

THIS ENGLAND

Elgar
Vaughan Williams
Britten

CARLOS KALMAR

THE OREGON SYMPHONY

Edward Elgar

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| 1 | Cockaigne (In London Town), Opus 40 | 15. 02 |
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Ralph Vaughan Williams

Symphony No. 5 in D major

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| 2 | Preludio: <i>Moderato</i> | 11. 57 |
| 3 | Scherzo: <i>Presto misterioso</i> | 5. 12 |
| 4 | Romanza: <i>Lento</i> | 10. 56 |
| 5 | Passacaglia: <i>Moderato</i> | 10. 15 |

Benjamin Britten

"Four Sea Interludes" and "Passacaglia" from *Peter Grimes*, Opus 33a and b

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|----|---|-------|
| 6 | Dawn: <i>Lento e tranquillo</i> | 3. 50 |
| 7 | Sunday morning: <i>Allegro spiritoso</i> | 3. 53 |
| 8 | Moonlight: <i>Andante comodo e rubato</i> | 4. 54 |
| 9 | Passacaglia | 6. 53 |
| 10 | Storm: <i>Presto con fuoco</i> | 4. 30 |

Recorded live on February 18 and 19, 2012 and on May 12, 13 and 14, 2012 in the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland, Oregon.

Total playing time: 77. 29

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Sir Edward Elgar

Cockaigne (In London Town), Opus 40

No one will ever suggest Sir Edward Elgar was an impressionist. But his *Cockaigne* overture is perfectly suited to the physical panoply of turn-of-the-century London, and full of loving description. In an emotional sense, the music adopts Brahms' recipe for the *Academic Festival Overture*: boisterousness without slapstick; serenity without chill; yearning without loss. But the greater joy of listening to this music lies in sampling the urban energy of Elgar's day and the new-found power Elgar brings to bear.

In fifteen very short minutes, we nearly get run over, dodge beer barrels falling off wagons, listen to carriage horses trotting and wiggling their ears, watch swells with walking sticks and spats put loving moves on ladies with parasols, and last but not scarcely least, encounter various brass bands (most triumphant, one tunelessly Salvational), which carry us nobly up Trafalgar in a big way!

Elgar accomplishes all this with a hybrid sonata/rondo structure of his own devising. The resulting thematic diagram looks like a quadratic equation. Fortunately everything sounds intuitive. It is more important to note that here, just before the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches are written, we find Elgar daring music to revel in trombone duels, cymbal clashes, bass drum attacks and organ pedals. A few years hence he would deliver a Birmingham lecture accusing English music of being "all over white" and "evading everything." But his influence would carry the day, and by 1914, English compositions as disparate from his own as Vaughan Williams' and Holst's would feature the uninhibited use of brass and drums.

Boldness apart, the real vividness of this music lies in how it moves. The elegant opening promenade conveys just the way someone might hesitate before crossing the street. A bit later, Elgar's sweeping sense of *Nobilmente* yields a delicious blend of luxury, romance and innocence. When this melody comes around for the last time, a caressing cornet lets us know the shadows have lengthened and it is time to go home. A big band we encountered earlier snaps its tempo forward impatiently on cymbal crashes, exactly the way teenage marchers do. Violent syncopations suggest the dropping of large objects in traffic. And the Salvation Army, as ever, cannot play in tune. Indeed, in a wickedly famous passage, the rhythm of a distant band is heard going "tum tum tum tum tum tum tum tum"... Every time the Salvation woodwinds try to join it in the same key, Elgar modulates away from them. They can't win.

But the audience does win. This is an overture with no boring moments and lasting beauty.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Symphony No. 5 in D major

The Vaughan Williams Fifth Symphony, composed between two far more violent works, is one of the most evocative pieces of music ever written – timelessly English, profoundly and gently sincere. It floats in upon the listener with soft motto horn calls, as if from a modal dream peopled with chords of smoke and fugues of fog. It inhabits a world of indistinct shapes moving through blacked-out streets, shadowy church gardens in the moonlight, and harbor mists. Yet no menacing or tragic vista is revealed in what Vaughan Williams depicts. Through everything muted and uncertain in 1943 wartime England, one senses only a deep reverence for beauty and the human heart. This is a work of cherished normality.

The symphony introduces itself with a harmonic ambiguity which sets the mood for the whole work and establishes its sense of mystery: foghorns in D, repeatedly tamped down by low Cs from the strings. For several minutes the music seems unable to emerge from the mist, as tendrils of gloom landing like tumbleweeds in the basses pull it down into the darkness. There is an almost Sibelian rumination to it. Indeed, the work is dedicated to Sibelius. But then, in one of the most open-hearted modulations in all of music, the symphony surges forward in E major, as though uttering *Alleluia* from Vaughan Williams' hymn, *For All The Saints*. This is the moment where the music moves into sunlight and green fields for its long journey – and listeners realize they have fallen in love.

Vaughan Williams' use of harmony is always historically minded and as unifying as anything in Schoenberg. But deconstructing it may be no more revealing of its intuitive simplicity than attempting to measure kisses with calipers. Suffice it to say that the first movement is developed with rigor. Fugal moments woven of filigree and shafts of light build to a windswept anticlimax of shuddering strings in octaves; the central horn climax expands bits of the *Alleluia* into a grand coming together of all that is good and noble, and the music proceeds warmly and confidently back towards the enveloping mystery from whence it came. As the movement concludes, sounds fade away like harbor ferries merging with the horizon. Only fog and a few bits of light remain. Welcome to the night.

The *Scherzo*, which follows, hearkens back to its counterpart in Vaughan Williams' 1914 *London Symphony*, where a gaggle of Cockney revelers dance to accordions in the street, but this time we are on a blacked-out journey through an air-raid warden's world. We travel in feathery gloom, where things go bump in the night. Unrecognized

objects jump out at us from the dark and disappear again. A moment of boisterousness from a pub spills into the street, its illumination a violation of law, but its crude energy humanly reassuring. Then, as if we turn the corner, it all vanishes.

"He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death." With these words from *Pilgrim's Progress*, Vaughan Williams sets the stage for the moonlit consolations of the *Romanza*. This is music of modal beauty to rival the *Tallis Fantasia*, hushed, profoundly consecrational and of incomparable warmth. Towards the end, a violin solo as timeless as England itself puts the listener to rest like a lullaby.

The symphony concludes with a unifying passacaglia, which is one of music's tried and true tricks. Like a magician picking your pockets while distracting you, it repeats itself relentlessly, only you don't notice. The music is now definitely on a D major journey, and a confident one, though leavened by unearthly quiet moments along the way. It comes at last full-circle to the mysterious horn calls with which the symphony began, now grand and capable of defeating the timpani, whose thunder tries to pull the music back down in key – only to give way at last to one of the most celestial and moving of all musical epilogues.

It is as if the symphony takes you lovingly by the hand to lead you home. And as you approach its doorstep, it seems as though the music would slow down for a proper goodbye. But instead, with a tiny push forward, the penultimate two chords slip through your fingers – and break your heart.

Benjamin Britten
"Four Sea Interludes" and "Passacaglia" from *Peter Grimes*, Opus 33a and 33b

The ocean's mystery and undertow have ideally suited music. And this has seldom been more the case than in a maritime nation like Britain. Think of Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony*, Elgar's *Sea Pictures*, or Delius'

Sea Drift, each a metaphysical work finding in the lives of mariners, or in "the sea itself" and its creatures, a symbolic rendering of the human condition. So it is no surprise that Benjamin Britten would turn to the North Sea waves of his native Suffolk for the ground-breaking and disturbing 1945 opera, *Peter Grimes*.

The work is a study of human oppression in many forms, some of them sexual and ambiguous, told through the life of a doomed Aldeburgh fisherman and the seaside town he inhabits. Britten grew up listening to the cold and forbidding waves he portrays – and found in their power the key to the tone of foreboding he sought.

The *Four Sea Interludes* are a suite drawn from set changes in the opera, and their immediate popularity has been a lasting one. The sonorities they contain, which so effectively portray ocean light, birds and grey breakers, reflect the style of Britten's most important musical influence and teacher, Frank Bridge. Indeed, Bridge wrote a similar orchestral suite in 1912, *The Sea*, which has been significantly revived in recent years. It is a slightly more romantic, summery and cinematic view of British seas than Britten gives us – yet clearly the model for the *Interludes*.

The first interlude, *Dawn*, breaks grey and cold. A hopeful silvery light first appears in the strings and high flutes, answered by the winged cries of gulls. But beneath this mercurial awakening shudders the darkened sea in the low brasses, its breakers heavy and ominous. The music slowly rises and falls with the ocean's own natural rhythms, until its climax reveals itself to be the very essence of undertow.

Sunday Morning, which follows, begins high and cheerful in the air, as though the listener were flying towards land with the gulls. Gradually, their chattering morphs into the busy stirring of the villagers themselves, summoned to church by bells. There is a bit of cheer in all this.

But *Moonlight*, compared with its counterpart in Frank Bridge's suite, evokes again a persistent lack of serenity, its harmonic progress lurching and effortful. Britten achieves this effect by avoiding "root" chords.

The harmonies themselves are consonant, but remain unstable. This is very definitely not a warm Italian night of mandolins, "moonlight and spaghetti."

The Passacaglia, which follows here, may be considered the opera's "funeral music." It occurs as Grimes and his latest apprentice effortfully ascend to the fisherman's hut. The boy slips and falls to his death. At this point Grime's fate is sealed and his suicide preordained. Passacaglias are one of music's great confidence tricks. Normally, a set of variations contains an easily identifiable theme. But a passacaglia places it in the bass line, where it will be hard to identify, and then cruises along deceptively with variations composed above it. Britten's trick here is to formulate a gloomy, lurching theme in the bass and then distract the listener with the dizzy chattering of birds, ocean spray, pounding waves and brass somersaults. But, psychologically one senses, this is all to no avail. The foot dragging, defeated quality of the Passacaglia says it all. It is produced by a neat compositional device: though written in 4/4 march time, the music comes up one beat short every three bars. Life, it seems to say, is getting ahead of one.

The last interlude, *Storm*, is a whirlwind begun full-tilt in thunder and lightning, with wind shrieks and timpani. Growling chromatic brasses pound from below, full of menace. As the storm fades away, a faint moment of serenity and hope seems to rise up from the chaos. For a moment, indeed, the seagulls nearly launch into a rhumba, complete with castanets. But it is not to be. The viciousness of the storm returns, and the movement ends with an emphatic finality. This is the music which later in the opera sends Peter, the doomed fisherman, and his boat to the bottom of the sea.

Nothing succeeds in opera like death and misery.

Steven Kruger

Carlos Kalmar
Music Director

Carlos Kalmar is in his tenth season as music director of the Oregon Symphony. He was appointed to the post in 2003, and in 2011 his contract was extended through the 2014/15 season. He is also principal conductor of the Grant Park Music Festival in Chicago, and music director of the Spanish Radio/Television Orchestra in Madrid.

In the past, Kalmar has also served as music director of the Hamburg Symphony, Stuttgart Philharmonic, Vienna's *Tonkünstlerorchester* and the *Anhaltisches Theater* in Dessau, Germany.

Kalmar is a frequent guest conductor with major orchestras in North America, Europe and Asia including those of Baltimore, City of Birmingham, Boston, Bournemouth, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas, The Hague (Residentie), Houston, Lahti, Los Angeles, Minnesota, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Tampere, Tokyo (Nipon Symphony), Ulster and Vancouver.

Because of his strong commitment to fresh programming, the Spring for Music Festival invited Kalmar and the Oregon Symphony to appear in its Carnegie Hall Festivals of 2011 and 2013.

His most recent recording, "Music for a Time of War" with the Oregon Symphony on the PentaTone label, received numerous critical accolades and hit the classical billboard charts. His previous recordings on the Cedille label include two 2008 releases with the Grant Park Orchestra, one of works by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis and one featuring mezzo soprano Jennifer Larmore. His 2006 release of the Szymanowski, Martinů and Bartok Violin Concertos with the Grant Park Orchestra and Jennifer Koh was highly acclaimed, as was the 2003 release of the Joachim and Brahms Violin Concertos featuring Rachel Barton and the Chicago Symphony, and *American Works for Organ and Orchestra* featuring David Schrader and the Grant Park Orchestra (2002).

Carlos Kalmar was born in Uruguay to Austrian parents. He showed an interest in music at an early age and began studying violin at age 6. By age 15 his musical development led him to the Vienna Academy of Music, where he studied conducting with Karl Osterreich. He makes his home in Portland, where he regularly hosts (and cooks) dinner parties for Symphony supporters.

The Oregon Symphony

Portland's largest performing arts group, which was founded in 1896 as the Portland Symphony, is the oldest American orchestra west of the Mississippi. Major artists have worked with the ensemble throughout its history, including Otto Klemperer, Erich Leinsdorf, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Georges Enesco, Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland, Vladimir Horowitz, Rudolf Serkin, David Oistrakh, Pablo Casals, Yo-Yo Ma and many others. Since its first CD recording in 1987, the orchestra has gone on to record 19 CDs, the most recent two in SACD with the PentaTone label. Today its 76 musicians, under the artistic leadership of Music Director Carlos Kalmar, perform a full range of concerts – classical to pops, youth concerts to one-of-a-kind special events – for an audience that exceeds 225,000 people each season. The orchestra made its Carnegie Hall debut in 2011 as part of the Spring for Music festival and has been invited to return in May, 2013.

The program on this CD was recorded in Portland at public performances on February 18 and 19, 2012 (Vaughan Williams and Elgar) and on May 12, 13 and 14, 2012 (Britten) at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. For more information, visit OrSymphony.org

