo
- III. Rondo: Allegro

One evening in Vienna in the mid-1790s, the fashionable piano virtuoso Josef Gelinek was invited to take part in a keyboard “duel” with an unknown young pianist. Gelinek was quietly confident, predicting that he’d give the kid “a first-class drubbing”. The following day, he called on his friend Wenzel Czerny. Wenzel’s son Carl recalled that he cut a rather humbler figure:

“I won’t forget last night in a hurry. That young fellow was full of the very devil! [...] He played compositions of his own which were supremely difficult and grandiose, and he displayed difficulties and effects on the piano beyond anything we’ve dreamed of!”

“Why?” said my father, astonished, “What is the man’s name?”

“He is a young man, small, ugly, dark and obstinate looking” replied Gelinek “and he is called Beethoven”.

Rebel, showman, poet, rockstar – it’s a side of Beethoven that we sometimes forget. But the young Beethoven wasn’t just a troublemaker with a phenomenal gift for the piano. True, he pushed back against his teacher Haydn, but when it came to Mozart, his attitude was more like hero-worship. After listening to a performance of a Mozart piano concerto, he turned to his own young pupil Ferdinand Ries and said “The likes of us will never be able to do anything like that”.

Still, Beethoven was never the type to refuse an artistic challenge. The Mozart concerto in question was No.24 in C minor, and between 1797 and 1800 Beethoven created his own C minor Piano Concerto.

Different key signatures had different meanings for Beethoven, and his stormy “C minor mood” is his most personal of all: think of the tempestuous first movement of the Fifth Symphony.

But in Beethoven’s C minor concerto, it’s a very different story. No outbursts of rage here: it’s the last piano concerto in which he kept all three movements, Mozart-like, in proportion with each other. And since Mozart begins his concerto with a low, unison phrase for strings, so does Beethoven. The music-mad audience that heard him give the first performance at Vienna’s Theater an der Wien on the night of 5th April 1803 would have spotted the resemblance immediately.

And yes, it’s an act of homage - but it’s certainly not an imitation. Beethoven’s vision was very different from his hero’s, and it shows itself in quiet poetry rather than barnstorming heroics. Mozart always finished his first movements with the orchestra alone, but Beethoven allows the piano a few last words – to magical effect. The hushed, glowing slow movement is one of the tenderest ten minutes he ever penned. And at the end of the *finale* he suddenly switches into an entirely new rhythm and mood, to dazzling effect. It’s nothing like Mozart – and that’s the highest compliment Beethoven could have paid him.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

VARIATIONS ON AN ORIGINAL THEME (ENIGMA), OP.36

Theme (Enigma)

- I. (C.A.E.)
- II. (H.D.S-P.)
- III. (R.B.T.)
- IV. (W.M.B.)

- V. (R.P.A.)
- VI. (Ysobel.)
- VII. (Troyte.)
- VIII. (W.N.)
- IX. (Nimrod.)
- X. Intermezzo (Dorabella.)
- XI. (G.R.S.)
- XII. (B.G.N.)
- XIII. Romanza (* * *)
- XIV. Finale (E.D.U.)

After a long day of violin teaching at The Mount School in Malvern in October 1898, Edward Elgar had dinner, lit a cigar and sat down at his piano. "I began to play, and suddenly my wife interrupted by saying 'Edward, that's a good tune...play it again, I like that tune'". He tried the tune differently, asking "Whom does that remind you of?" "That's Billy Baker going out of the room" she replied. Out of that parlour-game grew the greatest orchestral work yet written by a British composer: a series of miniature musical portraits of his nearest and dearest. First performed in London on 19th June 1899, the *Enigma Variations* marked a turning point not just in Elgar's career, but in the history of British music.

Why? Well, there was the technical mastery. Elgar never went to music college, but while his academically-trained peers had been learning their orchestration from textbooks, he'd been playing his violin in amateur operas, local orchestral societies and the Three Choirs Festival. He knew, from within, exactly how an orchestra worked. This practical know-how was allied to a masterly structural vision. The work is a set of variations – one of the clearest musical forms to follow. Elgar went a step further, and structured the *Enigma Variations* as a miniature symphony, with a first movement (I-VII), a slow movement (VIII-XIII) broken by a delicate intermezzo (*Dorabella*), and a grand finale (XIV).

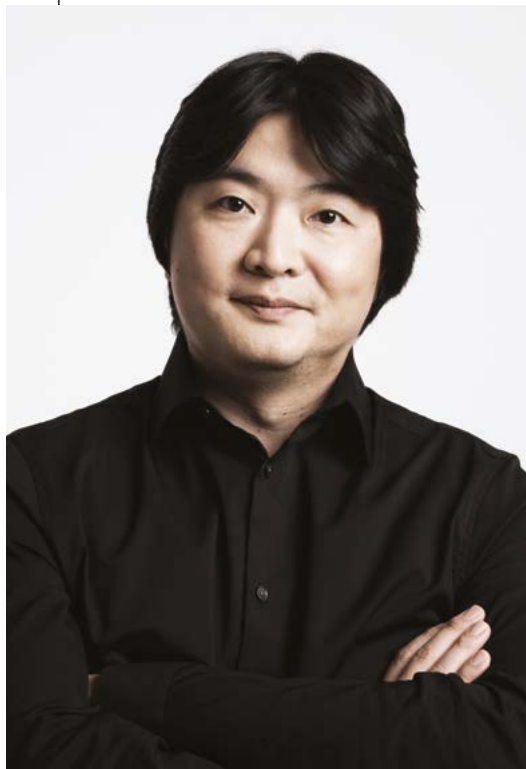
Yet just as much, they're a set of 15 perfect, self-contained orchestral cameos. Tone-painting came easily to a seasoned miniaturist like the composer of *Salut*

d'Amour and *Chanson de Matin*, and you don't have to be a musicologist to enjoy the pictures of distant liners (***) and Hereford organist George Sinclair's bulldog Dan splashing in the Wye (G.R.S.) – or to respond to the profound emotion of *Nimrod*: inspired (so Elgar said) by a conversation about Beethoven with his German-born publisher Augustus Jaeger. The original theme (the first thing we hear) is a self-portrait – gloriously transformed in the final variation EDU ("Edu" was Caroline Alice Elgar's pet name for her husband. She makes her own appearance early on, as C.A.E.).

Inspiration like this can't be faked, and in writing about his friends and family, Elgar didn't have to fake anything. The people – and places – he chose to portray in the *Variations* were those that had sustained him through his troubled formative years. The whole piece glows with a sense of genuine love – for friends, for family, for home. And the "Enigma"? Elgar was a wizard at cryptic puzzles and what he called "japes". Is it the counterpoint to another famous tune – perhaps *Auld Lang Syne*, or the National Anthem? Or an abstract concept, like Friendship? Elgar's only response to every suggestion was "No – nothing like it." We're left with the music, and Elgar's understated, endlessly evocative dedication: "To my friends pictured within."

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KAZUKI YAMADA



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Kazuki Yamada is Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), a role he commenced in Spring 2023. Alongside his commitments in Birmingham, Yamada is also Artistic and Music Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo (OPMC). Yamada has forged a link between Monaco and Birmingham having conducted collaborative performances with CBSO Chorus of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in both cities in 2019 and Orff's *Carmina Burana* in 2023. Time spent under the close supervision of Seiji Ozawa served to underline the importance of what Kazuki Yamada calls his "Japanese feeling" for classical music. Born in 1979 in Kanagawa, Japan, he continues to work and perform in Japan every season with NHK Symphony Orchestra and in his position as Principal Guest Conductor with Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. Shortly after assuming his position in Birmingham, Yamada gave a series of concerts on tour around Japan with the CBSO in summer 2023 and will take OPMC on tour to Japan in 2024.

ALICE SARA OTT

One of classical music's most creative minds, in the 2023-24 season Alice Sara Ott appears as Artist in Residence at London's Southbank Centre and Paris's Radio France. 2023-24 also sees Alice Sara Ott on tour with London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Antonio Pappano, and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Kazuki Yamada. She makes her debut with New York Philharmonic performing Ravel's G Major concerto with Karina Canellakis conducting. Ott also premieres Bryce Dessner's piano concerto with Tonhalle Zurich Orchestra with Kent Nagano, before going on to perform it with the likes of London's Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic and Deutsches Sinfonieorchester Berlin. Two major album releases this season include Beethoven and Echoes Of Life Deluxe, a follow-up to Echoes Of Life, Ott's widely successful tenth album on Deutsche Grammophon. Beethoven and Echoes Of Life Deluxe follow on from seminal albums such as Nightfall, Wonderland and The Chopin Project, taking her total number of album streams to over 370 million.



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