

# WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 15 September 2025  
1.00pm

Daniel Hope violin  
Simon Crawford-Phillips piano

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Violin Sonata in E minor Op. 82 (1918)

*I. Allegro • II. Romance. Andante • III. Allegro non troppo*

William Walton (1902-1983)

Sonata for violin and piano (1947-9)

*I. Allegro tranquillo • II. Variazioni (Andante)*



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**Elgar's** only surviving violin sonata was actually his second. As a boy in Worcester, he held a violin before he could read, and throughout his youth he cherished aspirations as a performer, scraping together his savings (and surviving on 'a bag of nuts' each day) to study with Adolphe Pollitzer in London. After that dream had faded, violin teaching came to be his main source of income, as well as a ceaseless chore. He knew what he was doing when, in 1887, he composed his Opus 9 – a violin sonata – and (presumably) when he destroyed its manuscript shortly afterwards. By the time Elgar composed his Violin Concerto in 1910, the violin had served him for five decades as the vehicle of his deepest disappointments and most passionate hopes.

So when, in the final months of the Great War, the 61-year-old composer returned to the idea of a violin sonata, the music that emerged was intensely personal. The Elgars had rented Brinkwells, a secluded woodland cottage in West Sussex, and Elgar had left behind the notebooks full of ideas and sketches (some decades old) that usually fuelled his creative process. In the secluded landscape of the Arun valley he drew instead on his inner resources. Alice Elgar noticed straight away that something special was happening, and noted in her diary that 'E. is writing wonderful music, different from anything else of his. A. calls it wood magic. So elusive and delicate'.

According to Elgar's diary, by mid-September 1918 the Violin Sonata was almost complete, and Elgar invited the violinist WH Reed to play the 'Sonata and sketch Vtett [his Piano Quintet], also wooded in the wood'. (The lore of the autumn woodlands around Brinkwells fascinated Elgar; Reed was pressed into chopping firewood). He wrote to an old friend and supporter Marie Joshua, offering her the dedication of the new work, adding 'I fear it does not carry us any further but it is full of golden sounds and I like it'. Days later, Marie died suddenly: Elgar dedicated the sonata, instead, to her memory ('M.J. – 1918') and as a gesture of remembrance, inserted a memory of the slow movement into the finale. The première was at his Hampstead home, Severn House, on 15 October; Reed was on violin, and Anthony Bernard on piano.

That slow movement is the heart of the Sonata; music, felt Reed, that was 'utterly unlike anything I have ever heard...it is most fantastic, and full of touches of great beauty'. It sits between two big, sweeping movements, each agleam with Elgar's brilliant command of the violin. Yet these, too, have their mysteries – the quiet, shimmering writing in the first, as Elgar evokes the otherworldly chance-music of the Aeolian harp that he wedged in the window frame at Brinkwells, and the pools of limpid calm and sudden, jagged outbursts that break what Elgar half-seriously called the 'broad and soothing' finale. 'If you cut that, it would bleed', Elgar used to say of passages in his

music that particularly pleased him. That comment might apply to the whole of the Violin Sonata.

Art is never pure and rarely simple. **Walton's** only violin sonata was born of profound personal tragedy, deep friendship and a hopeful (if haunted) sense of a new beginning. Is it possible to hear all of this in the music? 'Emotion recollected in tranquillity' might cover it, though it wouldn't quite account for the fierce, flashing brilliance that dances throughout Walton's music – or the composer's awareness of its commissioner and dedicatee: the violinist Yehudi Menuhin, then (in 1949) at the height of his artistry and international reputation.

In late 1947, Walton and his long-term partner Alice Wimborne had travelled to Lucerne; Alice was suffering from cancer though her London doctors had misdiagnosed its seriousness. In Switzerland, she was taken suddenly and critically ill but due to postwar currency restrictions Walton was unable to afford a doctor. Menuhin was in Lucerne too, and Walton approached him for a loan. Walton's (future) wife Susana takes up the story:

A wicked gleam came into Yehudi's usually innocent eyes. 'I'll give you anything you like, William', he said, 'in return for you writing me a sonata for violin and piano. Lou and I can give the first performance'. William promised but Yehudi was so impatient to see William start work that he led him firmly by the hand to the nearest music store, pulled him into the shop and bought a quire of manuscript-paper and half a dozen of William's favourite pencils.

Two years later, on 30 September 1949, Menuhin premièred the finished sonata at the Tonhalle, Zurich with 'Lou' – his brother-in-law Louis Kentner – at the piano. During the course of composition, in April 1948, Alice had died; her suffering would haunt Walton for the rest of his life. Having halted work on the Sonata, the devastated Walton met and married Susana Gil Passo in January 1949 and relocated to the Italian island of Ischia, which would be his home for the rest of his life. There, he returned to the score. The Violin Sonata was (said Susana) the first work that he composed on Ischia, in their rented temporary home, the Convento San Francisco; though he added the finishing touches back in London.

Perhaps the island's Mediterranean sunlight warms the long, lyrical opening movement, though darker currents move beneath the music's shining surface: a sonata-form movement with the spirit and freedom of a rhapsody. The second movement completes the Sonata's arc with a melancholy, questioning theme followed by seven variations that embrace a troubled slow movement and a restless scherzo before a dazzling, defiant finale.

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