

ENIGMA

7.30PM, Thursday 27 March
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)
orch. **Hans Sitt** (1850-1922)

Norwegian Dances (1881)

- I. *Allegro marcato*
- II. *Allegretto tranquillo e grazioso*
- III. *Allegro moderato alla marcia*
- IV. *Allegro molto*

DURATION: c.18'

Grieg's *Norwegian Dances* have a hint of Scottish ancestry, just like Grieg himself. 160 years before Grieg's great-grandfather set foot in Norway, the Scottish invasion of 1612 was routed, with their piping tune 'Sinclair's March' among the victors' spoils. This march opens Grieg's set while the remaining dances showcase the *halling*, an athletic male dance which encouraged competitive acrobatic display — not dissimilar in spirit to contemporary breakdancing battles — with distinctive moves including a roll over the head and a spinning kick to dislodge a hat held high on stick.

Grieg's arrangements for piano duet, later orchestrated by Czech composer Hans Sitt, focus more on his harmonisations and development of melodic material than on the dance form: "the realm of harmony has always been my dream world... I have found that the obscure depth in our folk music has its foundation in its unrealised harmonic possibilities. In my arrangements... I have tried to give expression to my feelings of the hidden harmonies in our folk melodies."

James MacMillan (1959-)
Concerto for Orchestra 'Ghosts' (2024, NZ premiere)

DURATION: c.25'

Famed for his percussion concerto *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, which has been performed around the world over 500 times over, Scottish composer James MacMillan looks to an eclectic musical history in his *Concerto for Orchestra*.

"The music seems to be haunted by other, earlier musical spirits and memories," he writes. These 'hauntings' feature a variety of characters, from Scottish traditional music to his teenage children's dance music, Beethoven's 'Ghost' trio, Debussy's trio for flute, harp and celeste, and an Eastern European hymn.

Throughout four interlocking sections, Macmillan displays his mastery of the orchestra — each instrument has a moment in the spotlight, whether alone or in duos (such as the trombone duo that opens the work), trios (which form a crucial part of the third section) or in larger chamber groupings.

Despite the title, audiences should expect more than just the eerie — acclaimed at its UK premiere in September 2024 as an 'ebullient romp', Macmillan's musical homage is crafted to showcase not just his musical memories but also the bravura of orchestral forces.

Co-commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra.

INTERVAL

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Enigma Variations (1899)

Theme. *Andante* (no break into Var I)

- I. "C.A.E." *L'istesso tempo*
- II. "H.D.S.-P." *Allegro*
- III. "R.B.T." *Allegretto*
- IV. "W.M.B." *Allegro di molto*
- V. "R.P.A." *Moderato*
(no break into Var VI)
- VI. "Ysobel" *Andantino*
- VII. "Troyte" *Presto*
- VIII. "W.N." *Allegretto*
(no break into Variation IX)
- IX. "Nimrod" *Adagio*
- X. "Dorabella" *Intermezzo: Allegretto*
- XI. "G.R.S." *Allegro di molto*
- XII. "B.G.N." *Andante*
(no break into Var XIII)
- XIII. "***" *Romanza: Moderato*
- XIV. "E.D.U." *Finale: Allegro Presto*

DURATION: c.36'

"Begun in a spirit of humour and continued in deep seriousness," Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations* arose from an afternoon improvising at the piano. Alice Elgar, Edward's wife, commented on a particularly good tune that had emerged and Elgar then proceeded to improvise on this tune in the manner he thought several of their friends would, "if they were asses enough to compose". These "friends pictured within" are notated primarily by their initials or by other cryptic comments, however the true enigma continues to remain elusive: "The Enigma I will not explain," wrote Elgar. "Its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed... through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes', but is not played."

The music that follows the theme is a vivid series of portraits:

C.A.E. [*Caroline Alice Elgar*] Elgar's wife, whom he portrayed here as a "romantic and delicate" inspiration.

H.D.S.-P. [*Hew David Steuart-Powell*] chamber music partner of Elgar's; his characteristic warmup run over the keys features in this variation.

R.B.T. [*Richard Baxter Townshend*] is captured by the sound of his voice, a deep bass flying off into soprano timbre when he became excited.

W.M.B. [*William Meath Baker*] a country squire pictured in the frantic rush to leave, concluding with a doorslam.

R.P.A. [*Richard Penrose Arnold*] a generally serious friend, whose occasional whimsical and witty remarks are represented by playful woodwind interjections.

Ysobel [*Isabel Fitton*] Elgar's viola student. Her variation features a viola solo based on a technical string crossing exercise.

Programme Notes cont.

Troyte [*Troyte Griffith*] a powerful melody and frenzied string passages combine to portray the chaos of this meticulous architect's attempts at learning piano from Elgar.

W.N. [*Winifred Norbury*] Elgar was inspired by Norbury's 18th century house; her variation imagines a sedate drawing room scene.

Nimrod [*A. J. Jaeger*] Elgar's publisher, advisor, critic and friend. Jaeger means 'Hunter' in German and Nimrod is a Biblical reference to 'a mighty hunter'. The variation recalls a discussion he and Elgar shared on the slow movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No.8 'Pathétique'.

Intermezzo: Dorabella [*Dora Penny*] The dance-like nature of the variation evokes Dora's habit of spontaneous dance response to music, as well as her characteristic stutter.

G.R.S. [*George Robertson Sinclair*] a friend who challenged Elgar to set to music the sight of local bulldog Dan tumbling down a bank into the river, paddling around to find a landing place and then shaking dry.

B.G.N. [*Basil G. Nevinson*] cellist and chamber music colleague. The variation highlights an expressive solo cello.

Romanza: *** The identity of this variation's dedicatee remains a mystery. One of the strongest candidates is *Lady Mary Lygon* who was on a voyage at the time. Rumbling timpani evoke an ocean liner's engines and the clarinet quotes from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*.

Finale: E.D.U. This final variation takes Alice's nickname for the composer, and prominently features Alice and Jaeger's variations signifying their importance in Elgar's life.

COPYRIGHT © AMBER READ 2025

Music for this concert has been supported by Charline Hamilton Baker