



SOMM NEW HORIZONS

COMPACT  
**disc**  
DIGITAL AUDIO

SOMMCD 069

DDD

EDWARD ELGAR (1857 - 1934)

Symphony No.1 in A flat major Op. 55 (1908)

Transcribed for solo piano by

SIGFRID KARG-ELERT (1877 - 1933)

ALAN BUSH (1900 - 1995)

Piano Sonata in B minor Op. 2 (1921)

**First recording**

**MARK BEBBINGTON** Piano

**Elgar Symphony No. 1**

1	i Andante. Nobilmente e semplice	21:16
2	ii Allegro molto	8:23
3	iii Adagio	11:57
4	iv Lento. Allegro	13:21

**Alan Bush Piano Sonata Op. 2**

5	Allegro deciso	11:47
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Recorded with financial assistance from  
the Alan Bush Trust

**Total duration 66:47**

Recording Location: Symphony Hall, Birmingham on 21 & 22 August 2006

Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

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**MARK BEBBINGTON**

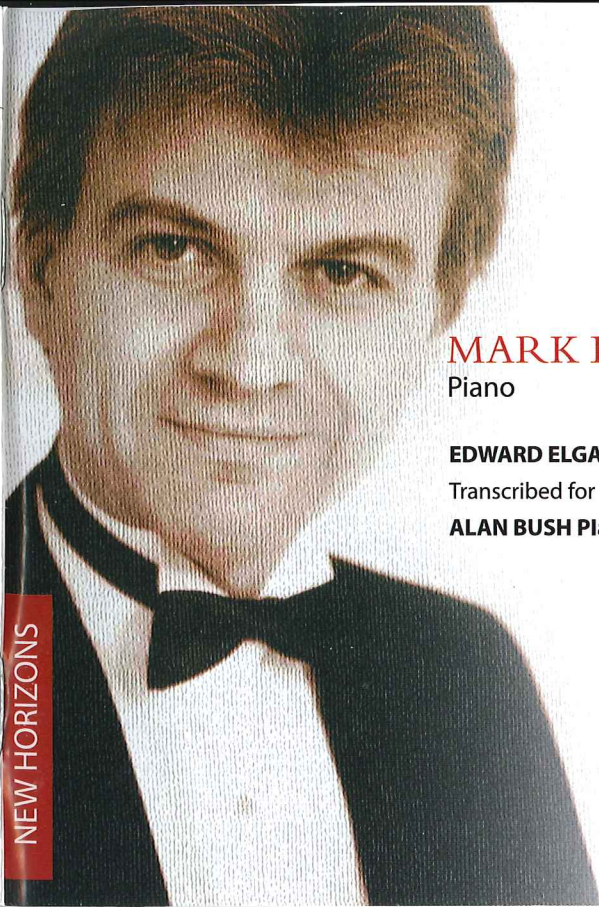
Piano

**EDWARD ELGAR Symphony No.1**

Transcribed for piano by SIGFRID KARG-ELERT

**ALAN BUSH Piano Sonata in B minor Op. 2**

NEW HORIZONS



**symphony hall**  
birmingham

The aim of SOMM's "New Horizons" series is to provide young musicians of great talent with the opportunity of promoting their careers worldwide in top quality recordings. The artists in the "New Horizons" series are chosen from the cream of interpreters of the new generation on their way to international recognition.

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However much Elgar's reputation and art were advanced by the *Enigma Variations* and *The Dream of Gerontius*, and his popularity by the first two *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches and *Cockaigne* Overture (all composed and premiered in the years 1899-1901), thereafter his growing need to write a large-scale abstract orchestral work could not be denied. This culminated in the First Symphony (1908), dedicated to and first conducted by the legendary Hans Richter, one of the world's most admired conductors. The work proved to be arguably the first great English symphony; it was played over 100 times during its initial years in places as far apart as St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Rome and Budapest. During the actual premiere, in Manchester by the Hallé Orchestra, Elgar was called to the platform after the slow movement (before the performance was over) to acknowledge the ovation. His international reputation was made within a decade, without radio or television, without recordings of any kind, and without air travel. It was an extraordinary achievement.

Many features of Elgar's First Symphony bear scrutiny. The most obviously original structural feature is the joining of second and third movements, when the hectic *Scherzo* slows to one-sixteenth of its initial speed to become the great *Adagio*. The use of a 'motto' theme, stated at the beginning of the work, imparts a strong organic unity, and concludes the Symphony in a mood of fierce and irresistible triumph. The choice of tonic key – A flat major – was surely unique in symphonic literature up to that time, and the manner by which Elgar plunges into the first movement *Allegro*, in D minor, is a subtle twist. Nor is it merely subtle, for the very fact of such a change demands a large canvas if all possibilities are to be explored. Thus, within a few pages, Elgar draws the vast tonal area which the work will encompass. The ensuing fluidity of the first movement, the extraordinary construction of the central movements, ending in a calm D major, together with the menacing D minor opening to the finale (whose main *Allegro* recalls the first movement's unease) and the final establishment of A flat major in the peroration to the Symphony, purged of all doubt and fear (signifying the 'massive hope' of which Elgar spoke regarding the work) – all should be fully studied, as they are inextricably linked to the Symphony's expressive content and formal contours.

Following the premiere, the demand for the Symphony was instantaneous. In the era before broadcasting and adequate orchestral recording, Novello, Elgar's publishers, were inundated with demands for a piano reduction for home use. Who could best translate this fully-orchestral work into keyboard terms? The choice fell upon Sigfrid Karg-Elert, twenty years Elgar's junior.

He was born in Oberndorf, Wuttemberg in November 1877 into a relatively prosperous household but his father's death when Sigfrid was 12 left the family destitute. Unable to rely upon parental financial support for the studies his musicianship demanded, Karg-Elert's education became erratic, and although largely self-taught (as was Elgar), Karg-Elert was recognised by both Reznicek and Grieg, who greatly encouraged him in the early years of the century, as did Busoni and Reger. Karg-Elert composed over 150 works, many for organ and for harmonium, and there is orchestral and piano music which today is rarely heard. Karg-Elert was noted for his transcriptions, and those he made of Elgar's Symphonies for solo piano are unrivalled.

We may sympathise with Karg-Elert's problems when confronted with Elgar's Symphonies, but should marvel at his retention of their essential features in the resultant piano scores. Perhaps occasionally Karg-Elert was thwarted by Elgar's complex invention, but the German's ingenuity invariably carries him through.

Something which was undertaken to fulfil a demand in the years before World War I – soon to be superseded by the gramophone (Elgar's recording of the symphony, the first to be made, was not set down until 1930) – can today be appreciated for what it is, enabling us to study Elgar's symphonic processes in a medium previously unavailable to those who are not virtuoso pianists.

Alan Bush's upbringing was different from those of Elgar and Karg-Elert. Born in London in December 1900, he also possessed an individual compulsion manifested through lifetime fascinations with music and philosophy, which he studied in Berlin in the 1930s. Perhaps his experience of the rise of Fascism in Germany led him, later in that decade, to join the British Communist Party. Bush united his passions in founding the Workers' Music Association in London in 1936, becoming a powerful advocate for Soviet music as a writer, pianist and conductor. He conducted the British premieres of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, Miaskovsky's Fifteenth and Khachaturian's Piano Concerto (with Moura Lympany) in the same Queen's Hall concert with the LPO in 1940.

Bush became an admired teacher at the Royal Academy of Music, where he remained for many years, composing steadily. His main works include several large-scale operas, often on somewhat

revolutionary subjects, which were much admired in post-war Eastern Europe during the Cold War. His musical language had changed from a somewhat modernistic youthful style into a more broadly-based mainstream 20th-century manner. In his Sonata in B minor of 1921 (Mark Bebbington gave the first known public performance of it in 80 years in London in 2006), we may appreciate many of the qualities of this unjustly neglected composer. This powerfully expressive piece, which has lain neglected for decades – a manifestly underserved fate, despite the composer's later deprecation of it – is in a single movement, in ternary form. The outline is relatively easily grasped and the work is surely transformed by a remarkable second subject of memorable lyricism, which is used as the basis for much of the reflective central section before the more peremptory, not to say displosive, first subject returns to end the work in exciting fashion.

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#### ANALYSING KARG-ELERT'S TRANSCRIPTION OF ELGAR'S FIRST SYMPHONY

It is worth remembering in our high-tech, 21st-century times that the role of the domestic parlour piano fulfilled an entertainment need as valid for the Victorian and Edwardian eras as today's television, CD and DVD markets. A piano arrangement brought the relatively inaccessible and rarefied world of opera and major symphonic and chamber works into the confines of the home environment. Prior to Karg-Elert stands a tradition of transcriptions for solo piano which range from the flamboyant opera paraphrases 'de concert' of Liszt to the less pianistically challenging, so called 'facile' adaptations of popular Verdi arias by largely forgotten Victorian composers such as William Stenson.

Elgar pronounced himself 'very pleased' with Karg-Elert's work, but can we be sure that the composer perused the transcribed score with sufficient diligence to register that its virtuoso difficulties placed it beyond the reach of the market for which it was intended? It is worthwhile considering, too, that the two-hand transcription began life as a version for two pianos. Indeed the triumphant final upward flourish at the close of the finale betrays that origin: an ascending scale in tenths, clearly more effective on two pianos. If the arrangement was indeed intended for the mass market, then maybe that market was also ambivalent in its response to a 'mere' piano transcription. Perhaps the meteoric success of the Symphony after its first performance in 1908 outstripped the demand for a piano realisation. Either way, the transcription fell into obscurity – a collector's item which is, nonetheless, finding its niche in this significant Elgar year.

In undertaking the 'translation' of orchestral score to piano reduction, Karg-Elert was posed the immediate problem of transcribing orchestral ensemble into feasible keyboard writing. That in itself is not easy, as we shall see, but surely his most pressing problem was to convey the structural cogency of a score which, even in the hands of an experienced Elgar conductor, can sometimes threaten a structural disunity. In this respect and as Liszt has done in his transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies, Karg-Elert brings out glimpses of a fascinating structural sophistication in the original score. He also reveals, by the very layout of the keyboard writing, the tempos he most likely had in mind and thereby imparts a vivid sense of structural pace.

#### FIRST MOVEMENT ? EXAMPLE 1

The first movement includes this tortuous exercise in double-note integration that resembles Liszt's treacherous *Transcendental Etude 'Feux follets'*. Whereas Liszt arranges his double-note sequences to work 'with' the physiology of the hand, Karg-Elert follows the intricacies of Elgar's flute, piccolo, clarinet and oboe lines ? making this not at all easy for the poor pianist.

Because a conductor's choice of tempo for the main body of this first movement is crucial to the structuring of it, Example 1 suggests that Karg-Elert had in mind a tempo that is much nearer to Barbirolli's 1962 EMI recording than to, say, Solti's later Decca recording from the 1970s (paradoxically modelled on Elgar's own tempos in his 1930 recording at dotted minim = c.88). This is not an attempt to invalidate any particular tempo interpretation, but Barbirolli's metronome mark at this juncture in the first movement (dotted minim = 60) is clearly pianistically possible; Solti's is highly unlikely, even to the most agile of keyboard lions.

#### SECOND MOVEMENT ? EXAMPLE 2

There are a number of instances where the immediacy of the piano's sound helps to clarify the thematic connections that unify the work. The second movement begins, for example, with scurrying strings (a variant of the motto theme which is announced at the symphony's opening), but as the second movement draws to its close, the great slow movement to come is heralded via re-working of the scurrying string figure at one sixteenth of its original speed. Unless articulated with exceptional expressive care, this lead into the third movement can frequently emerge without sufficient melodic or rhythmic definition. See how the immediacy of the piano writing, by contrast, crystallises the moment.

### THIRD MOVEMENT – EXAMPLE 3

The greatest challenge of all posed to Karg-Elert, however, comes with the third movement. Here Elgar achieves both pathos and a melancholy summation of Edwardian grandeur, in string writing of utmost lyrical intensity. Karg-Elert challenges Elgar exactly on his own terms and wisely so; string simplicity matched by pianistic simplicity, but with the pianist willing the piano sound to be ‘warmed’ by a touch of vibrato colour via the sustaining pedal.

A more complex problem is posed towards the close of the movement; clarinet and second violins (‘divisi’) interweave a hemi-demi-semiquaver passage that Karg-Elert integrates with a touch of real pianistic flair.

### FINALE – EXAMPLE 4

Even at a relatively sedate pace, this passage from the finale is likely to find most pianists seeking solace in a re-study of Brahms’ so-called ‘Blind Octave’ study (from the *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*, Book 2 No. 11). At anything faster than the Barbirolli tempo, approximation threatens.

For the opening of the finale, Elgar scores for strings both ‘con’ and ‘senza’ ‘sordino’ (with and without mutes, respectively). Above this haze of tremolo texture, he sketches a bass clarinet and bassoon dialogue of muted resonance.

### EXAMPLE 5

This is one of the few passages when Karg-Elert’s resourcefulness is outmatched by Elgar’s subtlety of orchestration. No pianist (or piano) can really find the autumnal magic of this passage.

### EXAMPLE 6

Karg-Elert is on blistering form later in this movement, however. Just look at how this climactic orchestral counterpoint is conveyed, in piano writing of Lisztian drama!

So, has Karg-Elert’s maverick transcription succeeded in bringing to life this most ‘symphonic’ of early 20th century English orchestral scores? Pianists can best judge by taking the work to the keyboard and

by beginning to form a personal judgement. For all listeners, though, the transcription will hopefully give pleasure as well as furnish interest and stimulation, in equal measure.

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### EXAMPLE 1 - FIRST MOVEMENT

Musical score for Example 1 - First Movement. The score is written for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Ob.), Violin I (VI. I.), and Violin II (VI. II.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamics such as *mf*, *sfz*, and *f*, and performance instructions like *ten.* and *ponticello*. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending with a double bar line and the second system starting with a new measure.

### EXAMPLE 2 - SECOND MOVEMENT

Musical score for Example 2 - Second Movement. The score is written for Violin I (VI. I.) and Violin II (VI. II.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamics such as *mf* and *f*, and performance instructions like *ponticello*. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending with a double bar line and the second system starting with a new measure.

### EXAMPLE 3 - THIRD MOVEMENT

Musical score for Example 3 - Third Movement. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The top staff is for Clarinet Solo (Cl. Solo) and the bottom staff is for Arpeggiated Bass (Arpe.). The Clarinet Solo part includes a section for Cor. [C.S.] and a section for VI. Solo. The Arpeggiated Bass part includes a section for Cor. [C.S.] and a section for VI. Solo. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

### EXAMPLE 4 - FINALE

Musical score for Example 4 - Finale. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

### EXAMPLE 5

Musical score for Example 5. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked *Lento* with a metronome marking of  $\text{♩} = 58$ . The score includes parts for VI. a 2., Cl-B., Vcl., Vlc. Fag. 1., Vlc. Vcl., and Gr. C. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings (*ppp*, *pp*).

### EXAMPLE 6

Musical score for Example 6. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score includes parts for Cor a 2., Cl. Fag., and VI. a 2. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings (*f*, *ten.*, *sf*).

**Mark Bebbington** is fast gaining a reputation as one of today's most strikingly individual young British pianists. His recent discs of British music for SOMM's "New Horizons" series have met with unanimous critical acclaim and his Arnold and Lambert disc (SOMMCD 062) and Frank Bridge Volume 1 (SOMMCD 056) have featured as a Gramophone Magazine Editor's choice and BBC Music Magazine 5\*\*\*\*\* Instrumental Choice, respectively.

Over recent seasons Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, the Far East and North Africa and has performed at major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia and London Mozart Players. As a recitalist he makes regular appearances at major international festivals.

Recorded at Symphony Hall, Birmingham.

SOMM Recordings wishes to thank Symphony Hall's Director, Andrew Jowett, for his help in making this recording possible.

Recorded with financial assistance from the Alan Bush Music Trust.

For further information about Alan Bush, his life and music, CDs and books etc., please contact the Alan Bush Music Trust, 7 Harding Way, Histon, Cambridge CB4 9JH: <http://www.alanbushtrust.org.uk>; email: [info@alanbushtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@alanbushtrust.org.uk)

The following recordings with Mark Bebbington are available in the SOMM Catalogue in the "New Horizons" series:

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