

EDWARD ELGAR

Born June 2, 1857 in Broadheath, England; died February 23, 1934 in Worcester.

In the South, Opus 50, "Alassio" (1904)

PREMIERE OF WORK: London, March 16, 1904

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

Hallé Orchestra

Edward Elgar, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 19 minutes

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

As a restorative for body and spirit during the damp British winter, Elgar and his devoted wife, Alice, left London for the Mediterranean coastal town of Bordighera, just east of Monte Carlo, on November 21, 1903. Elgar found Bordighera "lovely but too Cockney for me," and on December 11th, the couple travelled up the coast to Alassio to take rooms at the Villa San Giovanni, from which Elgar reported that he could see "streams, flowers, hills, with the distant snow mountains in one direction and the blue Mediterranean in the other."

On one sunny afternoon, the Elgars made an outing to an old church in the village of Moglio, the sound of whose name so appealed to Elgar that he repeated it over and over to himself until it had generated a musical motive in his mind. He added this fragment to the other sketches he was accumulating for an overture, called tentatively *In the South*, but it was not until an excursion to the Vale of Andorra four days later that the finished shape and content of the new work became clear to him. "I was by the side of an old Roman way," he recalled. "A peasant shepherd stood by an old ruin, and in a flash it all came to me — the conflict of armies in that very spot long ago, where now I stood — the contrast of the ruin and the shepherd — and then, all of a sudden, I came back to reality. In that time I had 'composed' the overture — the rest was merely writing it down." The score of *In the South*, to which Elgar appended the subtitle *Alassio*, was finished in London on February 21, 1904, allowing barely enough time to prepare the orchestral parts and arrange rehearsals before the premiere was given under the composer's direction at an Elgar Festival on March 16th. The work's success confirmed his reputation as the leader of English music, and he was knighted four months later.

Though Elgar called *In the South* an overture, its scale, orchestral expansiveness, evocative episodes and even its form make it, in effect, a symphonic poem. Its allusive qualities are indicated by two poetic excerpts that the composer placed at the head of the score. The first is from Tennyson: *What hours were thine and mine, In lands of palm and southern pine, In lands of palm, of orange blossom, Of olive, aloe, and maize and vine.* The other excerpt was culled from Byron's *Childe Harold*, the literary inspiration for Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*: *... a land Which was the mightiest in its old command And is the loveliest ... Wherein were cast ... the men of Rome! Thou art the garden of the world.*

Elgar contained his vision within a modified sonata form, which was made to accommodate two atmospheric episodes in place of the usual development section. An entire procession of fine melodic ideas occupies the first theme area: a heroic leaping motive; a striding downward melody marked with the composer's most characteristic performance instruction, *Nobilmente*; and a gentle, limpid strain led by the clarinet. The formal second theme, assigned to the strings, is quiet and almost passionately lyrical. The center of *In the South* holds two of Elgar's most evocative sound pictures. The first is a bold depiction inspired by his vision of ancient Roman armies, a stern passage whose open fifth-based harmonies make it one of the most daring episodes in all of Elgar's works. The second picture grows from a haunting bucolic melody entrusted to the solo viola, the principal instrument of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*. (So distinct in character, mood and melody is this passage that Elgar arranged it separately as a piece for small orchestra titled *Canto Popolare* and as a song called *In Moonlight* with a text borrowed from Shelley's *An Ariette for Music*.) A recapitulation of the full complement of themes from the exposition rounds out *In the South*.

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda