

COMPOSER: Edward Elgar 1857 -1934

NATIONALITY: English

- * Elgar, whose father owned a music shop, learnt to play the violin, cello, double bass, piano, organ, bassoon & trombone
- * He also had access to music books but, as a predominantly self taught musician, he decided to study law
- * His career as a civil servant in London ended in 1891 & he returned to Worcester to compose and found fame at 42

THE MUSIC: The Enigma Variations Opus 36

- * "Variations on an Original Theme" known as the "Enigma Variations" was completed and 1st performed in 1899
- * Elgar composed his own theme and the variations were based on the initials and character of his friends
- * Elgar added the word "Enigma" after completing the work - the secret code within the music remains a mystery



THEME AND VARIATIONS

The main melody is the theme, which is either original or borrowed from another composer. The theme is then repeated and decorated in a variety of ways to create the variations

LISTENING PLAN:

The inspiration for this music came to Elgar as he sat at the piano improvising. He entertained his wife by creating musical sketches based on the characters of his friends and family. Lady Elgar then had to guess who the characters were. Within two weeks the composer had completed a new work and within 6 months it had made him an international composer.

The composer wrote the main theme for this work and it is in ternary form.

The violins slowly introduce the 1st main melody **(A)**
 The clarinet follows with a contrasting 2nd tune **(B)**
 The strings return and conclude the theme with **(A)**
 A brief link from the string section leads straight into the 14 variations.

Elgar gave each variation titles, which were the initials of relatives or close friends. These are featured in the left column. The characters are described in the middle column and the right hand column provides a link to the actual music. As you listen to the 14 variations you may identify the theme and how the composer used it to create the contrasting sections in this great English masterpiece.

TERNARY FORM

A melody or composition with 3 parts – the middle section containing contrasting material

A 1 st main tune	B 2 nd main tune	A 1 st tune returns
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Caroline Alice Elgar
The composer's wife

INITIALS	CHARACTERS	WHAT TO LISTEN FOR
1 C.A.E.	Elgar's wife - a caring, patient but nervous lady	Swaying strings / woodwind with a hint of Elgar's special whistle on oboe
2 H.D.S-P	A friend who constantly played piano exercises	Dashing violins / woodwind as basses hint at serious character
3 R.B.T.	A writer /actor who did voice impersonations	Cheeky woodwind and swirling strings interrupt oboes attempt at the theme
4 W.M.B.	Local bad tempered, bossy, country squire	Full orchestra, including the timpani, accompanies theme on oboe / strings
5 R.P.A.	A serious friend - son of a famous poet	Slow violins have new melody while lower strings / bassoon plays the theme
6 ISOBEL	Amateur viola player	Graceful viola solo
7 TROYTE	An irritable, two finger, piano player	Pounding drums lead to exciting, skidding, strings and brass fanfares
8 W.N.	A busy, gentle lady friend	Clarinets and violins share the theme
9 NIMROD	A strong, close friend who only discussed serious music	Slow, quiet, strings lead to emotional surge in this most famous variation
10 DORABELLA	A delicate friend with a speech impediment	Longest variation with viola solo and stammering strings / woodwind
11 G.R.S.	Hereford Cathedral organist and his dog	Strings tumble as bassoon and basses bubble while the brass snarl loudly
12 B.G.N.	Local cellist	Sad variation for solo cello and strings
13 (***)	Secret young lady who suddenly went abroad	Romantic connections perhaps and the music implies she "sailed" away
14 E.D.U.	Lady Elgar's nickname for her husband	A majestic march for the finale and perhaps a self-portrait of Elgar

A SELECTION OF OTHER WORKS BY ELGAR

1. Cockaigne - a concert overture written in 1901 which paints a lively picture of London
2. Sea Pictures - a song cycle based on 5 sea poems - written in 1899
3. Introduction and Allegro - string music written in 1905 and a canvas of the Malvern Hills
4. Cello concerto - by 1919 this dynamic work had reinforced Elgar's international status
5. The Dream of Gerontius - a unique choral work written in 1900