



# THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

CONDUCTOR  
SIMON FERRIS

## CONCERT

SATURDAY JULY 14<sup>TH</sup> 2007  
7.30PM

KINGSTON PARISH CHURCH  
MARKET PLACE, KINGSTON UPON THAMES



# PROGRAMME

**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) – ‘Tragic’ Overture, Op.81**

**Edward Elgar (1857-1934) – Variations on an  
Original Theme for orchestra (“Enigma”), Op.36**

*interval (20 minutes)*

**Robert Schumann (1810-1856) – Symphony No.3, ‘Rhenish’, Op.97**

## Johannes Brahms Tragic Overture op. 81

Brahms’s tragic muse was explicitly that – a muse of tragedy, not melancholy or despair; or in other words, a muse of dramatic form rather than emotional attitude.

The *Tragic Overture*, Op.81 was a companion piece to the *Academic Festival Overture*, Op.80, which had been written in 1880 in response to Brahms’s honorary doctorate from the University of Breslau, and in thus pairing the hard-driven, bleakly inevitable former with the ebullient, rambunctious latter (“one weeps”, said the composer, “while the other laughs”), Brahms was no doubt making a conscious reference to the classical – specifically ancient Greek – practice of following a tragedy with a comedy or satyr play.

For Brahms’s classicism was thoroughly informed. Parallels have been drawn between the *Tragic Overture* and the Fourth Symphony Op.97, (1884), and both have been extensively discussed in the light of the composer’s interest in the drama of Sophocles, and the publication in 1871 of the young Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, which anatomised the Sophoclean moment as a perfect balance between undifferentiated Dionysian energies and the Apollonian forms of the intellect, speculating that it might be resurrected through modern musical forms (although of course Nietzsche had Wagner’s music drama in mind).

The musical form which the *Tragic Overture* takes – sonata form – is itself a species of dramatic argument, and the choice of key is equally significant; D minor, the tonality, for example, of the Commendatore’s music in *Don Giovanni*, Mozart’s *Requiem*, the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, is the most sepulchral of keys; Beethoven’s hour-long journey from that uncertain, troubled D minor opening towards the explosion of D major – historically the key of celebration (innumerable Glorias, for example) – in the finale, inevitably informs Brahms’s sense of dramatic and musical argument.

The opening two chords, declamatory in intent, are in fact harmonically and acoustically unsettling – the open fifth of the second chord denies us the tonal dominant, and the full, rooted D minor triad does not make an appearance until twenty bars in. The ardent, consolatory second subject group in F major rapidly gives way to a heavily punctuated, more martial and menacing third subject group; the development, which is a form of (funereal) march, is marked *molto piu moderato* and makes extensive use of the halting rhythmic figure of the first theme; the recapitulation emerges uncertainly from this lachrymose land (*tempo*

*primo, ma tranquillo*), arriving at a coda where an expiring motif on the clarinet (a contraction of the opening idea) gives way to a final bleak scurry for home.

The taut dramatic impulse of the piece, as with the finale of the Fourth Symphony, tends ultimately to the expression of bleak inevitability; Brahms's biographer, Walter Niemann, notes that "the fleeting touches of thrilling, individual emotion in this Overture are not to be found in conflict and storm, but in the crushing loneliness of terrifying and unearthly silences, in what have been called 'dead places'".

## Edward Elgar Variations on an original theme for Orchestra, Op.36

Fame came late for Elgar. When the *Variations for Orchestra* Op.36 were first performed in 1899 and he burst suddenly to national prominence, he was 42 years old. And while, in the following years, that national prominence became international recognition, with both Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler amongst his admirers, Elgar never quite managed to suppress a feeling of resentment that he had, in his own estimation, been overlooked so long.

When he wrote the Enigma variations his reputation as a composer extended little further than provincial choral festivals where *The Black Knight*, *King Olaf*, *The Light of Life* and *Caractacus* had secured a modicum of local renown for their composer. He was still, however, wearily making his living teaching the violin to processions of undistinguished young ladies in Malvern when, one evening, improvising aimlessly at the piano after dinner, his wife drew his attention to a theme he had just, unconsciously, played.

He worked up the theme in portraits of various, mostly local, friends. Elgar himself said, a decade later, that his *Variations* were begun 'in a spirit of humour and continued in deep seriousness', and in fact, out of this parlour game a much more serious set of processes was quietly engaged, and he succeeded in shaping, in the for him short span of seventeen weeks, what was in essence, and in the great tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century artistic separateness, a progress of the artist's soul.

Elgar's soul was perhaps more separate than most; Michael Kennedy has described him as a "complex, hypersensitive, self-pitying, unhappy yet idealistic man, yearning for an illusory land of lost content" – although in company he was generally jovial and engaging. He had a burning sense of his own social inferiority, judging that his Roman Catholicism and his lower-middle class origins (his father had been "in trade" – the owner of a music shop in Worcester) had held him back.

It is perhaps not altogether surprising, then, that he later claimed that the variations had been "written at a time when friends were dubious and generally discouraging as to the composer's musical future"<sup>1</sup>. Among the implied exceptions were his wife, Alice, and his friend and champion since 1897, A.J. Jaeger, publishing office manager at Novello, who were subject of the first (C.A.E) and ninth (Nimrod) variations respectively.

It was Jaeger who pencilled the word *enigma* in the score over the first six bars of the theme. His variation, 'Nimrod', the emotional core of the piece, memorialises a summer evening's conversation between the composer and Jaeger, in which the latter "discoursed eloquently on the slow movements of Beethoven". Of his wife's variation, 'C.A.E', Elgar subsequently

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from Edward Elgar, *My Friends Pictured Within*, Novello (London, 1927)

wrote simply “There is no break between the theme and this movement. The variation is really a prolongation of the theme...”.

Upon which we may infer that the theme itself, with its G minor–G major–G minor shape (though ending on a major chord), and its hesitant, rather inhibited rhythmic mirroring – two quavers and two crochets, immediately reversed, references to which throughout the piece, Elgar stated, being ‘almost continuous’ – is in fact himself; or, as he put it in a letter of 1912, ‘it expressed when written ... my sense of the loneliness of the artist ... and to me, it still embodies that sense’; the variation, therefore, which bears his nickname, and to which all else tends, is a rather different Elgar – forthright and confident - who is yet to be.

The variations themselves are more loose capriccios than strict variations – in some cases ((\*\*\*) and ‘Dorabella’) there is only the slightest reference to the original theme – and they are, moreover, motivic, and do not necessarily respect the original theme’s harmonic plan. They run in sequence as follows:

### Theme (‘Enigma’)

I C. A. E. (Caroline Alice Elgar). As Elgar said, a prolongation of the theme “with what I wished to be romantic and delicate additions”.

II H. D. S.-P. (Hew David Steuart-Powell): An amateur pianist who for many years played with Elgar and B.G.N (cello); there are allusions – Elgar calls it a humorous travesty - to his idiosyncratic warm-up.

III R. B. T. (Richard Baxter Townshend): An old friend of the Elgars, a writer, whose eccentric career had spanned classics at Cambridge and cattle ranching and gold prospecting in Texas and Colorado; fond of amateur dramatics, this variation “has a reference to R.B.T’s presentation of an old man in some amateur theatricals – the low voice flying off occasionally into soprano timbre.”

IV W. M. B. (William Meath Baker): nick-named ‘the Squire’ by the Elgars, had a brusque manner and a talent at slamming doors.

V R. P. A. (Richard P. Arnold): Son of the poet, Matthew Arnold; a music lover (amateur again), whose serious conversation was often interspersed by witty and irrelevant asides.

VI Ysobel (Isabel Fitton): A keen viola player, of a well-known Worcestershire family; the opening bar “a phrase made use of throughout this variation”, contains “an exercise for crossing the strings – a difficulty for beginners.”

VII Troyte (Arthur Troyte Griffith): a Malvern architect who tried, and failed, to learn to learn the piano under Elgar’s tutelage. Elgar describes the attempt as “maladroit”.

VIII W. N. (Winifred Norbury): By Elgar’s own admission, more a portrait of her family’s fine eighteenth century house; there is a suggestion of her characteristic laugh.

IX Nimrod (August Jaeger): Jaeger, of course, is German for ‘hunter’, and Nimrod is the great hunter in Genesis.

X Dorabella (Dora Penny): the nickname is taken from *Così fan Tutte*, and her friendship with (the older) Elgar has been described as gently flirtatious.

XI G. R. S. (George Robertson Sinclair): organist at Hereford Cathedral, this variation is in fact based on a recollection of his bulldog, Dan, falling into the River Wye, paddling downstream, clambering out, and barking with triumph. G.R.S challenged Elgar to “set that to music!”

XII B. G. N. (Basil G. Nevinson): the cellist with whom H.D. S-P. and Elgar played trios. Elgar described him as a “very dear friend”.

XIII \* \* \* (**Romanza**): usually associated with Lady Mary Lygon, although she was not a close friend; speculation has extended to Helen Weaver, Elgar’s former fiancée, who broke off the engagement (possibly owing to differences in religious faith) and emigrated to New Zealand; Elgar says that “the drums suggest the engines of a liner, over which the clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn’s *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*.”

IX **Finale**: E. D. U. (Edoo was his wife’s nick-name for him). Elgar said that this variation “is merely to show what E.D.U intended to do.”

Affectionate though the variations certainly are, the implication that Elgar somehow manages to efface himself in a series of delicate and humorous character pieces is rather wide of the mark. At the end of the score Elgar appended an adaptation of a line of Tasso, which reads ‘bramo assai, poco spero, nulla chieggio’ (*I desire much, hope for little, ask for nothing*). From that peculiar cocktail of yearning, despondence, and defiance, and mediated through the love and support of his wife, and lone champion, Jaeger, Elgar accurately distilled an aesthetic whole which justifiably placed him for the next decade in the mainstream of European musical consciousness, and demonstrates, ultimately, more kinship with *Ein Heldenleben* than *Carnival of the Animals*.

*interval (20 minutes)*

### Robert Schumann Symphony No.3 in E flat Major, op. 97 - “Rhenish”

Schumann arrived in Düsseldorf – overlooking the Rhine – in September 1850 to take up his first salaried post as conductor and municipal music director, and by early December had completed both his cello concerto and the Symphony in E flat Major op.97, the *Rhenish* (which is numbered no. 3, but is in fact his last symphonic composition – the fourth in D minor in fact predates the third by nearly a decade).

He was, by his own admission, surprisingly happy in Düsseldorf. In spite of some initial discomforts, he and Clara found the town attractive and the Rhine, which had always been for him a source of inspiration (“Majestic father Rhine” he wrote in his diaries in 1830, “a German god”), was now a constant and evocative presence. In late September he visited Cologne Cathedral for the first time, and it was this visit, evidently, which provided the creative spark for the new symphony – a second visit in early November, where he attended the Archbishop of Cologne’s elevation to Cardinal, provided more specific inspiration for the fourth movement, which he noted in his score was “in the character of an accompaniment to a solemn ceremonial”, a description he later reduced to the more succinct *Feierlich*, which translates roughly as “solemn”.

This period of contentment and creative fecundity, which was to last until the end of 1853, was, for Schumann, uncharacteristically unblighted by ill-health. He had always been subject

to what he referred to as “rheumatisms” and “hallucinations” – symptoms which would perhaps be characterised today as bipolar disorder – and in Düsseldorf in 1854 he would experience the first of the final series of psychotic episodes, the underlying cause of which was almost certainly the onset of tertiary syphilis, which led, first to his attempted suicide in the Rhine, and then to his final incarceration (at his own request) in the asylum at Eendenich, where he died in 1856.

The E flat Major symphony, as though in recognition of Schumann’s new public, civic responsibilities, is an ebullient and extrovert work. It is cast, somewhat unusually, in five movements, although precedents – Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* and Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, for example – existed for an ‘extra’ movement in symphonies of an overtly descriptive or programmatic nature. While there is no programme for the Rhenish, Schumann pointed out for the benefit of his publisher, Simrock, that the work “perhaps mirrors here and there something of Rhenish life”, and there is also evidence to suggest that Schumann had contemplated a symphony relating to a Rhineland festival while he was still in Dresden.

Unlike his other three symphonies, in the first movement of the Rhenish there is no slow introduction to provide a thematic or structural core; instead the movement opens directly on to a statement of the first theme which derives much of its energy from abrupt syncopated rhythms; the second theme is presented first in the relative minor before reappearing in the expected dominant – a gesture typical of Schumann. The development is sufficiently forthright and energetic to have elicited comparison with Beethoven’s *Eroica* (also in E flat Major).

The second movement, marked Scherzo but perhaps more like a Ländler, the rustic folkdance cousin of the waltz – Schumann had noted that “popular elements should prevail” – was originally subtitled ‘Morning on the Rhine’; its scurrying trio section is introduced and developed more like a second subject of a sonata form movement.

The third and fourth movements (marked *Nicht Schnell* and *Feirlich* respectively) form a contrasting pair of slow movements; the former counterbalances the sombre counterpoint of the latter with a delicate and intimate intermezzo; the quasi-ecclesiastical fourth movement represents in fact a very public form of contemplation, and it is here that Schumann finally unleashes his three trombones, kept until this point in reserve, to provide the requisite cathedral gravitas. The finale returns to the ebullient and external E flat Major, and shares also something of its marked rhythmic variety, and concludes with a coda which draws some of the thematic material of the symphony together.

Within weeks of the first performance, Schumann was already having serious and escalating difficulties with his new orchestra (in part over his increasingly idiosyncratic conducting style); Clara’s frequent absences from home on concert tours, and the fact that her fame as a musician continued to outstrip his own was causing him considerable domestic distress; and on the horizon there was always the possibility of a recurrence of his depression and instability (horribly realised, in the event); but the third symphony remains one of the pinnacles of this final, highly productive and creatively satisfying period of his life.



## Simon Ferris, conductor

Simon Ferris read music and was organ scholar at King's College London. As an undergraduate he pursued additional instrumental and musicianship studies with Bernard Oram at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and, after graduation, received composition tuition and encouragement from Geoffrey Bush. A skilled and experienced jazz musician, Simon's wide-ranging professional career now embraces an array of genres and disciplines, finding at its core a mixture of performing, composing, arranging, writing, conducting and teaching.

Simon is currently, and uniquely, on the staff both at Tiffin School and at The Tiffin Girls' School in Kingston upon Thames.

**Thames Youth Orchestra** was formed in 2005 with funding from the Performing Arts College, Tiffin School. Now comprising musicians from fifteen South West London schools, TYO looks ahead to an exciting future fully committed to providing for its young players an exhilarating and enriching first hand experience of great orchestral music.

For further information, please contact Rebecca Lacey, chair of TYO:

[rebecca.lacey@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.lacey@blueyonder.co.uk)

TYO is indebted to Lords Estate Agents for its continuing support.

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### CURRENT MEMBERS

Peggy Linton  
Karen Megrarahan  
Catriona Rogers

# THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

So Yeon Kim, leader

## Section coaches

Joanna Korzinek, strings  
Pippa Hyde, violas and cello  
Ian Stott, brass  
Paul Price, woodwind

### First Violins

So Yeon Kim\*  
Max Liefkes  
Rachel Bruce  
James Carter  
Georgina Jackman  
Chris Hollingbery

### Second Violins

Eunyoung Kim\*  
David Mogilner  
Pradeep Kannan  
Jonathan Wong  
Cheryl Pilbeam  
Imogen Dodds  
Nicholas Lung  
Sian Davies  
Amy Sibley  
Anna Selig  
Annabel Cheung  
Daniel D'Souza

### Violas

Ric Hollingbery\*  
Tillie Dilworth  
Eleanor Figueiredo  
Sarah Ashley-Cantello  
Alexi Ayliff-Vellianitis

### Cellos

Toby Perkins\*  
Miriam Figueiredo  
Hassan Kadhom  
Jonathan Bruce  
Isabella Hatfield  
Miles Dilworth

### Jonah Park

Tom Davies  
Fred Mikardo-Greaves  
John Cheetham

### Bass

James Andrewes

### Flutes

Nicky Chalk\*  
Mayuko Tanno\*  
Sem Lee  
Neshma Shah  
Lawrence Thain (piccolo)

### Oboes

Laura Lewis  
Emma Price

### Clarinets

Georgina Feary  
Ben Ingledew  
Andrew Williams

### Bassoons

Victor Jones  
Isabel White  
Nick Fletcher  
Alison White (contrabassoon)

### Horns

Freddie Bruce\*  
Catie Igoe  
William Watson  
Zacchaeus Rodwell

### Trumpets

Max Fagandini\*  
Bryony Watson  
Tom Nolan

### Trombones

Hatty Martin  
Henry Affonso  
Peter DeVilliers  
Julius Whiteman

### Tuba

James Kang

### Timpani

Will Lewis-Smith

### Percussion

Piers Thompson  
Hugo Fagandini

### Organ

Simon Toyne

\*principal