

# Two Piano Pieces

In Smyrna · Skizze

Edward Elgar

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## INTRODUCTION

These two small but significant Elgar piano pieces are now published practically for the first time. For the *Skizze* was previously printed only in an obscure German periodical of 1903, and *In Smyrna* made its only appearance in an artistic anthology for charity in 1905. Yet these two pieces contain all the music which Elgar conceived and wrote entirely for the piano between the *Concert Allegro* of 1901 and three little works which appeared in the composer's old age. The *Concert Allegro* was never quite finished, so the pages of the *Skizze* and *In Smyrna* give us a special insight into Elgar's understanding of the piano at the summit of his career. That is important to any understanding of Elgar and his music. For throughout his creative life the piano figured along with the writing table, paper, pens, and ink of Elgar's study as the indispensable tool of his composition process.

The actual invention of Elgar's ideas, as he himself was fond of insisting, took place mostly away from the piano—often when walking, golfing, or cycling. And therefore those ideas typically did not form themselves 'in a keyboard shape'. Yet ideas once invented have still to be developed. And the essence of developing an idea lies of course in making some sort of extemporisation upon it. This was where the piano came in for Elgar. He had from childhood an immense skill as a keyboard extemporiser, and he regularly used this skill to develop thematic ideas for himself and exhibit them for his friends in partly finished or nearly finished sections of music. So valuable was this extemporising skill to him that he often practised it as if for its own sake. Thus the actress Nancy Price recalled:

Many delightful hours I spent with Elgar in his studio. He liked me to read poetry while he improvised music to accompany it. I often wish some of that music had been preserved . . . [He] was able to improvise on the instant of the spoken word.\*

Samples of Elgar's improvising can still be heard in a series of gramophone recordings made in 1929, when the composer was seventy-two. But the best index of his keyboard skill during his greatest years is to be found in the *Concert Allegro*† and the two pieces printed here.

The music of the *Skizze* appears in fact to have been started side by side with that of the *Concert Allegro*. The fairly advanced draft of the *Skizze* now in the British Museum is dated 16 November 1901. By 21 and 22 November Elgar was deep in the composition of the *Concert Allegro*. Unlike the longer work, however, the *Skizze* was ultimately finished—exquisitely finished. And its tiny structure contains within it the most advanced of all Elgar's keyboard writing. In the *pianissimo*—*diminuendo*—*accelerando* that leads up to the *Skizze*'s little coda, one finds oneself suddenly inside a microcosm of the musical world with which the composer surrounded *The Apostles*. *The Apostles*, written in 1902-1903, was to be the largest work of Elgar's life; the *Skizze*, evolved at almost the same time, was paradoxically the smallest.

Perhaps it was this hint of musical connection with *The Apostles* that prompted Elgar to dedicate the *Skizze* 'To my dear friend, Professor Julius Buths, Düsseldorf'. Julius Buths (1851-1920), conductor at Düsseldorf and director of the great triennial Lower Rhine Festivals, was one of the best friends Elgar and his music ever had. Buths was well known to Elgar's great friend at Novello's,

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\**Into an Hour-Glass* (London: Museum Press, 1953) pp. 212, 216.

†Novello, in preparation (1976).

A. J. Jaeger ('Nimrod' of the *'Enigma' Variations*), who was himself a native of Düsseldorf. It was at Jaeger's suggestion that Buths had been invited to attend the Birmingham Festival of 1900. There he heard the premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius*. And despite the poor performance he was so struck by the beauty and grandeur of Elgar's music that he took a score back to Düsseldorf with him, determined to produce the work at the next Lower Rhine Festival. This he did in May 1902, having conducted a prior performance in December 1901, and also the first German performance of the *'Enigma' Variations* earlier in that year. Buths then employed his literary skills to translate *The Dream of Gerontius* into German for future performances in German-speaking countries. This translation pleased Elgar so much that he asked Buths to undertake an immediate German translation of *The Apostles*, and had the libretto sent to him in Düsseldorf section by section as it was finished. It was probably near this time that the *Skizze* was dedicated to Buths. And from that dedication followed its printed appearance in Germany.

In January 1903 the Elgars were staying for a few days at Ridgehurst, the home of another German friend, Edward Speyer. On the evening of 17 January Elgar himself played the *Skizze* to another of the guests at Ridgehurst, the pianist Leonard Borwick. Borwick and Fanny Davies, for whom the *Concert Allegro* had been written, were both of them pupils of Clara Schumann. And later on Elgar was to make an opportunity for praising especially the art of these two players when he lectured at the University of Birmingham in November 1905 on the subject of 'English Executants':

When we come to piano playing . . . a series of great names is immediately called to mind; not of the Herculean school, but real artists—restrained and capable of the highest things; one name occurs to me here in Birmingham, Fanny Davies, a name known all over Europe. And I will add one more—the player who gives me among Englishmen the greatest and highest satisfaction, Leonard Borwick.\*

When Elgar spoke those words at the end of November 1905, he had a special reason to be thinking about the piano. For in the previous month he had written the only other piano work of his middle years, *In Smyrna*. It was the musical result of a Mediterranean cruise which the composer had been invited to join with other friends in September and October 1905. A few passages from Elgar's own diary† kept during the cruise tell more than anything else could possibly tell about the inspiration for *In Smyrna*:

Friday, Sept. 29, 1905. At sea . . . Arrived at Smyrna about 2 . . . but Frank [Schuster], Mrs Craigie, & I remained on 'Carnarvon' till 7 . . .

Saturday, Sept. 30. Rose early—glorious day. Frank, Lady M[aud Warrender] & I ashore—went to the bazaar. Much finer sight than Constantinople. Colour; movement; & camels—100s—led by a donkey through the bazaar. (This was my first touch with Asia, & I was quite overcome. The endless camels made the scene more *real* than in Stamboul—the extraordinary colour & movement, light & shade were intoxicating . . .) Drove thro' the town right up to the fortifications—tomb of S. Polycarp. Tremendous view. Last part on foot to the watch tower. Descended & made detour round the 'Camel bridge' . . . wonderful gorges with remains of ancient aqueducts . . .

Sunday, Oct. 1. Rose late. Very, very hot & sirocco blowing—Peculiar feeling

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\**A Future for English Music and other lectures*, edited P. M. Young (London: Dennis Dobson, 1968) pp. 127, 129.

†*Letters of Edward Elgar*, edited P. M. Young (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956) pp. 156-8.

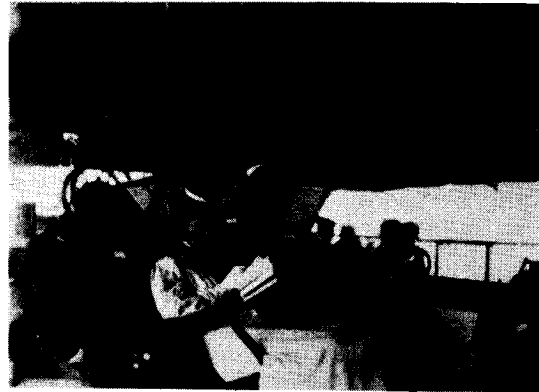
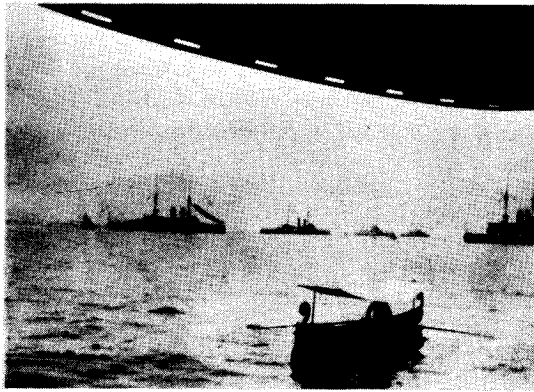
of intense heat & wind... Ashore & drove to the Mosque of dancing dervishes... Music by five or six people very strange & some of it quite beautiful – incessant drums & cymbals (small) thro' the quick movements...

Monday, Oct. 2... Went for a short trip in the steam launch round the fleet. Beautiful views of a most beautiful place...

Tuesday, Oct. 3... Awoke at 4 by anchors weighing. Left Smyrna at five...

The special moment out of all this experience which may have focussed Elgar's musical expression was noted in his sketchbook beside an early idea for the music: 'In Smyrna (In the Mosque)'. It was nothing but the sheer musical need to evoke this exotic experience again that led Elgar irresistibly to the piano. So a representation of actual place allied itself to the music of *In Smyrna* in 1905, just as an abstraction of musical thought had allied itself to the music of the *Skizze* four years earlier.

JERROLD NORTHROP MOORE



*Photographs taken by Elgar during the Mediterranean cruise*



*Elgar at the piano in his study at Plas Gwyn, 1905*

# 1 IN SMYRNA

EDWARD ELGAR

Quasi andante ♩ = 72

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time, marked 'Quasi andante' with a tempo of ♩ = 72. It consists of four systems of music, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).  
- **System 1:** The right hand (R.H.) plays a continuous eighth-note pattern starting with a *ppp* dynamic. The left hand (L.H.) has a few notes, including a triplet. Dynamics include *con Ped.*, *p*, and *poco marcato*.  
- **System 2:** The R.H. continues the eighth-note pattern. The L.H. has a more active line. Dynamics include *Ped.*, *cresc.*, and *f*.  
- **System 3:** The R.H. continues with a similar pattern. The L.H. has a triplet. Dynamics include *pp*, *Ped.*, *p*, and *cresc.*.  
- **System 4:** The R.H. changes to a *largamente* section. The L.H. has a triplet. Dynamics include *mf*, *f*, and *Ped.*.  
Throughout the score, there are several instances of *Ped.* (pedal) and asterisks (\*) indicating specific performance techniques. The piece concludes with a triplet in the L.H.

rit. a tempo

dim. p R.H. L.H. Ped. \* Ped. \*

ppp p 3 \*

dim. molto 3

pp Ped.

stringendo rit. stringendo

*ppp espress. e mesto* *mf* *p*

\* *3*

Detailed description: This system contains the first two measures of the piece. The piano part begins with a *ppp* dynamic and *espress. e mesto* instruction. The treble part has a *stringendo* marking. The second measure features a *rit.* marking and a triplet in the treble. The third measure returns to *stringendo* and has a *p* dynamic. A small asterisk is placed below the piano staff in the first measure.

rit. a tempo

*p dolce* *3* *3*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 4 and 5. Measure 4 has a *rit.* marking and a triplet in the treble. Measure 5 is marked *a tempo* and *p dolce*, featuring triplets in both staves.

*mf* *3*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 6 and 7. Measure 6 has a *mf* dynamic. Measure 7 features a triplet in the treble and a *3* marking in the piano part.

accel. rit. accel. rit.

*tr* *dim. molto* *pp* *3* *3* *3*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 8, 9, and 10. Measure 8 has a *tr* marking and *dim. molto*. Measure 9 has *accel.* and *rit.* markings, with a *pp* dynamic. Measure 10 has *accel.* and *rit.* markings, featuring triplets in both staves.

*a tempo*

*mf* *sf* *dim.* *p* *rit.*

*a tempo, più lento* **Tempo I** *cantabile*

*pp* *pp* *con Ped.*

*cresc.*

*largamente*

*f* *sf*



*grandioso*  
*ff*  
*Ped.* \* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \*  
*dim.*

This system of music is marked *grandioso* and *ff*. It consists of two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the lower staff provides harmonic support with chords and a steady bass line. There are five piano pedal markings (*Ped.*) with asterisks between them, indicating sustained resonance. The system concludes with a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking.

*p*  
*dim. molto*  
*ad lib.*  
*cresc.*  
*Ped.* \* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \*

This system begins with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The upper staff features a melodic line with a *dim. molto* (diminuendo molto) marking. The lower staff has a bass line with several piano pedal markings (*Ped.*) and asterisks. The system ends with an *ad lib.* (ad libitum) section in the upper staff marked *cresc.* (crescendo).

*f*  
*sf*  
*ppp subito*

This system starts with a *f* (forte) dynamic. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs and a *ppp subito* (pianissimo subito) marking. The lower staff has a bass line with a *sf* (sforzando) marking.

*poco cresc.*  
*ten.*  
*ten.*  
*ten.*  
*rit.*  
*dim. molto*

This system features tempo markings: *poco cresc.*, *ten.* (ritardando), *ten.*, *ten.*, and *rit.* (ritardando). The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs and a *dim. molto* marking. The lower staff has a bass line with a *sf* marking.

*a tempo, più lento*  
*molto rit.*  
*pp molto espress.*  
*con Ped.*  
*ppp*  
*dim.*  
*Ped.* \*

This system is marked *a tempo, più lento* and *molto rit.*. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs and a *dim.* marking. The lower staff has a bass line with a *pp molto espress.* (pianissimo molto espressivo) marking and a *con Ped.* (con pedal) marking. The system ends with a *ppp* (pianissimo) marking and a piano pedal marking (*Ped.*) with an asterisk.

Meinem lieben Freunde, Professor Julius Buths, Düsseldorf

# 2 SKIZZE

EDWARD ELGAR

Allegretto

*pp espressivo*  
*con Ped.*

The first system of musical notation for '2 SKIZZE' consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is in 3/8 time and B-flat major. The upper staff features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and accents. The dynamic marking is *pp espressivo* and the instruction *con Ped.* is present.

The second system of musical notation continues the piece. It maintains the same melodic and harmonic structure as the first system, with slurs and accents throughout. The dynamic remains *pp espressivo*.

*pp cantabile*

The third system of musical notation shows a change in mood and dynamics. The upper staff is marked *pp cantabile*. The melodic line is more lyrical, with longer slurs. The lower staff continues with a steady accompaniment.

The fourth system of musical notation concludes the piece. It features a final melodic phrase in the upper staff and a corresponding accompaniment in the lower staff, ending with a double bar line.

pp espressivo

This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and accents. The dynamic marking is *pp espressivo*.

This system contains the next four measures. The musical notation continues with slurs and accents in both hands, maintaining the *pp espressivo* dynamic.

più presto

pp poco sonoramente

sempre con Ped.

ppp

This system marks a tempo change to *più presto*. The right hand has a more active melodic line, and the left hand has a simpler accompaniment. The dynamic marking is *pp poco sonoramente*. A *ppp* marking is present in the bass line of the final measure. The instruction *sempre con Ped.* is written below the first measure.

dim.

This system contains the final four measures. The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand has a simple accompaniment. The dynamic marking is *dim.*

*sempre più presto*

Musical notation for the first system, consisting of a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music is in a minor key, indicated by a single flat. The tempo instruction *sempre più presto* is written above the staff. A piano dynamic marking *ppp* is placed in the first measure. The notation includes chords and melodic lines with slurs.

*più tranquillo*

Musical notation for the second system, continuing the grand staff. A decrescendo marking *dim.* is placed in the first measure. A piano dynamic marking *pppp* is placed in the fourth measure. The tempo instruction *più tranquillo* is written above the staff. The notation includes chords and melodic lines with slurs.

Musical notation for the third system, continuing the grand staff. The notation includes chords and melodic lines with slurs. A piano dynamic marking *pppp* is placed in the first measure.

*rit.*

Musical notation for the fourth system, continuing the grand staff. The notation includes chords and melodic lines with slurs. A piano dynamic marking *pppp* is placed in the first measure. The system concludes with a double bar line.