

BRASS BAND MUSIC SERIES - General Editor: Bram Gay

## THE SEVERN SUITE

for Brass Band, Op. 87

EDWARD ELGAR

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The Severn Suite was first performed on 27 September 1930 at the National Brass Band Championships, Crystal Palace. The first performance of the new edition took place on 7 September 1996 at the British Open Brass Band Championship at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester.

The composer's dedication of *The Severn Suite* was to his friend, George Bernard Shaw. This edition needs no other; but I hope and believe that Sir Edward would thank, as I do, those talented and enthusiastic members of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama who breathed new life into his notes on the morning of 17 May 1996. *BG* 

Duration: c. 15 16 minutes

Score and parts are on sale separately
Score - ISMN: M-050-02699-0

Parts - ISMN: M-050-02698-3

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## The Severn Suite

Op. 87

A performing edition with reference to the autograph and the R Smith manuscript.

## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

The Severn Suite is unique. Commissioned by John Henry Iles for the National Brass Band Championships held at the Crystal Palace in 1930, it is the only work for brass band by a composer universally acknowledged to be among the great. In its subsequent orchestral version it has been little played, and in the wind-band score hardly at all. Its neglect by the bandsmen for whom it was written is owed to several factors. First, the bands of the time made little of it, and their audience - the audience of the park bandstand and the pier pavilion - must have made even less. Secondly, the published material was inadequate and inaccurate, and the scoring itself was not ideal. Ban Is playing to today's more sophisticated audience have found the many problems of the first edition to be beyond convincing solution.

The many attempts made to improve the score might have see ned impertinent had we not been led on good authority to believe that the score was not Elgar's, but the work of Henry Geehl, developing a sketch made by the composer. The composer's autograph score having come to light, we now know that Elgar scored the work in its entirety. It is score, in C is completely laid out for the brass band but in untransposed notation, using the bass clef for the low instruments and other clers as appropriate for the middle register. A second score, believed to be Geehl's, has been in the possession of the publishers since before the date of radication. This is a literal and accurate transposition from Elgar's, in brass band notation. The various differences between Elgar's score and Geehl's relate in general to pass gest where Elgar expected advice and change. His expectation is clearly indicated by marginal notes in his own hand. The changes implemented are all sensible ones. Some, however, include putery technical simple cations which I believe to be unnecessary in the context of today's pands. In such passages I have restored Higar's writing.

No manuscript full score in the key of the first edition, 3 flat, is known to exist. It seems possible that the disastre is discrepancies between the autograph and the published score were created when that transposition was made.

The present edition has been prepared with reference to the autograph. For this privilege I am independ to the consposer's godson, Mr Walstan Atkins, to whose family Elgar gave the manuscript following Sir Ivor Atkins' creation from it of the second Organ Sonata. I have also referred to the Geehl manuscript, which, as I have said, corresponds closely with Elgar's. My score is not identical with either, since some of the problems of the first edition are found in both and no useful purpose would have been served by giving them further currency. I have tried, however, to make as few changes as possible to make these clear, and always to show Elgar's notation. I have leaned, when the primar, sources left me in doubt, upon the recently published orchestral score (Acuta Music, 1991) which represents his latest thinking. I have adopted some aspects of that thinking which are not present in the brass band autograph.

I do not present this edition as *absolute* Elgar. That would have been of little use except to those prepared to transpose and edit for themselves. Instead I have approached the score in the attitude of a publisher's editor faced with a score from a great composer whose help in editing he is unfortunately denied.

My notation, I hope and believe, is authentic; but Sir Edward left some questions of dynamic and phrasing unresolved, being perhaps unaware of the subtlety of which the band is capable. Those who wish to adopt the dynamics of the autograph will find them in a surprisingly complete form in the printed edition of 1930. They are unsatisfactory and often irrational evidence if any were needed of the speed with which the work was composed. I have added new indications only when both need

and solution seemed obvious. I do not claim to have resolved every problem.

Elgar accented plentifully; I have tried only to render him more consistent. Where I have contributed new phrasing, something which seemed essential if a certain wooden-ness of performance is to be avoided, I have taken it from the orchestral score. That the composer phrased differently in wind and strings when playing together provided some difficulty of choice. Again I have aimed for consistency, and where the brass band manuscript contains legatos these have usually been respected. Those legatos not derived from either of the brass band scores are shown in dotted lines.

The first edition raised many doubts of notation. In the bridge between *Toccata* and *Fugue* I have adopted the accidental key-change which appears in the orchestra score, in the Organ Sonata, and in Sir Edward's recording, rejecting the autograph, where the first published version is to be found. Whether this revision was the result of a change of mind, or of an absence of it during the writing of the autograph, the benefit of the later notation is clear.

The melody-note before the double-bar at 64 occasioned Elgar some indecision. In the autograph he first wrote the flat, later substituting the natural; yet in the orchestra he reverted to the flat. So have I.

The autograph presents many problems of balance, stemming perhaps from the composer's lack of experience of the band. Where changes have been made the or ginal is always shown in small notation. The lower cornets are mainly affected, much of their writing being too high to be practical or useful. Where - rarely - notes have been added in place or silence they are included in a bracket placed above or below the stave.

I have assumed that the bass trombone, like his monds, ends the *Toc rata* muted, and that of three are open during the fugue. With regard to the famous question of the mutes in the *Minuet* Ligar's intention is clear; the trombones, the second and third cornets the magelhorn and the soprano cornet were to remain muted throughout. In the autograph score the word "Muted" is written (in the cases of the low cornets Elgar wrote 'All muted") against the instrument names on each page of the score throughout the minuet, the exphanium being reparately marked on muted occasions, though not infallibly so. There I have offered a [bracketed] a lution. The success or otherwise of this highly innovative scheme must depend upon the design of the mutes and the degree to which they integrate dynamically and tonally with the open band. Muted and open cornets are easily available as and when wished, assuming that two proves are available on each part and that the perfomers have decided against the composer's man I believe that many will so decide.

The orchestral so or offers many temp ations to add detail to this one. I have succumbed on rain occasions, making the original available in every instance except at the adoption of the syncopation of the orchestra score in the bars before figure 53, a second thought of the composer's which I believe improves the passage greatly. The soprano octave has been added ([bracketed]) in a very few short passages where the orchestration shows this to be an advantage. In the coda I have reinstated the two bars of horn which were disastrously omitted from the first edition, and have offered, optionally, a re-scoring of the third and fourth bars after figure 68. This is a rare instance within the Second Soite of the composer having adopted, when translating to the orchestra, a more exuberant figuration. If adopted these optional bars will add brilliance to the climax of the work. My importations are clearly marked and may be omitted.

Though Elgar was told by Herbert Whiteley that there would be "no drums" at the Crystal Palace, his writing for the brass band percussion is more inventive than for that of the orchestra. I have imported his orchestra timpani, thus achieving the best of both worlds.

The autograph contains no metronome marks, those included in the first edition being editorial. Whether or not they had the blessing of the composer they run contrary to his own recorded practice, which was as follows:

Introduction:

112 crotchets per minute.

Toccata

132 minims, increasing with the dynamic; a phenomenon not unknown among amateur conductors. This tempo is very effective indeed, and not beyond the reach of today's bands.

Minuet

112 crotchets and often quicker, the episodes rising to 144. Since this is the movement where, if anywhere, Elgar's invention flags, pace is useful. We should remember Shaw's complaint to Elgar, that at the Crystal Palace some bands played the minuet "like the Salvation Army letting its hair down over a sentimental hymn".

Coda

A little quicker than the Introduction.

In general, since the composer's own recorded performance gives validity to certain extra variations of tempo these have been added, in brackets, to the score only.

Performances given by conscientious conductors with an eye to the editorial metronome markings are responsible, perhaps, for the work's tacitly-held reputation as dull and over-long. One otherwise splendid recording takes ninteen minutes. I have found it easy, and musically profitable, to lose three. Performances, I suggest, ought not to be adjudicated metronomically.

I acknowlege with gratitude the help of Geoffrey Brand, who kindly made available to me the Geehl manuscript, and of Philip Maund, whose painstaking research has uncovered many valuable facts including corrections in the composer's own hand to the first edition. Mr Maund's untiring advocacy of the first-published key of B flat has long been a deterrent finally unsuccessful, to my own choice. It has been argued that Elgar wrote in C for correction, that he expected to be transposed downwards by his editor, and that he moved back to C when orchestrating in order to achieve happier orchestral results, partly through more player friendly part-writing. This argument I find difficult to accept in relation to the composer of the A flat and E flat Symphonies and of the Enigma Variations.

I am by no means an instinctive C me or man, having played the work so often in B flat as to render that condition impossible. For the choice of C major my grounds are chiefly two: first the presence of the composer's score, and of his later orches ration in the same key. Secondly I believe that had Elgar intended from the outset that the massis be transposed then this would have been done during the making of the Cechl score, while transfer ing to brass band notation.

We know from out sides that Elgar and Geehl fell out ever the score, the composer having described the editor to his friend Ivor Atkas as "impossible to work with". From a comparison between the outograph and the first edition we know, too, that Elgar conceded little to the publisher beyond brass band essentials. Intle but those sad errors of notation and the key. Surely that was a subsequent decision made on the ground of practical performance by the bands of the time?

subsequent decision made on the ground of practical performance by the bands of the time?

Musicology apart I on convinced of the benefits of the higher key. The lower one suffers from the presence of a "dead" major third in all registers of the band, coming from the flat fourth harmonic of the B flat tube. In the higher key ver neet a very bright major third derived from the fifth harmonic of the A tube. Large parts of the work, consequently, gain a new lightness and brilliance. While this accident of acoustics is not one which would have determined the choice of key in the mind of the composer I think he could hardly have failed, having heard the difference, to applaud it.

In any case the basis band pitch of Elgar's time has long gone. Its brilliance is a happy memory. Perhaps the Pey of his edition will serve to compensate for its loss.

Bram Gay Wyton, April 1996

## **The Severn Suite**

Sir Edward Elgar Op. 87



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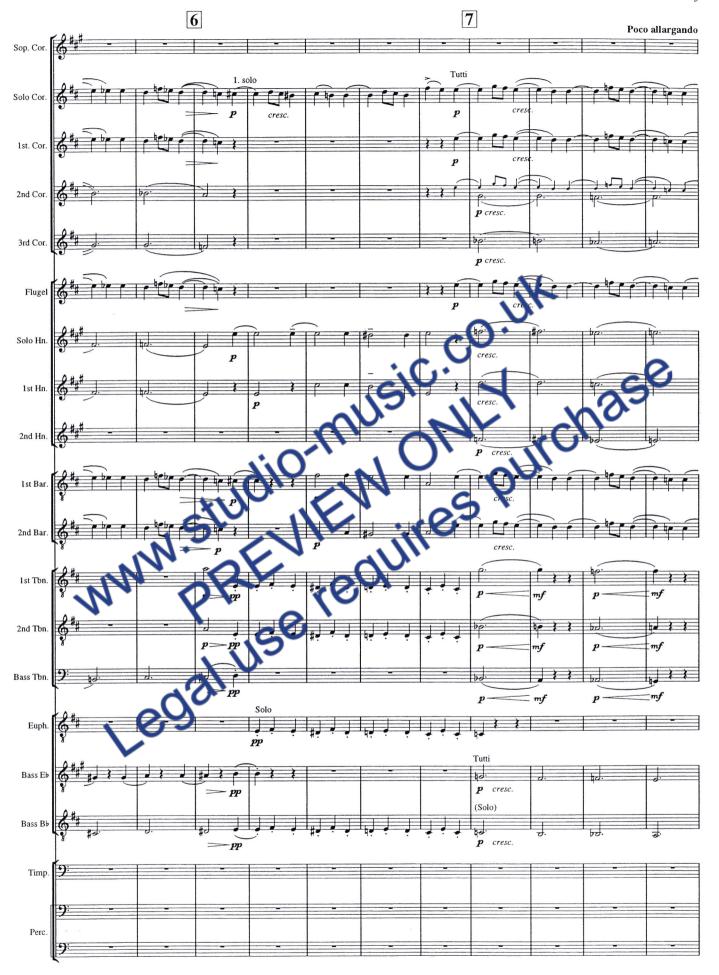




















































































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