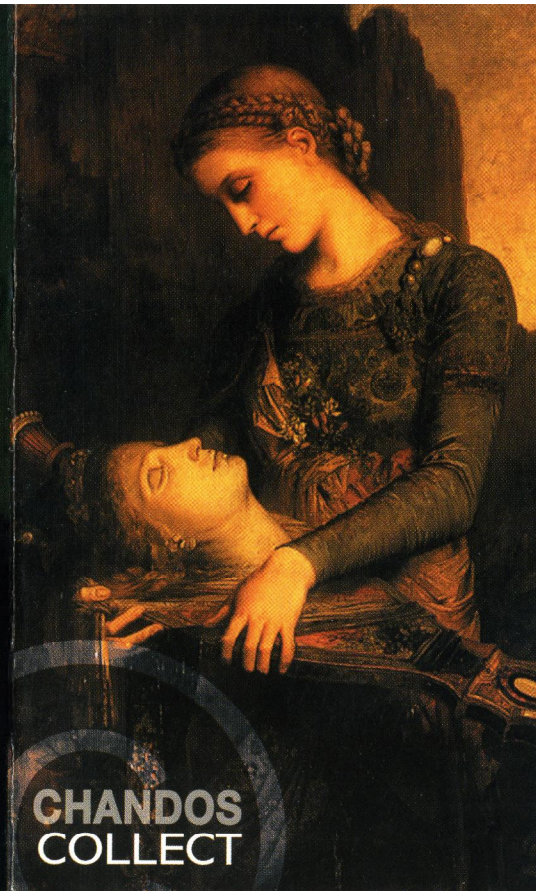


CHAN 6610



# Parry

Symphonic Variations  
Concertstück  
From Death to Life  
Elegy for Brahms

London Philharmonic Orchestra  
Matthias Bamert

CHANDOS  
COLLECT

**Sir Hubert Parry (1848–1918)**

1	<b>Symphonic Variations (1897)</b> in E minor	14:06
2	<b>Concertstück in G minor</b> Edited by Bernard Benoiel Andante ma non troppo – Allegro con brio	9:58
	<b>From Death to Life (1914)</b> Symphonic Poem in two connected movements	16:33
3	I Via Mortis Lento	8:39
4	II Via Vite Slow alla marcia	7:54
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		TT 54:24

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**Parry: Symphonic Variations etc.**

**Symphonic Variations in E minor**

For several decades Parry's resourceful set of twenty-seven 'symphonic' variations remained his only orchestral work to be given the occasional performance. Greatly admired by D.F. Tovey, Joachim and Elgar, it remains an effective orchestral *tour de force*, though no more his masterpiece than the *Haydn Variations* are of Brahms. The 'symphonic' structure implied in the sonata style divisions of tempo and key gave Parry the opportunity to explore and enhance his technical resources; it was a lesson that bore fruit in his later symphonic cantatas. The result is a minor classic, not an academic exercise, which no academic composer could have written.

The first performance was given under the composer's baton at a Philharmonic Concert on 3 June 1897. 'The band played up like bricks and it went capitally,' Novello published the full score and it was soon taken up in America under Theodore Thomas and in Europe where performances continued into the 1920s. Its echoes even found their way into Korngold's score for the 1939 film *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*.

**Concertstück in G minor**

In 1973 I examined the Parry manuscripts in the Royal College of Music. Among the incomplete works, sketches and fragments, I found a movement for orchestra called *Concertstück*. It had been bound next to some sketches for piano and orchestra that evidently pertained to a different piece. Of greater interest was the fact that the work was complete except for one section, where the music stopped altogether for a few bars, and in places the supporting harmony and orchestration had not been filled in. For performing purposes other editing was also necessary. Parry had written out alternative versions to the principal string lines in several passages, and accompanying figurations were sometimes incomplete or ambiguous. In places the tonality is so unstable it is unclear whether a passage is in C minor or G minor, and Leopold Hager and I had to make final decisions actually in rehearsal on whether A or A flat should be played.

Although the manuscript is undated it is clearly the 'Concertstück in G minor for piano' mistakenly referred to by Graves 'of which no trace remains', written as a composition exercise for Edward Dannreuther in September



1877. The work has still never received a concert premiere. It was first performed in 1981 by Leopold Hager and the Luxembourg Radio Orchestra as a coupling to the premiere recording of Parry's Symphony No. 3 in C major.

*Concertstück* was written immediately after Parry and his wife, in the company of George Eliot, had attended Wagner's famous 1877 London Concerts. Parry's German was sufficiently competent for him to become friendly with the composer and Frau Cosima Wagner. Not surprisingly the principal, indeed the overwhelming influence on *Concertstück* is Richard Wagner. However, references to the Beethoven and Weber Overtures and the tone poems of Liszt are clearly apparent. *Concertstück* is not an overture but, as the title accurately states, a concert piece. For a work so deliberately an essay in the style of another composer, it is a curiously exhilarating and fascinating composition.

Whilst the melodic material and much of the instrumentation are totally Wagnerian, the development strays far indeed from Wagnerian music drama. We are in the tragic heroic atmosphere of *The Ring* but the sense of movement is closer to *The Flying Dutchman* and *Faust Overtures*. This accounts for part of the intensity: the back-to-front effect of late Wagnerian thematic ideas, with their slower pace, being worked out in the still classical

sense of movement we find in these two earlier overtures. Add to this a slow contrapuntal section which looks forward to Bruckner and an intense fugal passage clearly derived from the scherzo and instrumental double fugue in the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and it is remarkable that the piece does not explode: a tribute perhaps to Parry's natural gift for composition. It is astonishing to contemplate the implications for the future of English music if Parry had built his style on this curiously avant-garde work.

#### **From Death to Life**

A 'Symphonic Poem in two connected movements', it bears the mottoes 'Via Mortis' (Road of Death) and 'Via Vite' (Road of Life). It was written for the 1914 Brighton Festival and first performed under Dan Godfrey on 12 November, the second performance at a Philharmonic Concert taking place on 18 March 1915. Parry shared the platform with Elgar who concluded the concert with his own Second Symphony. 'To Queen's Hall at 10.30'. Parry noted, 'Very good rehearsal of *From Death to Life*, Band played up most amiably'. In the evening '*Death to Life* went capitally but I could feel it was not a success'. There is no record of any subsequent performances and, like the Fourth Symphony, by the 1960s all the performing material had vanished. This is the first modern performance.

Parry referred to the work as the spiritual triumph of Life – earnest and also joyful – over Death, arm in arm with Fate 'who walks ever in our midst'. The title gives the hint: the work does not in fact confront the terrifying aspects of death, but focuses on mankind's gradual return to society, after the battle is over, 'from Death'. Written during the first months of the Great War it carries on from *The Vision of Life*, revised earlier that year and also entitled 'A Symphonic Poem'. Essentially it is a work about mourning and readjustment that wisely eschews the tragic. This is the only late work to absorb the light music styles, marches, pastiche, even a reference to Elgar's *Cockaigne*, that Parry normally reserved for his incidental music to Aristophanes' plays. Earlier that year Parry had responded enthusiastically to a number of Russian pieces – 'I enjoyed Stravinsky's *Rossignol* immensely' – and *From Death to Life* captures something of their vitality.

The second theme of the first movement, the folk 'lament', returns briefly in the second movement; it is also ingeniously combined with the opening *Lento*, in B flat minor, of the first movement 'Fate' to form the 'Return to life' theme of the second, in B major, marked Slow alla marcia. Parry however was not to live to see the Armistice and one senses in *From Death to Life* that the nightmare is ever present at the door.

*From Death to Life* suggests that Parry was in the process of renewing every aspect of his compositional technique. If the Symphony No. 5 is a summation, *From Death to Life* reveals the emergence of a new approach to the treatment of musical ideas. Orchestral effects which look doubtful on paper are startling and successful in performance. The superficial similarity of the melodic ideas to those in the Symphony only highlights the difference between the two works and their treatment of the late romantic orchestra. It is the aesthetic precursor not to the *Songs of Farewell* and *Jerusalem* but to his philosophical study *Instinct and Character*. The somewhat disconcerting effect of the work comes from the fact that, like the final self-portraits of Rembrandt, especially the very last *Artist Laughing*, Parry portrays himself with intense orchestral colours as the perplexed old man looking out at the world.

#### **Elegy for Brahms**

The death of Brahms on 3 April 1897 affected Parry profoundly. He put aside all other creative work and by 29 May he speaks of 'taking every moment to get on with the orchestral *Elegy for Brahms*'. It was essentially a private tribute. The first performance was not given until his own memorial concert in 1918, conducted by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, in a revised version. The work was

not heard again. In 1975 I showed the score to Alasdair Mitchell who conducted the first performance of the original with the Edinburgh Camerata on 5 March 1977. The *Elegy* is a splendidly proportioned symphonic movement in A minor, which owes as much to Liszt as to Brahms. The sonata-style seams are clearly evident to the eye but the inspirational flow of the music strikes the ear more as an improvisation. One suspects Parry created his own programme in which the psychological argument prompted the technical solutions.

There are several references to Brahms's music. The lilting second subject in E minor is purposely reminiscent of the second subject in his A minor String Quartet and the passionate development section is based on the famous C major tune from the First Symphony, but plunged into the minor to achieve the psychological inverse of the original's mood of optimism. Parry uses the romantic orchestra with notable delicacy to convey his own sense of hollowness and loss. The work culminates in a radiant coda, which in its last upward gesture recalls Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung*.

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Recorded under the auspices of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust

**Executive producer** Brian Couzens

**Sound engineers** Ralph Couzens (*Symphonic Variations, From Death to Life, Elegy*) and Richard Lee (*Concertstück*)

**Editors** Peter Newble (*Symphonic Variations, Concertstück*) and Jeffrey Ginn (*From Death to Life, Elegy*)

**Recording venue** St Jude's Church, Central Square, London; 5, 6 & 9 January 1991 and 6 January 1992 (*Concertstück*)

**Front cover** *The Prophetic Head and Lyre of Orpheus*, by Gustav Moreau

**Design** Cass Cassidy

**Booklet typeset by** Dave Partridge

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(DDD)

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