
FROM THE BAVARIAN HIGHLANDS

Edward Elgar (1857-1934): From the Bavarian Highlands, Op 27 (1895)

- 1 The Dance *Sonnenbichl*
- 2 False Love *Wamberg*
- 3 Lullaby *In Hammersbach*
- 4 Aspiration *Aspiration bei Sankt Anton*
- 5 On the Alm *Hoch Alp*
- 6 The Marksmen *Bei Murnau*

Edward Elgar's settings of six poems by his wife, Alice, entitled *From the Bavarian Highlands*, shows the lighter side of a composer more often associated with massed choirs and epic religious oratorios. Words and music were inspired by several holidays the Elgars took in the popular Alpine resorts of Oberstdorf and Garmisch and the finished piece was first performed at the Worcester Festival in 1896. Neither text nor music contains authentic Bavarian folksong, but even allowing for the superiority of the husband's music over his wife's verse, the influence and their deep love of the area is entirely apparent in these delightful miniatures.

Background to the work

The early 1890s seem to have been the happiest of Edward and Alice Elgar's married life. He was relatively unknown and thus still free to choose on what and with whom to work. They had begun to collaborate on part songs, she choosing or herself writing texts for which he would compose the melodies. From 1892 until 1897 they spent summer holidays in Bavaria, first at Oberstdorf and then Garmisch, which had not yet developed as a centre for tourism. In 1894 they stayed at the guesthouse of an English family, the Slingsby-Bethells, whom they had met the previous year and who introduced them to the local entertainment of the part-singing and *Schullplat'l* dancing of the villagers – almost certainly the inspiration for the suite of six part songs, based on Bavarian folk dances and the words of the region's *Volkslieder* and *Schnadahupfler*, that constitute these *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands*. They were completed with piano accompaniment in April, 1895 and orchestrated for their first performance, a year later, at the Worcester Choral Festival, with Elgar conducting, on April 21st. Like all of his part songs and some of his larger choral works, the musical score is markedly superior to the verbal text, but these songs in

particular show clearly an enjoyable sense of collaboration between the Elgars. They are light and simple, without structural elaboration or significant musical development, but all of the melodies are lively and convey a charming sense of warmth and happiness.

From the Bavarian Highlands

The suite of six songs was dedicated to the Slingsby-Bethell family, their hosts during most of the Elgars' Bavarian holidays and each has a particular association with the area around Garmisch and its scenic Alpine backdrop. The opening song, 'The Dance', is set in Sonnenbichl, north of Garmisch, beneath the Zugspitze mountain. Merrily, to light, alternating rhythms of dancing and marching, the dancers sing of drinking, dancing and urgent thoughts of love. A graceful and flowing song follows, set in Warberg, a village to the west of Garmisch. 'False Love', as its title suggests, tells a sad story of the dashing of a young man's amorous springtime hopes as he arrives at his lover's door, only to find a rival already there.

In the third song, 'Lullaby', set in Hammersbach, to the south of Garmisch, the altos take the voice of a mother, gently singing her baby son to sleep in safety, whilst the full chorus sing distantly of 'dancing gay'

as 'zithers play', in vain attempts to entice her away from her maternal dedication. A pilgrim's song, 'Aspiration', follows, inspired by the chapel of St Anton, in the neighbouring village of Partenkirchen. Set in a snowy landscape, it celebrates the pilgrims' resolute and patient piety as they await divine guidance.

The full chorus is employed to considerable effect in 'On the Alm' – the high mountain pastures on which cattle are grazed during summer months. In this song, the cattle are tended by a girl who lives in a hut, towards which her lover is climbing eagerly to join her. As he does so, he sings longingly of his love, represented alternately by tenors and basses; his words are echoed in a Jucche (yodelling) sound, as if in an Alpine valley, by the female voices.

Finally, 'The Marksman', the *tour de force* of the suite, brings it to a resounding conclusion. The marksmen tramp across the landscape as they muster for the hunt to brisk, *staccato* rhythms. With sure hand and steady eye, they cry 'Huzza!' as they hit their prey. A peaceful, melodic interlude marks the crimson glow of the setting sun before the hunters turn triumphantly homeward in exultant song, 'through meadows sweet with new-mown hay'.

CARMINA BURANA

Carl Orff 1895 - 1982:

Carmina burana, Cantiones profanae cantoribus et choris cantandae comitatus instrumentis atque imaginibus magicis (Secular songs for singers and choruses to be sung together with instruments and magic images) (1937)

Described as a 'Scenic Cantata' (which is still frequently staged), Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* is a setting of 24 poems from the medieval 'Songs of Beuern', a collection of some 300 anonymous thirteenth century texts from the Benedictine Monastery of Beuern in Bavaria. The texts are mostly in Old Medieval Latin, with smatterings of Middle High German and Old Provençal, and the subject matter is both surprisingly secular and still pertinent nine centuries later in its concerns with the fickleness of fortune and wealth, the ephemeral nature of life, the changing of the seasons and the perils and pleasures of drinking, gluttony, gambling and lust.

The striking opening of the first movement ('O Fortuna') has featured in countless advertisements, movies and title sequences (including *The X Factor*). Orff's radiant solo for soprano, 'In trutina', in which a young girl describes the wavering of her mind between chastity and lasciviousness, will also be familiar to many. But there is much more to it than a couple of soundbites, and the juxtaposition of the almost ritualistic and rhythmic sections with the melting lyricism of the more reflective movements adds up to a remarkable whole. It has been said of *Carmina* that "the music itself commits no sins simply by being and remaining popular" and it will be performed tonight in its entirety in the authorised setting for two pianos and percussion ensemble.

A 'new beginning'

"Everything I have written to date, and which you have, unfortunately, printed, can be destroyed. With *Carmina Burana* my collected works begin." So wrote Orff to his publishers after the successful premiere of the work at the City Theatre in Frankfurt am Main in 1937. It revealed a talent for self-reinvention which was to serve him insidiously well in later years, but it did less than justice to his earlier work. As a musically precocious child he had written songs from the age of five and composed incidental music for his own puppet theatre plays. By his late teens he had composed his first choral work and opera whilst studying at the Akademie der Tonkunst followed by work as conductor and répétiteur at the Munich Kammerspiele, consolidating his early interest in theatre. This broadened into a wider interest in both musical history – especially the Renaissance and Baroque periods – and contemporary music – he was influenced by the synaesthetics of Schoenberg – and dance. He worked with Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban, who were exploring mundane movement through gymnastics as part of modern expressionist dance, which later became important to the minimalism of modernist dance and continues to influence postmodernist

physical theatre. With Dorothee Gunter, he founded a school for music, dance and gymnastics, developing the Schulkwerk project for teaching music to children on specially constructed mallet percussion instruments. The method, published in instalments from 1930 onwards, was widely adopted across Europe and North America and continues to be used. It demonstrated a commitment he shared with other composers (Britten, Hindemith, Schoenberg) to the emerging concept of music for use – the idea that music should be accessible to all people, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds. *Carmina Burana* represents an integration of these different facets of Orff's musical range, with its homophony, simple rhythms and straightforward harmonies and makes some sense of his insistence that it marked the real beginning of his collected works. It was the first of what he termed Trionfi, complemented by the subsequent composition of *Catulli carmina* (*Songs of Catullus*) in 1943 and *Trionfo di Afrodite* (a setting of poems by Sappho and Catullus) a decade later. Neither of these have achieved anything like the popularity of the initial work and are rarely performed, though the three works were intended as a stage trip-

tych, modelled on the late Renaissance triumphal processions, accompanied by music and dancing. They share the main characteristics of all his work after 1937 – choral euphony, accessibility and a performable theatricality.

It was not until 1847 that a selection of the illustrated manuscript poems from the *Benediktbeuern* was published. The manuscript contained songs of minstrels, jesters and goliards – wandering students and clerks – which celebrated the pleasures of daily life whilst satirising ecclesiastical and monastic ceremony. It had been despatched to the Court Library at Munich after the secularisation of Bavarian monasteries in 1803 by Napoleonic decree. The Court librarian, Johann Andreas Schmeller, selected what he considered the most remarkable of them in a modern edition under the invented title of *Carmina Burana* and it was in this form that Orff first encountered them. With the help of his friend, the Swiss scholar Kurt Huber and the poet Michel Hofmann, he organised them into a libretto for which he composed his own score. The original melodies, of which Orff seems to have been unaware, were eventually deciphered and transcribed by the musicologist Walter Lipphardt in the 1950s.

Carmina Burana

The work opens and closes with a setting of the first poem in Schmeller's selection, 'O Fortuna, velut luna', between which it is structured in three parts, each containing groups of poems and musical interludes focussed on a common theme. The first of these, entitled 'In Springtime' and 'On the Green' constitutes a pastoral, with related erotic genre verses; the second, 'In the Tavern', collects songs which celebrate the carousing sensuality of eating and drinking and the third, 'The Court of Love', consists of songs on the bitter-sweet qualities of romantic and passionate love.

After a brief introduction, the opening 'O Fortuna' builds insistently through the same tonic D to a huge *crescendo*, followed immediately by a chant-like opening to a variation, 'Fortune plango vulnera'. Plainsong dominates the first two of the Spring poems, 'Veris leta facies' and 'Omnia sol temperat' (for solo baritone), though both are appropriately brighter and more lively than the opening choruses. The third, 'Ecce gratum', changes the atmosphere completely as the male voices lead the chorus into a lyrical, accelerating celebration of the joys of spring, complete with orchestrated sighs of 'Ah!'. The texts collected in the section 'On the Green', interspersed with instrumental dances, turn to the human dimensions of spring's revival of natural growth as young men and women search for lovers and a young girl goes shopping for makeup to rouge her cheeks ('Chramer, gip die varwe mir'). In a final erotic conceit, the choral voices insist they would deny the world, if only the Queen of England might lie in their arms!

'In Taberna' consists of songs for male voices. The opening baritone solo celebrates masculinity as selfish hedonism and is followed by a keening tenor solo, supported by the male chorus, lamenting the fate of the swan upon which the drinkers will feed after it has been roasted. The baritone Abbot of Cucany (Cockaigne – the mythical mediæval utopia to which Elgar dedicated an

overture) then sings of his venality as a prelude to the entire male chorus, which embarks on a fast, furious celebratory iteration of toasts and drinking habits.

'Cours d'Amor', the third group of verses, is set lyrically throughout and united by a clear narrative thread about the course of carnal love, from the uncertainties and frustrations of the virginal and lovelorn to the passion and fulfilment of consummation. The soprano soloist opens, followed by a languishing solo baritone, in 'Dies, nox et omnia'. The soprano then sings of the alluring beauty of a girl in a red dress, on whom the male chorus gaze hungrily in 'Si puer cum puellula', followed by the soprano soloist who sings, sweetly and softly, of the virgin's impending choice between chastity and surrender. Baritone and male chorus encourage her roisterously towards the latter in 'Tempus est iocundum' until, soaring *con abandono* she consents gloriously in 'Dulcissime'. Her choice is celebrated gloriously by the entire chorus in full voice as an address to the divine, mythic coupling of 'Blanziflor et Helena', before a concluding reprise of 'O Fortuna' reminds us that chance and luck rule the world.

Apologia pro sua vita: Some background issues about Orff's work

Whether or not it affects our appreciation of Orff's music, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the initial success of *Carmina Burana* occurred at the height of Nazi rule in Germany. After its first performance, the Nazi party newspaper, *Volkischer Beobachter* referred to it as 'Bavarian Niggermusik', perhaps because of its syncopated percussion, modelled on Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. This was later revised to the view that it contained 'the kind of clear, stormy, and yet disciplined music that our time requires' after Goebbels had written in his diary that it contained 'extraordinary beauties'. Orff had disguised the fact that his maternal grandmother was Jewish and appears to have had no difficulties in accommodating to Nazi prescriptions on art – one reason, possibly, for disowning the earlier work that

he had produced under the influence of the *avant garde* expressionism of the Weimar period. He had no scruples about writing incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Mendelssohn's work was deemed politically unacceptable for performance by the Nazis. The extent of his collaboration became clearest when his friend Huber, who had helped with the libretto for *Carmina Burana*, was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943. Huber was a founder of the White Rose anti-Nazi opposition movement and was tortured under interrogation, given a show trial and executed. After Huber's arrest, his wife pleaded with Orff to intercede on his behalf, but he refused. After the war the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) declared Orff denazified, almost certainly in part because of the influence of Newell Jenkins, a former student of Orff's, who had offered to arrange work for him in the US before the war and had returned as OMGUS's officer for music and theatre. Orff made the mendacious claim that he had co-founded the White Rose movement with Huber, a calumny which was accepted, despite the fact that neither his wife nor daughter were prepared to support it.

The ubiquitous popularity of *Carmina Burana* is understandable because, in the serious critical sense conceptualised by Theodor Adorno, it is a work of musical *kitsch* – 'the precipitate of devalued forms and empty ornaments from a formal world that has become remote from its immediate context. Things that were part of the art of a former time and are undertaken today...a kind of receptacle of mythic basic materials of music'. Adorno offers examples of musical kitsch that could be tailored for Orff's work from 'the anonymous domain underneath...marches and drinking songs, sentimental tunes and ditties for servant girls. Ultimately it applies to aspects of moderate, formerly serious music that have meanwhile become transparent and, today,...relinquish their secret'. Might this be what underlies claims for *Carmina Burana*'s continuing relevance?
