



DISC OF THE MONTH

Elgar

The virtuoso violinist Tasmin Little shines in her long-awaited and much anticipated recording of Elgar's Violin Concerto, which is complemented here by *Polonia* and the charming Interlude from *The Crown of India*. Little is accompanied by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Sir Andrew Davis, a conductor justly acclaimed for his contributions to British music, and Elgar in particular.

Bonus track: The reconstructed cadenza heard on the 1916 recording

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CHANDOS NEW RELEASES

Tasmin Little

The violinist on fulfilling her dream of recording Elgar's Violin Concerto more than 20 years after encountering the work for the first time

I grew up in a household where a wide variety of music was played, particularly classical, and large black vinyl discs of Locatelli, Delius and Szymanowski were regularly placed inside the beautiful four-legged piece of furniture that constituted the family record player. Bearing this in mind, and with 10 years at the Yehudi Menuhin School under my belt, I still find it surprising that it wasn't until I was nearly 20 that I first heard Elgar's Violin Concerto. Nowadays it is in the repertoire of a great many violinists. But in my late teens the concerto simply was not regularly played in the concert hall and there were few recordings.

From the very start of the performance, I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand up and my breath was taken away. The sheer scale of the piece was awe-inspiring - the longest violin concerto I was familiar with was Beethoven's, lasting around 45 minutes. The live performance of the Elgar that I heard lasted nearly an hour! In truth, I am now of the opinion that an Elgar lasting that length of time can be overly self-indulgent and when, a few years later, I was introduced to Albert Sammons's recording, I experienced a performance completely different in style and duration. At a Beethoven-beating 43 minutes, it is exhilarating with a more satisfying shape. On the minus side, some passages are played at breakneck speed and not always very tidily. However these quibbles are more than made up



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for by the passion and sense of unity in Sammons's performance.

I was first invited to perform the concerto in 1988 with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Yan Pascal Tortelier. I began preparation many months before - I knew that the Elgar would be a challenge to play and difficult to memorise, too. Even though I have now performed the work nearly 70 times and every performance has been from memory, there are many crossroads where one can easily take the wrong turning, so good concentration is paramount.

It was always my dream to record it. However, I declined all offers to make the recording early in my career. I felt I was too

young and needed to live with the work for a long time before putting my interpretation on disc. Now the right circumstances have fallen into place and earlier this year I recorded it in Glasgow with Sir Andrew Davis and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

The sessions were an absolute joy. Even in an empty concert hall, with the pressure of microphones and a ticking clock, time can be suspended as the atmosphere of an immortal work is created. I have known Andrew for many years and, as we worked together, spontaneity grew and the piece transformed. We did not calculate each little phrase in advance - the ebb and flow so essential to the piece evolved completely naturally.

I had heard about a version of the cadenza with harp which Elgar himself had recorded with the violinist Marie Hall in the days when engineering of recordings was too basic to allow such details as the cadenza *pizzicatos* to be heard. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the work's existence, I felt it would be a fitting tribute to record this cadenza and I hope people will enjoy hearing this short "extra".

Hearing the concerto for the first time in the mid-eighties (on a student budget, without a programme), I knew nothing about the piece or the cryptic Spanish inscription regarding die feminine soul enshrined in the concerto. Yet the feeling behind the music was so obvious to me, I immediately sensed the yearning and journey lying within. The first movement reached its wild conclusion, the intimacy of the slow movement died away and the third movement began. When it neared what I felt must be the "home stretch", I was on the edge of my seat to find that the piece had taken a vastly unexpected turn. The ghostly sound of *ponticello*, *tremolando* violins and strange "thrummings" of *pizzicato* emerged from the stage as the solo violin line weaved in and around the orchestra. The reworking of material from earlier in the piece gave me the impression of an *idée fixe* struggling to find peace. Finally the atmosphere lifted and the piece rushed to its triumphant conclusion. What an epic! @ Tasmin Little's recording of the Elgar Violin Concerto will be reviewed in the next issue