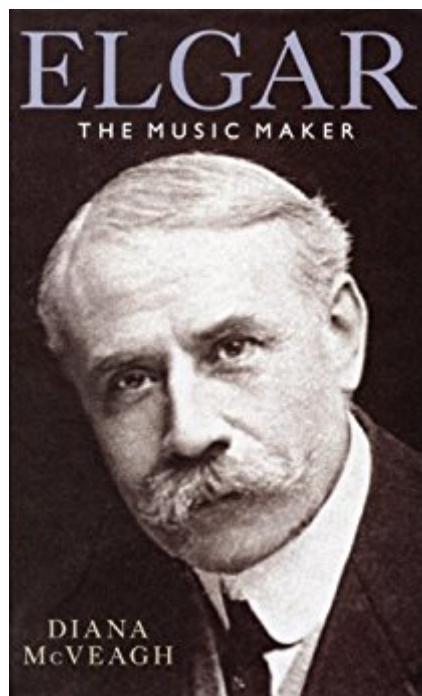


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Elgar The Music Maker



Synopsis

The new Diana McVeagh book on Elgar is first-rate, wrote Gerald Finzi of her earlier study of the composer, published in 1955. In the completely new *Elgar the Music Maker* she harvests five decades of thoughts about his music, scrutinizing the biographical details that have since been discovered and using them to assess the ways in which they affect the compositions. Diana McVeagh explores Elgar's complex personality and his compositional methods, his style and his relationship to his contemporaries, yet it is the music - still played, recorded, loved and discussed as much as ever- that remains her prime focus. Each of Elgar's works is discussed, balancing information and appraisal, from his juvenilia to his unfinished Third Symphony. Diana McVeagh provides a compelling and accessible companion to the music of one of England's greatest composers. Musicians, scholars and CD collectors alike will find much to enjoy in *Elgar the Music Maker*. Diana McVeagh is the author of the highly acclaimed *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* [2005]; of the entries on Elgar and Finzi for *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* [1980, 2001]; and of the Finzi entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [2004].

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Customer Reviews

When I started to explore Elgar's music in the 1970s, Diana McVeagh's earlier book about him helped to light the way, so I was keenly interested to see what she would have to say now. I am happy to say that this book is a marvel of perceptive listening. McVeagh covers the full course of Elgar's musical development, surveying all of the major works as well as numerous songs and pieces for violin and piano, and she has valuable, new observations about many of them. Despite the book's brevity--it runs to just 240 pages, including two detailed indexes--the author finds room for a thorough appraisal of the works she believes are Elgar's best. For example, she devotes 17 pages to "The Dream of Gerontius," the choral masterpiece that is just beginning to get the attention here that it deserves. She shows that many of the hallmarks of Elgar's musical idiom appeared early. In the fervent Romance for violin and piano, written when he was just 21, McVeagh hears a foreshadowing of both "King Olaf" and the Violin Concerto. She also uncovers overlooked gems by the mature composer, such as "The Herald," a memorable part song for male voices of 1925. With its focus firmly on the music, this book is the perfect complement to the biographies by Robert Anderson, Michael Kennedy and Jerrold Northrop Moore. McVeagh's study unfolds chronologically, and she describes the main events of Elgar's life, but her chief biographical concern is in the way the contradictory aspects of his personality shaped his music. "The pull between outward certainty and inward despondency is what makes his mature music endlessly fascinating and rewarding ... The great achievement of his music is how he integrated the uncertainties within it." If you have just heard the Enigma Variations and want to know more about Elgar, this is an ideal introduction. If, like me, you have been listening to his music for years, you will enjoy the fresh perspectives these pages offer on your favorite works. Either way, I think you will find McVeagh's book delightful.

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