

Petroc Trelawny explores Elgar's 'Englishness'

This is Worcester, cathedral city and county town. Lower Broadheath where Elgar was born is about three miles from here; this is the very heart of Elgar country. "Music is all around here," he once said, "it's in the air", and it is very difficult to disassociate Elgar's music with this particular part of rural England. But why does Elgar's music sound to us so quintessentially English? What was it about Elgar's upbringing and the society in which he came of age that so coloured his musical output? Elgar's "**Land of Hope and Glory**" is a sort of unofficial national anthem, a key part of the Last Night of the Proms each year. Grander works like the "**Enigma Variations**" and the haunting "**Cello Concerto**" have touched generations of audiences at concert halls up and down the country. Elgar led the way out of a fallow period of British music making, seen by many as a saviour of classical music in these islands, towering above his domestic contemporaries. He was also a great figure of the Edwardian establishment and the British Empire with works like his "**Coronation Ode**" and his great masque, "**Crown of India**". The image that we have of Elgar at the end of his life cast him absolutely as a product of Edwardian England and Empire; the luxuriant handlebar moustache, his fastidious manner of dressing, his rather patrician way of speaking, his knighthood, all of them cast him as an Englishman of a very particular time and period. If you start to scratch the surface of Elgar, very quickly you find a much more complex personality than the image of himself he liked to convey. Yes he grew up here in Worcester, yes he was self-taught, but there's something very cosmopolitan even international about his music and his outlook. No wonder his repertoire is still hugely popular in concert halls around the world today.