



## Tasmin Little on Elgar's Violin Concerto

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certos together, especially the Brahms and at the Last Night of the Proms, but we had never done the Elgar Concerto together until this recording. I think this was a great bonus for both of us – there was nothing at all 'routine' in the performance, as it was a new experience for him and for me to be together in this work. Of course, he has conducted it many times, and there were occasions when my approach took him by surprise; in return, he persuaded me to take certain passages a shade more slowly, but the result was a genuine partnership and collaboration, and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra was an absolute joy to work with. I believe this is their first ever recording of the Elgar Violin Concerto, although they made many records of Elgar's music with Sir Alexander Gibson, also for Chandos.

In addition to the Concerto and the alternative cadenza, we included the *Intermezzo* for violin and orchestra from Elgar's music for the masque *The Crown of India*. This beautiful piece links with the Concerto in some ways: it dates from 1911 (the Concerto from 1910), and is in Elgar's trademark 'reflective' mood, equally thoughtful, sharing that introverted state which is heard at times in the Concerto.

In this short piece, and of course in the Concerto, Elgar's solo violin part is fantastically well-written. This does not mean that the Concerto is easy – far from it, it is at times very difficult – but except for the opening tutti and the other tutti in the first movement, there is no let-up for the soloist. It is a very demanding Concerto – I believe it should have an impetuous quality, as befits its virtuosic writing, where in parts of the finale it is dashed off as if without a care in the world. Of course, there are many singing passages, but there is virtuosic percussive writing for the violin as well; Elgar was a violinist himself and writes with a real understanding of the instrument.

I am so glad that this recording with Chandos happened at this point in time, and I am really excited that we have two further recordings in the diary. The opportunity to record Elgar's Concerto has come at exactly the right time for me and I am very excited at the result – so much so, that I feel I can echo the phrase Elgar wrote on the last page of the manuscript of *The Dream of Gerontius* – 'this is the best of me.'



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# Elgar and the Violin Concerto

Tasmin Little

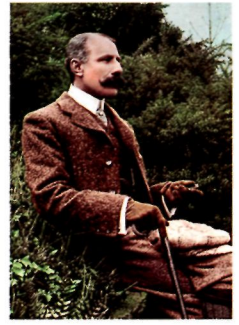
**Tasmin Little**, whose new recording of Elgar's Violin Concerto with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis is released this month by Chandos, writes on her approach to this great work, first performed exactly 100 years ago.

It would be a natural assumption on the part of many people to imagine that, having been brought up in a very musical household – my parents are both passionately interested in English music, especially the works of Delius and Vaughan Williams – and playing the instrument myself, as a child I would have come into contact with Elgar's Violin Concerto at quite an early age. But I didn't. Nor, when I was studying at the Yehudi Menuhin School, did I hear the work during my time there.

Of course, it is such a major work in every sense that no child at the Menuhin School could study it – despite the famous recording with Elgar conducting that Yehudi made when he was 15 or 16 – and so it was not until later, when I was a student at the Guildhall School, that I heard the Concerto for the first time. This was in the 1980s at the Royal Festival Hall in London, and although I knew of the work's existence, I had never heard or seen the music until that time, when the work itself shone through and hit me straight between the eyes.

That sudden encounter with this great violin concerto made me incredulous that I could not have been aware of it before, that it had not been part of my education at home or at the Menuhin School. My most lasting memory of hearing the work for the first time was my sense of wonder at the last movement – the accompanied cadenza passage, where up to that point you think the end of the work is in sight and then something completely unexpected happens as the cadenza unfolds.

I walked away from the Festival Hall that night with my head in the clouds. It proved to me one thing – that it is unnecessary with a great work to know anything at all about it beforehand (I had not even read the notes in the programme), for in a way it becomes an even more powerful experience. Twenty-five years ago, the Elgar Violin Concerto was not as regularly played as it is today, when it has now become part of the core repertoire of many international soloists. In this case, it led me



to seek the Concerto out at once, and it was not until after I had returned from further studies in Canada with Lorand Fenyes that the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra invited me to play it. They gave me six months' notice, which I needed in order to learn it. As my career was then just starting and I had far fewer concerts than I have now, I had sufficient time to prepare it thoroughly.

I was very fortunate to have Yan Pascal Tortelier as the conductor for my first professional performance of the Elgar concerto: he was a super partner – charming, sensitive and as a violinist himself I remember especially his sensitivity and awareness of what the soloist has to do in this work. I could not have had better support either from him or from the orchestra, in those early days, the RPO was generous in supporting me. Since then, I have done the Elgar many times with Yan Pascal, most recently in Australia, and I have now given around seventy performances of the work.

In 1985, there were not very many recordings of the Concerto available, but two I like particularly are those by Albert

Sammons as well as Pinchas Zukerman's second recording with Leonard Slatkin. Although there are times in the Sammons performance when it feels too hurried, I prefer the overall sweep of that performance (on that record, the conductor is Sir Henry Wood). I like Pinchas Zukerman's playing of it very much and Slatkin's tuttis are electric! Some performances tend to miss the combination of passion, elation and a real thrust to the work that I believe the piece demands – the moments of intimacy should be offset by moments of passion.

Although the Albert Sammons set was the first complete version to be recorded, in 1916 Marie Hall, with Elgar conducting, made two 78rpm discs, heavily cut, of the work, but in the finale's cadenza, for that recording Elgar added a part for the harp, which is not in the original score. For my new Chandos recording, we have made the first recording in almost one hundred years of this alternative version of the cadenza, which was also slightly cut to fit the playing time of the old record side. It seems that Elgar added the harp's part because the acoustic recording process could not properly capture the pizzicatos of the orchestral strings, and the harp supports them. I think this alternative cadenza is beautiful. I really like it, for the addition of the harp increases and enhances the sense of otherworldliness, the ghostly, dream-like state and sense of what I think needs to be achieved at that point.

In the alternative cadenza, the orchestral parts remain the same as in the published score, and on our recording the alternative cadenza is a stand-alone track. I must say that working with Sir Andrew Davis on this project was absolutely super – we have known each other for many years, and have often performed con-



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