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Percy Young. *Elgar, Newman and The Dream of Gerontius: In The Tradition of English Catholicism*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Scholar Press, 1995. 162 pp. ISBN 0-85967-877-6 (hardcover)
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alternative to performance evaluation, the merit of dissecting a single, anonymous recording is questionable. A more informative approach may have been to expand the comparative sampling of pianists cited on page 197, assessing the relative merits and deficiencies of each.¹ David Rowland contextualizes *tempo rubato* markings in Chopin by exploring the history of rhythmic flexibility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and demonstrating how the nature of Chopin's *rubato* varied according to genre and texture. Concise and well-written, Rowland's essay offers some useful guidelines for a historically informed performance.

The final chapter, by John Rink, is based on the premise that authentic performance may be defined simply as "convincing interpretation" (p. 215), a view the author attempts to substantiate with the contentious assertion that the historical performance movement represents an impediment to the performer's artistic freedom (pp. 214–15). Ironically, the greatest strength of this essay is its analytical and historical data, most notably the author's discussion of rhythmic shape in the D major Prelude, op. 28, no. 5. The construction of a hypothetical polemic between "historical" and "intuitive" performance, however, dilutes the persuasiveness of Rink's argument considerably. The book concludes with Jeremy Barlow's presentation of Fanny Erskine's Paris diary (1847–48), which documents several encounters with Chopin.

Chopin Studies 2 gathers together many diverse strands of Chopin research with variable success. Despite its flaws, this volume succeeds in expanding the scope of its predecessor and, indeed, many of the essays extend far beyond the realm of Chopin studies to address broader issues of relevance for the performance, analysis and history of nineteenth-century music. It is precisely this eclecticism which makes the book a valuable reference tool for music scholars of wide ranging interests.

Glenn D. Colton

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Cardinal Newman was the nineteenth century's most famous convert to Roman Catholicism. As an Anglican cleric, and one of Oxford's leading intellectuals, he had preached sermons describing Rome as "the whore of Babylon." When the conversion came it was spectacular. Rome offered him the diocese of Westminster, its highest position in England, and Newman thereafter exercised an unparalleled influence in Catholic affairs.

¹ Shaffer briefly compares performances by Artur Rubinstein, Nikita Magaloff, Martha Argerich, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Maurizio Pollini, and Livia Rev.

It is often said that Elgar was given Newman's poem *The Dream of Gerontius* on his wedding day, but we know that he was familiar with the work long before that. It had already achieved some fame through the murder of the religious mystic General Gordon of Kartoum, whose death had roused the nation and had forced a reluctant Gladstone to send in the British army to avenge him. Gordon's personal copy of *Gerontius* was found among his possessions, with certain passages of the text underlined. These underlinings were widely publicised and Elgar made a note of them: he even passed them on to others, including his future wife, Carolyne Alice Robertson.

Gerontius is an intensely Catholic work. It tells of the death and spiritual journey of a Christian soul as it progresses towards Heaven, its encounter with purgatory, with angels, and its glimpse of God. The words brought forth from Elgar some of his most enduring music which established him as England's greatest composer. Yet the circumstances surrounding the first performance were less than auspicious. The work was a failure when it was first performed at the Three Choirs Festival in 1900, under the baton of Hans Richter. Elgar was especially critical of the singers; he noted that they hardly seemed to know their parts and the ensemble was ragged. In retrospect we now understand that much of the blame rested with Elgar himself who finished the work at break-neck speed and did not give the performers enough time to rehearse. Richter redeemed the situation two years later when he took the work to the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Düsseldorf and, in the presence of Elgar, secured a resounding triumph. Richard Strauss was in the audience, and during the Festival he made a public speech in which he recognized Elgar as an English musical genius of the front rank. England was amazed; it did not know that it had one.

Unlike Cardinal Newman, Elgar was born a Catholic. He was brought up in the small Worcester town of Broadheath, where his father kept a local music shop and played the organ at St. George's Church. Surrounded by scores and musical instruments from his earliest youth, Elgar was virtually self-taught and, by the time he was in his teens, he was already playing the organ and sometimes composing for the church service. The Catholic Church provided him with his first musical opportunities. Yet it was the very fact of his being a Catholic, in a vastly Protestant England, that gave Elgar the lifelong feeling that he was an outsider. And that is how he was at first treated by the British musical establishment. He was forty-two years old before he made any mark on the national scene through his "Enigma" variations.

Meanwhile he earned a meagre living by teaching in and around Worcester, conducting the staff band of the local lunatic asylum, arranging music for a variety of ensembles, and sometimes playing the violin in the orchestras of the Three Choirs Festivals. It was for him a wretched existence. He once said of teaching that it was like turning a grindstone with a dislocated shoulder.

Gerontius was without parallel in the long history of English choral music. For years Anglican composers in search of an identity had composed a stream of oratorios more or less in pale imitation of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (the influential model for so much that later went wrong with the genre) for

performance in the churches and cathedrals of Victorian England. Stainer's *The Crucifixion* (1887), Parry's *Judith* (1888) and Charles Villiers Stanford's *The Resurrection* (1875) and *The Three Holy Children* (1885), are typical of the type. (Delius, whose pagan views rendered him an outcast from the religious choral tradition, once made the malicious observation that if Parry had lived long enough, he would have set the whole Bible to music.) This dull, dutiful and essentially lifeless repertory had always failed to find a wider audience. It was particularly ironic, then, that the one exception was to be a Catholic text set by a Catholic composer. And as if to underline the fact that *Gerontius* was different, Elgar was careful not to call his work an oratorio.

The work was composed mainly at Malvern, Elgar's home in the heart of the English countryside, and much of it was inspired by his daily walks in the surrounding woods. "The very trees seem to sing my melodies—or am I singing theirs?" he wrote at this time. He was well aware of the value of the material he was creating, and he once remarked that it was as if the themes were always there, just waiting to be snatched out of the air. After he had finished the score, he wrote beneath the final measures a quotation from Ruskin:

This is the best of me: for the rest, I ate and drank, and slept, and hated, like another; my life was as the vapour, and is not; but THIS I saw and knew: this, if anything of mine is worth your memory.

Both during his life, and for a long time after his death, Elgar was seen as the embodiment of Edwardian England, a composer of pomp and circumstance, a gentleman-squire-turned-musician who wrote tunes for an entire nation to sing, someone whose hobnobbing with English royalty was eventually rewarded with a knighthood (1904); the Order of Merit (1911); the post of Master of the King's Music (1924), widely regarded as the most elevated position in music in Britain; and a Baronetcy (1931). We now know that this view of Elgar was profoundly mistaken, the many honours notwithstanding. Elgar does not come out of the English tradition at all. He is in every major respect a representative of Central Europe, a true contemporary of Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler. And it was in Central Europe that his genius was first recognized, not in England. His best-known tune, "Land of Hope and Glory" he came to regret, because it was taken up in World War One almost as a second national anthem and the jingoistic words were not his, although they served the times. He himself would have been appalled to know that a misguided posterity would come to see him as a chief representative of the British Establishment, because all his life he never felt that he belonged to it.

Goethe sums up the plight of artists such as Elgar in one of his most telling aphorisms: "A genius is invariably bound to his times through some weakness," an idea that takes on the force of a revelation if we consider its opposite: namely, that a genius's strengths free him from his times. Artistic weakness, in brief, is temporal; strength is timeless. Whenever we place Elgar in the framework of Edwardian England we are invariably playing the historian's simplistic game of Time and Place, and are dwelling on weakness.

Percy Young tells the story of Elgar, Newman and *The Dream of Gerontius* with warmth and sympathy. As the dean of Elgar scholars, Dr. Young was writing about the composer and his music long before they became fashionable topics for English writers to pursue. His book, *Elgar, O.M.* (1955), was a landmark study which helped to stem the tide of reaction that had swept in after Elgar's death, and which was still in full flood as late as the 1950s. Time and place had taken their toll, and talk then was of Schoenberg, serialism and the Second Viennese School. Everything that the reader is likely to want to know about *Gerontius*—the music, the poem, the first performances, and the subsequent reception of the work—may be found in this book.

It is entirely appropriate that Dr. Young should have written the Foreword to Stewart Craggs's new volume, *Edward Elgar: A Source Book*. This essay could well have served as an introduction to his own book, for in it Dr. Young tells us about the first performance he ever heard of *Gerontius*, at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester in 1929, when he was seventeen years old. The experience was a turning-point in his life and, thereafter, he became a staunch Elgarian. Young is not wrong to describe Dr. Craggs's work as "properly challenging." Dr. Craggs has marshalled a daunting array of statistics—sufficient to challenge the most demanding of Elgarians. There is an alphabetical list of compositions, a chronology, a so-called *Catalogue raisonné* (containing dates of composition, and places and dates of first performances), a full list of Elgar recordings conducted by Elgar himself, and a very large bibliography. Like the telephone directory, the book is not there to be read for pleasure, but rather to be consulted as the need arises; but the mere act of using it will rid the literature of much confusion and error. The telegraphic language nonetheless raises some minor difficulties. In the chronology for 1918 we read: "20 August: Starts work on a Violin Sonata." And on the very next line: "15 September: Completes the Violin Sonata." But "a Violin Sonata" is not at all the same thing as "the Violin Sonata"; since Elgar only wrote a single work in this genre one wonders what purpose such a distinction is meant to achieve. Similarly in the entry for 1921, we read: "25 May: Orchestration of the Bach Organ Fugue completed." And on 27 October of that year: "Première of the Bach *Fugue in C minor*." Is this the same piece? If so, the language obscures the fact. There are also some small spelling slips affecting the conductor August Manns (p. 21), Nicholas Kenyon (p. 153), and Düsseldorf (pp. 25, 26, and 72). And the date of the first performance of *Gerontius* was 3 October, 1900, not 5 October (p. 25). Throughout the book the "Halle Orchestra" is deprived of the acute accent which is an essential part of the name of its distinguished founder, Sir Charles Hallé. Such things rarely amount to much, but they ought not to occur in catalogues.

These two books form a welcome addition to the literature on Elgar. They are written with admiration for their subject, and they provide much new information about the greatest composer that England has ever produced.

Alan Walker