

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIFTH SEASON

**Chicago Symphony Orchestra**  
**Riccardo Muti** Zell Music Director  
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Thursday, March 3, 2016, at 8:00

Saturday, March 5, 2016, at 8:00



**Sir Mark Elder** Conductor

**Vaughan Williams**  
Overture to *The Wasps*

**Vaughan Williams**  
*Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"*

**INTERMISSION**

**Elgar**  
Symphony No. 1 in A-flat Major, Op. 55  
Andante, nobilmente e semplice—Allegro  
Allegro molto  
Adagio  
Lento—Allegro

## Ralph Vaughan Williams

Born October 12, 1872, Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, England.  
Died August 26, 1958, London, England.

### Overture to *The Wasps*



In search of “a little French polish,” Ralph Vaughan Williams went to Paris early in 1908 to study with Maurice Ravel. (He ended up staying three months, taking four or five lessons a week.) Although both men were at the beginning of their careers (and Ravel, the teacher, was three years younger than his student), Vaughan Williams benefited greatly from their contact. “He showed me how to orchestrate in color rather than in lines,” Vaughan Williams later remarked, and convinced him that “the heavy contrapuntal Teutonic manner wasn’t necessary.” Vaughan Williams returned home to write music that was more English than ever. Ravel later called Vaughan Williams “the only one of my pupils who does not write my music.”

Among Vaughan Williams’s first compositions after he returned to London were the Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis and incidental music for a production of Aristophanes’ *The Wasps*. Tallis’s fantasia established him as the great English composer of his time (while also

bringing him international fame). *The Wasps* was more local in its impact, but no less important to his career, for it gave him his first important opportunity to write for the stage.

In 1909, Vaughan Williams was invited to compose music for a Cambridge University production of Aristophanes’ play. First produced in 422 B.C., this satire by the greatest comic poet of the ancient world takes as its subject the Athenian judiciary system and the apparently ageless love of litigation. Vaughan Williams’s score, originally for male chorus and orchestra, was later reworked as a purely instrumental suite for the concert hall. The overture, the most popular of the excerpts, is prime early Vaughan Williams. The scene is clearly England, circa 1909, instead of ancient Greece—the melodic material owes much to English folksong, a particular passion of Vaughan Williams at the time—and the mood is good-natured rather than biting or witty. But the overall effect is winning, the atmosphere is inviting and full of promise (as with any good overture), and the characteristic sound is that of Vaughan Williams exercising his newly found voice. ■

Phillip Huscher

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#### COMPOSED

1909

#### FIRST PERFORMANCE

July 23, 1912; London, England

#### FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

July 14, 1964, Ravinia Festival. Sixten Ehrling conducting

November 21 & 22, 1968, Orchestra Hall. Jean Martinon conducting

#### MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

July 8, 1967, Ravinia Festival. Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting

January 20 & 31, February 1 & 4, 2003, Orchestra Hall. Mark Elder conducting

#### INSTRUMENTATION

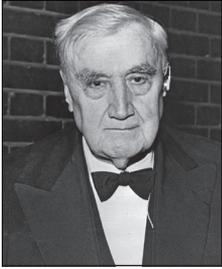
two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, harp, strings

#### APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

9 minutes

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## Five Variants of “Dives and Lazarus”



Vaughan Williams died in London on August 26, 1958. On September 19 his ashes were buried in the north choir aisle of Westminster Abbey, near the burial place of his great English predecessor, Henry Purcell. The first music played that day was

the *Five Variants of “Dives and Lazarus.”*

Williams had known and loved the English folksong “Dives and Lazarus” since 1893. The songs of English folk at work, play, and worship meant more to Vaughan Williams than any other music. In a famous essay written in 1912, when he was just gaining prominence, he wrote that the artist’s work

. . . must grow out of the very life of . . . the community in which he lives, the nation to which he belongs. . . Have we not all about us forms of musical expression which we can purify and raise to the level of great art? For instance, the lilt of a chorus at a music-hall joining in a popular song, the children dancing to a barrel-organ, the rousing fervor of a Salvation Army hymn . . . the cries of the street peddlars, the factory girls singing their sentimental songs.

Even as he gained in knowledge and sophistication, his loyalty did not waver; his tie to the simplest music of his people became only stronger.

Vaughan Williams collected more than 800 folksongs and their variants during his life. He made arrangements of many of them, such as “I will give my love an apple,” or “Tobacco’s but an Indian weed,” for voice and piano or unaccompanied chorus. He also based a number of original

works on these songs, from the three *Norfolk* rhapsodies of 1905 and 1906 to the *Folksongs of the Four Seasons* for women’s voice and orchestra in 1949. But, most importantly, folksong left its mark on Vaughan Williams’s own language; the turns of phrase of his favorite songs, like “Dives and Lazarus,” became second nature to him. He seldom actually quoted folksongs in his major instrumental works, but he had so thoroughly absorbed the idiom that one often senses their presence.

“Dives and Lazarus” has been known and sung in England since at least the end of the sixteenth century. There are several variants, in both words and music, though the story remains essentially the one found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 16. A rich man drives the beggar Lazarus away from his door; after the man dies, he burns in Hell, begging for a taste of water from Lazarus, now “in Abraham’s bosom.” Vaughan Williams begins with a simple version of the melody, and then offers five variants (not variations) of the song. As he writes in the score: “These variants are not exact *replicas* of traditional tunes, but rather reminiscences of various versions in my own collection and those of others.” This score is really the musings and memories of a devoted collector.

**T**he opening statement of the folksong is played by the full ensemble. The harp emerges with a major role in variant 1; variant 2 capitalizes on the divided string choirs; variant 3 opens with a duet for solo violin and harp; the violas have a prominent singing role in variant 4. The final variant, with the strings further subdivided, builds to an impressive climax, answered by the solo cello and harp, and then fades slowly. ■

Phillip Huscher

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**COMPOSED**  
1939

**FIRST PERFORMANCE**  
June 10, 1939, New York City

**FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES**  
April 8, 9 & 10, 1993, Orchestra Hall.  
Leonard Slatkin conducting

**INSTRUMENTATION**  
string orchestra of violins, violas, and cellos, plus harp

**APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME**  
13 minutes

## Edward Elgar

Born June 2, 1857, Lower Broadheath, near Worcester, England.

Died February 23, 1934, Worcester, England.

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### Symphony No. 1 in A-flat Major, Op. 55



Essentially a self-trained musician, Elgar was fifty when he started composing his First Symphony in earnest in 1907. Yet this is far from an apprentice piece. He had already demonstrated his mastery in substantial choral works such as

*The Dream of Gerontius* and *The Kingdom*, and in such orchestral works as the Introduction and Allegro for Strings and the tone poem *In the South*, and, not least, his first four *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches.

Elgar long desired to create a symphony; as early as 1898 he proposed composing one for the Three Choirs Festival—instead of yet another oratorio—to commemorate the martyred Victorian hero, General Gordon (particularly adored by the British public since his unnecessary death defending Khartoum in 1885). Work on the *Enigma* Variations had intervened, and by the time Elgar returned to thinking of a symphony, he was determined not to saddle it with a program—or at least not one which could be used to elucidate its “meaning.” Late in 1907, he left for Italy with his wife and daughter, Carice, telling his patron Frank Schuster that he was spending time in Rome as a “pagan not Xtian at present.” He clearly wanted a break from Bible-based oratorios, and desired the liberty to make his own spiritual journey in the form of an “abstract” symphony.

Elgar’s six months in Italy involved a long struggle with self-doubt, reinforced by less-than-cheering weather, which resulted in his catching first a cold, then influenza. By his return to England in May 1908, Elgar had written few but nonetheless important themes, most of them bleak and furious, including a strutting march intended, he said, for the “Scherzo (so called).” Back home in Herefordshire, Elgar’s ideas began to cohere, and he finally completed the work on September 25. Even its less-than-ideal premiere by the Hallé conducted by Hans Richter in Manchester on December 3, 1908, left the critics in no doubt that they had heard a masterpiece. The symphony was next performed, on December 7, by the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) under the same conductor to a packed Queen’s Hall. On the previous evening, Richter told the LSO: “Gentlemen, let us now rehearse the greatest symphony of modern times, written by the greatest modern composer; and not only in this country.” Over the next eighteen months, the symphony was performed in North America (New York—repeated three weeks later due to its success—Chicago, Boston, and Toronto) and around Europe (Vienna, Leipzig, Saint Petersburg, and Rome), receiving in all over 100 performances.

**E**lgar’s First Symphony has an epic quality, richly populated with several apparently incidental themes: yet many of these, on further examination, prove to be not only essential to the work’s structure, but also built

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#### COMPOSED

1907–08

#### FIRST PERFORMANCE

December 3, 1908; Manchester, England

#### FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

October 22 & 23, 1909, Orchestra Hall. Frederick Stock conducting

#### MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

April 28, 29 & May 1, 1983, Orchestra Hall. Raymond Leppard conducting

July 7, 2000, Ravinia Festival. Donald Runnicles conducting

#### INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, strings

#### APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

52 minutes

from motifs derived from a few principal themes. First comes the noble introductory procession, which effectively haunts the entire work—and not only the first and final movements in which it explicitly appears. Elgar described this theme as “simple &, in intention, noble & elevating . . . the sort of ideal *call* (in the sense of persuasion, not coercion or command) & something above everyday & sordid things. . . .” The contrast between this and the first movement’s following *Allegro* section is startling: anxious and turbulent, it is rooted in D minor, a key as far away from the introduction as can be conceived in diatonic music. Yet even in this section there are moments of calm and hope, strings hymning upward as woodwinds twitter like skyborne birds. And after a particularly calamitous climax, the processional music makes an unmistakable, if ghostly, reappearance. From there on, hints of this noble, if apparently other-worldly, procession resurface until, near the movement’s end, it reasserts itself as a substantial promise of ultimate resolution over the turmoil of the *Allegro*. Even then, there is a final reiteration of another theme, last heard at the height of the movement’s calamitous climax, now played sotto voce like a troubling existential question.

The following so-called scherzo is initially all scurrying action, intensifying as first and second violins vault a theme to and fro in energetic yet joyless abandon. The music eventually reaches a strutting march, as sardonic as the demons’ music in *The Dream of Gerontius*. Respite is offered by a calmer episode in which flutes and strings gently gambol (Elgar told the LSO to play it “like something we hear down by the river”). But the diabolical marching resumes, threatening to overwhelm the movement until, apparently exhausted, it gradually winds down. Then, in one of the symphony’s most striking

transformations, the music segues into the slow movement, its opening melody note for note the same as the scherzo’s opening scurrying theme but now much slowed down and creating a sense of limpid calm. Several of Elgar’s friends and colleagues recognized a portrait of the composer himself in this long, serene movement.

After so much calm, there remains a final reckoning. The finale opens, like the first movement, with a slow introduction, only now dominated by baleful forces, starting with a bass clarinet’s sinister rendition of a chromatic theme from the opening movement: there is an expectant atmosphere, as if of troops gathering for final battle. A stealthy staccato theme played by a trio of bassoons is soon transformed in the movement’s main *Allegro* section into a strutting march theme. This martial swaggering is suddenly interrupted by a jarring low C-flat, the march theme reduced to a halting bass line above which the processional theme is heard once again, played by the last desk of violins and violas (so sounding mysteriously disembodied). Even more wonderful is the transformation of the strutting march theme into a noble “new” melody. Here, surely, is the musical embodiment of what Elgar described as the symphony’s ultimate theme: “There is no program beyond a wide experience of human life with a great charity (love) and a massive hope in the future.” The noble processional music finally returns, withstanding tidal crashes, to bring the symphony to a triumphant close. ■

Daniel Jaffé

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**Phillip Huscher has been the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1987.**

**Daniel Jaffé is a regular contributor to *BBC Music Magazine* and a specialist in English and Russian music.**