

ELGAR Violin Concerto

Gil Shaham violin

David Zinman conductor

Chicago Symphony Orchestra



Live Concert Recording

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, violinist Gil Shaham and conductor David Zinman performing Elgar's Violin Concerto at Miami's Carnival Center for the Performing Arts on February 13, 2007. Photo: Todd Rosenberg



EDWARDIAN CLIMAX

Elgar's Violin Concerto of 1910

By Andrew Neill

Two months in advance of the first performance of Elgar's Violin Concerto, the great Austrian violinist Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962) remarked to the composer, 'You have written an immortal work'.¹ When Elgar's Concerto was revealed for the first time in the Queen's Hall in London on 10 November 1910, its triumphant reception was achieved against a background of change.

Beneath the veneer of Edwardian Britain, there was an edge to political life. On 6 May 1910 King Edward VII died, leaving a country in mourning and, during the following year, the bitterly fought Parliament Act ensured the sovereignty of the House of Commons. Furthermore, strike action in the mines, on the railways and in the ports pointed to a period of industrial unrest. This social and economic upheaval would also find its reflection in the middle two movements of Elgar's Second Symphony, on which he was also working at the time.

Such instability would have mattered little to the audience as the first performance of the Concerto came to an end. The music, as we now know, is partly a reflection of Elgar's personal life and emotional state. It is likely that the audience would have recognized this intuitively as they listened to this expansive and, at the same time, intimate work. The Violin Concerto falls between Elgar's two great symphonies and represents the climax of what is perhaps his greatest sustained creative period. The First Symphony was first performed in Manchester on 3 December 1908 and the Second was premiered nearly

¹ Robert Anderson & Jerrold Northrop Moore from The Elgar Complete Edition: *The Concertos* (Novello & Co. Ltd 1988), p.ix.

30 months later in the Queens Hall on 24 May 1911.

Elgar was born near the city of Worcester in 1857 and grew up in his father's music shop on the high street. The violin was the young composer's instrument and in 1877 he traveled to London for a series of lessons with the Hungarian-born violinist Adolph Pulitzer (1832–1900). These lessons helped confirm in Elgar the belief that he was unlikely to be successful as a soloist. He reluctantly came to earn his living as a teacher in the Worcester area and also performed as a member of local bands and in the orchestra of the annual Three Choirs Festival.

Early in the last decade of the 19th century Elgar began a concerto for violin, the sketches for which he destroyed. It seems that his first meeting with Fritz Kreisler was part of the stimulus Elgar needed to consider once more composing a concerto. They met at the 1904 Leeds Festival when Kreisler played the Brahms Concerto and again the following year in Norwich when Kreisler gave an interview to the press: *'If you want to know whom I consider to be the greatest living composer, I say without*

hesitation Elgar....I say this to please to no one; it is my own conviction....I place him on an equal footing with my idols, Beethoven and Brahms. He is of the same aristocratic family. His invention, his orchestration, his harmony, his grandeur, it is wonderful. And it is all pure, unaffected music. I wish Elgar would write something for the violin. He could do so, and it would be certainly something effective'.²

At the end of the Festival, Elgar sketched his first ideas for a concerto, which would be put aside as he worked on *The Kingdom* and his first symphony. In April 1909 Elgar and his wife, Alice, travelled to Italy staying near Florence for a month before travelling home via Pisa and Venice. They were the guests of an American friend, Julia Worthington and, while in her rented Villa Silli in Careggi, Elgar sketched some of the first and much of the slow movements of the Concerto. By the autumn, Alice was able to record in her diary *'...possessed with his music for the Violin Concerto.'*

Later in the year Kreisler began putting pressure on the composer, remarking in November 1909: *'Sir Edward Elgar promised me a concerto three years ago. When he writes one, it will be a labor of love rather than profit.*

*But I can't get a note out of him.'*³

The composition of Elgar's Concerto is well documented as is the closeness of the professional relationship which matured between Elgar and the violinist W. H. Reed, who recalled: *'He was sketching out something for the fiddle, and wanted to settle, in his own mind, some question of bowing and certain intricacies in the passage-work...What we played was a sketchy version of the Violin Concerto. He had got the main ideas written out, and, as he put it, "japed them up" to make a coherent piece.'*⁴ Reed visited Elgar at his flat in New Cavendish Street, London W1, many times enabling him to obtain an unique insight into Elgar's composition of the Concerto: *'I found E. striding about with a lot of loose sheets of music paper, arranging them in different parts of the room. Some were already pinned on the backs of chairs, or stuck up on a mantelpiece ready for me to play... There was no false modesty about his joy in hearing the solo violin boldly entering the first movement with the concluding half of the principal subject instead of the beginning, as if*

answering a question instead of stating a fact. Several times we played that opening, to his infinite glee at the novelty of the idea. He has often said to me, "If you have a good idea, don't waste it: make the most of it".'⁵

Elgar and Kreisler met again in 1910 at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester, where they rehearsed the Concerto together. The critic, Robin Legge, recorded the occasion: *'Elgar took his appointed place upon one of the old-fashioned round piano stools which swung round according to the wish of the occupant. Fritz Kreisler stood, splendidly dignified as always, fiddle in hand. At one moment Kreisler would edge Elgar off the piano stool while he himself took the composer's place, and, with a deprecatory remark: "Na, na, Edward," and an appeal to us of the audience, would attempt to show the composer his idea of the right and proper manner in which the music should go. Of course, Elgar would lift him from the piano stool laughingly and say: "Na, na, Fritz, this is how I want it played.'⁶*

³ Quoted by Robert Anderson & Jerrold Northrop Moore from *The Elgar Complete Edition: The Concertos* (Novello & Co. Ltd 1988), p.v.

⁴ W.H. Reed, *Elgar As I Knew Him*, (London 1936, reissued London 1973) pp.23-24.

⁵ *Elgar As I Knew Him*, p.24

⁶ Reproduced in M. Anderson de Navarro, *A Few More Memories* (London 1936), p.208.

² *The Hereford Times*, 7 October 1905.

At the heart of the Concerto lies an expression of love between the composer and a woman who became a close friend of the Elgar family, Alice Stuart Wortley. Alice was the daughter of the painter Sir John Everett Millais and wife of the Member of Parliament for Sheffield, Charles Stuart Wortley. The Stuart Wortleys were a musical family and became firm friends of the Elgars after their first meeting. It is now clear that Alice was the inspiration for the Concerto. Elgar gave some of the themes and her the name 'Windflower', after the little white anemone nemorosa of early spring which, as he explained, '*is often overlooked by gardeners...*'. Alice's daughter, Clare, clarified matters when she wrote: '*He called her Windflower after the themes – not the themes (of the concerto) after her*'.⁷

In the spring of 1910, Elgar travelled to Tintagel in Cornwall. According to her daughter, Alice said that if only Elgar saw Tintagel '*he would write something wonderful. Sir Edward used to say that she would be responsible for anything, however dreadful, that he might compose as a result of the visit!*' At the end of April Elgar was able to write to Alice: '*I am now ablaze with work & writing*

hard; you should come & see (& hear it!)'.

A long opening passage for full orchestra prepares the ground for the magical entrance of the violin which seems to emerge from the orchestra with '*the concluding half of the principal subject*'. The soloist then elaborates the themes already stated before the second principal subject calms the atmosphere ahead of the substantial development section.

The *Andante* begins with the statement of the main theme by the orchestra, the violin playing a counter-melody on entering. This passionate, controlled music proceeds *allargando* through to *nobilmente* with the violin becoming first the virtuoso and then the introvert. Robin Legge recalled the tears pouring down Elgar's cheeks when he played the movement with Kreisler. As the movement ends, the orchestra and soloist commune together in music which Elgar described as '*where two souls merge and melt into one another*'.

The virtuosic music which begins the third movement takes the audience into a new world with a sense of forward direction.

Elgar introduces his themes, hints at development and proceeds towards what the listener might believe to be a conventional ending. Slowing down, though, Elgar moves into the most original part of the concerto, the *cadenza accompagnata* where the orchestral strings are instructed to play *pizzicato tremolando*: 'thrumping' with the soft parts of the fingers as the soloist recalls themes from the first movement. In this remarkable, extended section lies the heart of Elgar's music making. Finally, the orchestra returns to join the soloist (*nobilmente*) in an optimistic conclusion with the violin embraced by horns and lower strings.

The first performance, which was conducted by the composer, was vividly described by Dora Penny:⁸ '*The place was simply packed. Kreisler came on looking white as a sheet – even for a player of his great experience it must have been a nervous moment – but he played superbly. E.E. was also, obviously, very strung up; but all went well and the ovation at the end was tremendous*'.⁹ Elgar dedicated the Concerto to Kreisler and inscribed the title page in Spanish with a quotation from

Lesage's *Gil Blas*: '*Aquí está encerrada el alma de...*' Elgar explained: '*Here, or more emphatically in here is enshrined or simply enclosed – buried is perhaps too definite - the soul of...? Now guess*'.

It is for the listener to decide, but it is possible to conclude that part of the composer's own soul is enshrined in this deeply personal music.

Andrew Neill, the author, was the Chairman of the Elgar Society from 1992 to 2008.

⁷ No biographer of Elgar suggests that the relationship between Elgar and Alice Stuart Wortley was anything but an emotional and artistic one which Alice Elgar felt able to encourage.

⁸ Dora Penny (1874–1964). '*Dorabella*': *Variation 10 in Elgar's Enigma Variations*.

⁹ D. M. Powell, *Edward Elgar: Memories Of A Variation* (London, 1937, rev. 3/1949), p.91.

Gil Shaham, violin

Gil Shaham is internationally recognized as one of today's most virtuosic and engaging artists. He is sought after throughout the world for concerto appearances as well as for recital and ensemble performances on the world's great concert stages and at the most prestigious festivals.

Gil Shaham is a devotee of chamber music, and regularly tours in recital with artists such as Akira Eguchi, Truls Mørk, Lynn Harrell, Yefim Bronfman, his wife (violinist Adele Anthony) and sister (pianist Orli Shaham). His recording 'American Scenes' – music for violin and piano by American composers with André Previn – received a Grammy Award in 1999. In 2007 his dream of bringing together friends and colleagues for chamber music came to fruition in a tour of Brahms programs, culminating in a series of concerts at Carnegie's Zankel Hall. An encore of this project is planned for 2009.

His wide discography includes many award-winning discs, including multiple Grammy nominations, a Grand Prix du Disque, a Diapason d'or and a Gramophone Editor's Choice. Gil's most recent recordings have

been produced for his own label, Canary Classics – Tchaikovsky *Violin Concerto* coupled with *The Butterfly Lovers*, a Fauré album with Akira Eguchi and Brinton Smith, and Prokofiev chamber works and Mozart violin sonatas with Orli Shaham.

Born in Illinois in 1971, he became a scholarship student at Juilliard in 1982, where he worked with Dorothy DeLay and Hyo Kang. He has also studied at Columbia University.

Gil Shaham was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1990. He plays the 1699 'Countess Polignac' Stradivarius, and lives in New York City with his wife and their two children.

For more visit: www.canaryclassics.com



Photo: Christian Steiner

David Zinman, conductor

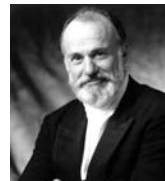
Born in 1936, David Zinman graduated from Oberlin Conservatory and pursued advanced work in composition at the University of Minnesota. Conducting studies at the Boston Symphony's Tanglewood Music Center brought him to the attention of Pierre Monteux, who guided his musical development. Monteux gave Zinman his first important conducting opportunities with the London Symphony Orchestra and at the 1963 Holland Festival, where critics hailed him as a major conducting discovery.

David Zinman made his American conducting debut with The Philadelphia Orchestra in 1967, and he has since led many of the world's leading orchestras. His tenures, first in Baltimore and now in Zurich, have been distinguished by his extraordinarily broad repertory, his strong commitment to contemporary music, and his pioneering of historically informed performance practice.

David Zinman's extensive discography has earned numerous international honors, including five Grammy Awards, two Grand Prix du Disque Awards, two Edison Prizes, the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis and a Gramophone Award. With the Tonhalle, he has recorded Honegger and Mozart

albums to launch a series on the London/Decca label and a disc of Mahler's Second Symphony on the Tonhalle label to critical acclaim.

David Zinman's honors include the City of Zurich Art Prize in 2002 for outstanding artistic efforts; becoming the first conductor and the first recipient of non-Swiss nationality; being the 1997 recipient of the prestigious Ditson Award from Columbia University, given in recognition of his exceptional commitment to the performance of works by American composers (many of which he has recorded in a series for Decca's Argo label); and awarded the title of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.



Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Now in its second century, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra enjoys an enviable position in the music world with performances greeted by enthusiastic audiences both at home and abroad.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's distinguished history began in 1891 when Theodore Thomas, then the leading conductor in America and a recognized music pioneer, was invited to establish a symphony orchestra in Chicago. Thomas served as music director until his death in 1905 and was succeeded by Frederick Stock. Stock was music director for 37 years and, during that time, he led the Orchestra in its first commercial recording in 1916. Since that first recording, the Orchestra has amassed a discography numbering more than 900. Furthermore, these recordings have garnered more Grammy Awards than any other orchestra in the world.

Two of the world's most celebrated conductors assumed titled positions with the CSO in the 2006–2007 season. Eminent Dutch conductor Bernard Haitink was named the Orchestra's Principal Conductor, and renowned French composer and conductor Pierre Boulez furthers his long-standing

relationship with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as its Conductor Emeritus. Distinguished conductors to have held positions with the Orchestra include Fritz Reiner (1954–1964), Sir Georg Solti (1969–1991) and Daniel Barenboim (1991–2006). In May 2008, the CSO announced the appointment of Riccardo Muti as its tenth music director; he begins a five-year contract in September 2010.

In 2007, the Orchestra launched its own record label, CSO Resound, for CD and digital download releases. The debut offering was Mahler's Symphony No. 3, conducted by CSO Principal Conductor Bernard Haitink. Subsequent releases include Bruckner's Symphony No. 7 and Mahler's Symphony No. 6 with Haitink, Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 with Myung-Whun Chung, and *Traditions and Transformations: Sounds of Silk Road Chicago*, which features the CSO, Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble.

www.cso.org



The Chicago Symphony Orchestra and conductor David Zinman at Miami's Carnival Center for the Performing Arts on February 13, 2007. Photo: Todd Rosenberg

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Bernard Haitink

Principal Conductor

Pierre Boulez

Helen Regenstien

Conductor Emeritus

Duain Wolfe

Chorus Director

Oswaldo Golijov

Mark-Anthony

Turnage

Mead Composers-in-Residence

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Robert Chen

Concertmaster

The Louis C. Sudler

Chair, endowed by an anonymous benefactor

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Yuan-Qing Yu

Assistant

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Blair Milton

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Sando Shia

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Rong-Yan Tang

Akiko Tatumoto

Baird Dodge

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Arlene Bennett Family

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Max Raimi

Robert Swan

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John Sharp

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The Eloise W. Martin

Chair

Kenneth Olsen

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Chair

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Katinka Kleijn

Jonathan Pegis

David Sanders

Gary Stucka §

Brant Taylor

Basses

Joseph Guastafeste

Principal

The David and Mary

Winton Green Chair

Daniel Armstrong

Roger Cline

Joseph DiBello

Michael Hovnanian

Robert Kassinger

Mark Kraemer

Stephen Lester

Bradley Opland

Harps

Sarah Bullen

Principal

Lynne Turner

Flutes

Mathieu Dufour

Principal

Richard Graef

Assistant Principal

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Jennifer Gunn

Piccolo

Jennifer Gunn

Oboes

Eugene Izotov

Principal

The Nancy and Larry

Fuller Chair

Michael Henoeh

Assistant Principal

Scott Hostettler

Clarinets

Larry Combs

Principal

John Bruce Yeh

Assistant Principal

Gregory Smith

J. Lawrie Bloom

E-Flat Clarinet

John Bruce Yeh

Bass Clarinet

J. Lawrie Bloom

Bassoons

David McGill

Principal

William Buchman

Assistant Principal

Dennis Michel

Burl Lane

Contrabassoon

Burl Lane

Saxophone

Burl Lane

Horns

Dale Clevenger

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Daniel Gingrich

Associate Principal

James Smelser

David Griffin

Oto Carrillo

Susanna Drake

Trumpets

Christopher Martin

Principal

The Adolph Herseth

Principal Trumpet

Chair, endowed by an

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Assistant Principal

John Hagstrom

Tagge Larsen

Trombones

Jay Friedman

Principal

James Gilbertsen

Associate Principal

Michael Mulcahy

Charles Vernon

Bass Trombone

Charles Vernon

Tuba

Gene Pokorny

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The Arnold Jacobs

Principal Tuba Chair,

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Querfeld

Timpani

Donald Koss

Principal

Vadim Karpinos

Assistant Principal

Percussion

Patricia Dash

Acting Principal

Vadim Karpinos

James Ross

Acting Principal

Piano

Mary Sauer

Principal

Librarians

Peter Conover

Principal

Carole Keller

Mark Swanson

* Assistant concertmasters

are listed by seniority.

§ On sabbatical



EDWARD ELGAR

(1857–1934)

Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61 **48:28**

- | | | | |
|----|-----|---------------|-------|
| 1. | I | Allegro | 17:54 |
| 2. | II | Andante | 12:08 |
| 3. | III | Allegro molto | 18:23 |

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