



ENGLISH CELLO WORKS

BRIDGE
ELGAR
IRELAND

Andreas Brantelid

Bengt Forsberg

The Royal Danish Orchestra

Thomas Søndergård



English Cello Works

Frank Bridge (1879–1941) • Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934) • John Ireland (1879–1962)

The *Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85*, by Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934) was written mainly during the summer of 1919 at Brinkwells, a cottage near Fittleworth, Sussex. The composer conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in the first performance at Queen's Hall, London, on 27 October 1919, with Felix Salmond as soloist. Due to inadequate rehearsal time, the premiere was not a success, but the piece was subsequently taken up by Beatrice Harrison, who gave the first broadcast performance in 1924 under Elgar's direction. Following this broadcast, the concerto soon came to be recognised as one of the finest examples of the medium and has enjoyed unflagging popularity among musicians and listeners ever since.

The work begins unconventionally with a grand flourish of splayed chords from the soloist alone. This noble opening idea is not the first movement's principal theme, but a 'motto' that recurs at various critical junctures as the piece unfolds. In due course, the violas introduce the movement's main subject, a wandering, numbed, world-weary theme, in moderate tempo, which is taken up by cello and orchestra in turn. A pastoral-sounding central section, introduced by clarinet and cello in dialogue does nothing to break the autumnal mood. As the movement softly ends, there is a *pizzicato* reference to the cello's 'motto'.

After a thoughtful, hesitant assessment of its main theme by the cellist, the fleet-footed second movement is unleashed. Unsettled and nervous, it is a reminder that, for all Elgar's outward self-confidence, he was sensitive, vulnerable and highly strung. This brilliant, haunted *scherzo* is dominated by the rapid bowing of the cello's scudding semiquavers. A lyrical, halting secondary idea attempts to break through, but is never developed sufficiently to deflect the cello from its bustling *moto perpetuo*.

The beautiful, poignant slow movement is founded upon the expansive opening theme issued by the cello, which plays virtually without pause throughout the movement, accompanied only by strings, clarinets, bassoons and horns. Here the solo line assumes the character of a human voice, its eloquent utterances choked, broken and punctuated by sighs. This profound lament ends with considerable pathos and the music moves without a break into an introductory passage for the finale in which various phrases and thematic fragments are tried out. The cello has a short cadenza, recalling the 'motto'.

Then the finale gets under way, the orchestra giving out the movement's main, march-like theme, which exudes an air of decisiveness and resolve, leavened with bluff humour. A degree of irony is introduced by the pompous, dragging bass lines. Suddenly, the music is brought up short by a slow, deeply felt theme on strings. A passionate, supplicatory idea on cello develops into a restatement of the mournful slow movement theme. The prevailing mood is one of despair and the music appears to be fading away, but, at length, the soloist is moved to give out the work's opening 'motto' one last time before the march-tune cuts in to bring this searching, elusive concerto to a brusque but trenchant close.

Chamber music played a pivotal role in the creative life of John Ireland (1879–1962). His professional career was launched when his *Phantasie Trio* and *Violin Sonata No. 1* won prizes in competitions for new chamber works sponsored by Walter William Cobbett, and his reputation was fully established in 1917 with the first performance of his *Violin Sonata No. 2*.

Another key work in this medium, the *Cello Sonata in G minor* was written in 1923 and premiered the following year on 4 April by the cellist Beatrice Harrison with pianist Evelyn Howard-Jones at the Aeolian Hall, London. The composer himself performed the sonata many times as pianist with several cellists and recorded it with Antoni Sala on the Columbia label in October 1928.

At the outset the cello presents a brooding four-note motif from which much of the rest of the work is derived. A lyrical theme also appears in this introductory passage, providing a satisfying counterpoise to the cello's baleful figure. These two clearly identifiable ideas form the basis of the thematic material of this restless opening *Moderato e sostenuto*. Lying at the heart of the movement is a short, veiled episode marked *tranquillo* and *secreto*: here Ireland quotes from a passage in his 1918 setting of the Aldous Huxley song *The Trellis*, specifically the lines: 'None but the flowers have seen / Our white caresses'. This reference has been interpreted as an allusion to Ireland's affection for Arthur Miller, the son of a Chelsea antiques dealer, with whom he undertook a motoring holiday in Dorset shortly before starting work on the sonata. In the movement's final portion, the music is propelled by a forceful rhythmic element. After a climax is reached, the tension eases, but the terse coda ends with a bold gesture of defiance from both instruments.

The opening bars of the central *Poco largamente* retain some of the previous movement's turbulence, but the music is swiftly becalmed. The piano unfolds a soft, hymn-like melody in E flat to which the cello responds with its own songlike invention. After a brief but ardent climax, a relaxed atmosphere is re-established. At the end of the movement, an unaccompanied ascending cello phrase heralds the arrival of the finale.

This bravura movement restores the key of G minor with a dynamic and assertive leaping idea. The thematic material consists mostly of variants of both subjects of the first movement. A more extended lyrical idea supplies fresh, contrasting music. After a passionate climax the tempo increases, culminating in a majestic closing gesture. According to several writers, a major source of inspiration behind the sonata was the South Downs in West Sussex. The Devil's Jumps, a group of Bronze Age round barrows on Treyford Hill near Uppark, are thought to have been in Ireland's mind, especially in the finale with its upward leaps on the cello and skipping-like piano accompaniment.

Closely argued and combining muscularity with disquiet, the *Cello Sonata* is one of Ireland's finest pieces. His incisive approach to the material does not preclude considerable depth of feeling. Though the score bears no programmatic title or associated literary quotations, there is a vivid, almost cinematic quality to its driving narrative. It has been described evocatively by the writer Jocelyn Brooke (1908–1966) in one of the semi-autobiographical volumes that make up his *Orchid Trilogy* as being 'inextricably associated with winter evenings by the sea: the sunset flaming yellow in the west, the last rainy light gleaming in the puddles on the cliff-paths, and the sullen thudding of the waves on the beach below'.

Frank Bridge (1879–1941) studied violin and composition at the Royal College of Music. His reputation as a gifted string player led to membership as a violist in the Joachim Quartet and he also later joined the English String Quartet. His early works for chamber forces reveal a natural flair for exploiting performers' skills. The *Piano Sonata* (1921–24) marked the beginning of an advanced style in his music, resulting in such great works as the *Piano Trio No. 2* (1929), the *Violin Sonata* (1932) and *String Quartets Nos. 3 and 4* (1926, 1937). Bridge was also highly regarded as a teacher, though Benjamin Britten was his only composition pupil.

Bridge's *Cello Sonata in D minor* was begun in 1913, but not completed until 1917. It is probable that the work's protracted gestation contributed to its disparate musical styles, with a comparatively conventional sonata-form first movement succeeded by a more harmonically ambiguous and complex second.

Marked *Allegro ben moderato*, the first movement begins softly with an eloquent, supple cello line, lightly accompanied by the piano, but this principal thematic material soon becomes impassioned and impulsively romantic. Introduced by the piano, the warmly lyrical second theme has a Gallic elegance. The movement arrives at a stirring climax, followed by a hushed echo which casts a shadow across the final bars.

The second movement begins *Adagio ma non troppo*, with a gently melancholic theme in the piano, eventually taken up by the cello. An assortment of other, broadly related, ideas appear in succession, including a tender, pastoral-sounding tune in the vein of an English folk ballad. After a fiery *scherzo*-like central episode, the slow music returns with the pastoral melody, together with material from the movement's opening section. Following a sturdy climax, the extended coda recalls the first movement's initial theme, now blazingly defiant, to end the sonata decisively and with resolve.

The sonata was premiered at Wigmore Hall, London, on 13 July 1917 by the cellist Felix Salmond, who subsequently played the work in Europe and America. Bridge always looked fondly upon the *Cello Sonata*, which has proved to be among his most popular chamber pieces.

Elgar wrote *Liebesgruß* ('Love's Greeting') in 1888 as an engagement present for his piano student Caroline Alice Roberts. The publishers Schott issued it the following year as *Salut d'amour* in versions for violin and piano, piano solo, cello and piano, and for small orchestra. Widely performed and well-loved in all its various arrangements, this charming miniature was one of Elgar's earliest creative successes.

Paul Conway

Andreas Brantelid



Andreas Brantelid was born in Copenhagen in 1987 to Swedish/Danish parents. After receiving early tuition from his father, he made his debut as a soloist at the age of 14 with the Royal Danish Orchestra. Today, Brantelid is one of the most sought-after Scandinavian artists, winning worldwide critical acclaim for his thought-provoking interpretations, uniquely colourful sound and engaging personality. Brantelid has previously released albums on labels such as Proprius, EMI and BIS, with acclaimed releases on Naxos including *Russian Tales* (8.573985) and *Times of Transition* (8.574365). Brantelid plays the 1707 'Boni-Hegar' Stradivarius, which has been made available to him by the generous support of Norwegian art collector Christen Sveaas.

Bengt Forsberg



Photo: Eli

Pianist Bengt Forsberg (b. 1952) is among the most highly regarded Swedish musicians of today. Originally educated as an organist, he later switched to the piano and has been known as both soloist and recitalist, with his exceptionally wide repertoire including lesser-known and unjustly neglected composers. Composers whose works he has recorded and performed include Alkan, Sorabji, Saint-Saëns, Koechlin, Boëllmann, Medtner and Korngold, among others. Renowned for his work in the field of chamber music, regular partners include Andreas Brantelid, Nils-Erik Sparf and Ellen Nisbeth. His longstanding collaboration with the mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter has been particularly successful, and has resulted in many highly acclaimed recordings.

The Royal Danish Orchestra

Photo: Camilla Winther

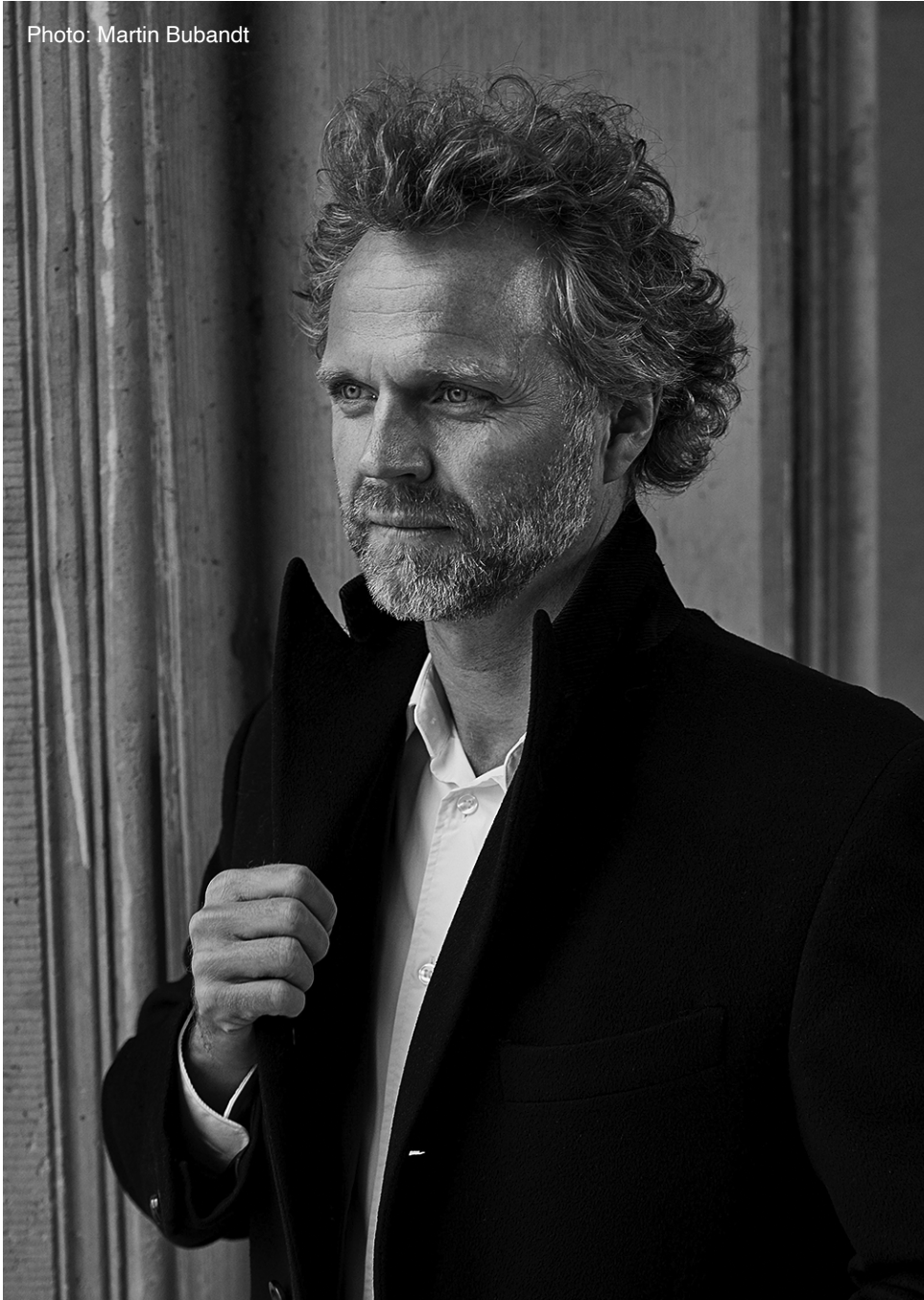


In 2023, The Royal Danish Orchestra marked its 575th anniversary, making it the oldest orchestra of its kind in the world, with a history dating back to 1448. Naturally, such a legacy has given rise to many traditions. Since its founding, each musician has been assigned a number, securing their place in the orchestra's historical line. Among the notable figures who once played in the orchestra are John Dowland (No. 140), Heinrich Schütz (No. 259) and Carl Nielsen (No. 647). Over the centuries, The Royal Danish Orchestra has worked with many of the most prominent conductors and composers, including Hans Knappertsbusch, Erich Kleiber, Bruno Walter, Richard Strauss, Pierre Monteux, Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, Leopold Stokowski, Eugene Ormandy, Rafael Kubelík, Sir John Barbirolli, Sir Georg Solti, Leonard Bernstein, Pierre Boulez, Kirill Petrenko, Sergiu Celibidache, Daniel Barenboim, Sir Simon Rattle, Mariss Jansons, Marek Janowski, Hartmut Haenchen, Mikhail Jurowski, Bertrand de Billy and Alexander Vedernikov. The Italian conductor Paolo Carignani also served as principal guest conductor from 2021 to 2024. The orchestra continues to attract leading international conductors such as Sir Antonio Pappano and Marc Minkowski. From 2024 to 2029, the French conductor Marie Jacquot will hold the position of principal conductor. The Royal Danish Orchestra performs for the theatre's opera and ballet productions and presents symphonic concerts on the main stage of The Royal Danish Opera House. Renowned above all for its string sound, the orchestra also performs on an outstanding collection of instruments crafted by the great Italian masters.

www.kglteater.dk/en/about-us/arts/the-royal-danish-orchestra

Thomas Søndergård

Photo: Martin Bubandt



Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård has been music director of the Minnesota Orchestra since 2023 and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra since 2018. Between 2012 and 2018 he served as principal conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales after stepping down as principal conductor and musical advisor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra. Søndergård has appeared with some of the world's leading orchestras, including the Berliner Philharmoniker, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, and the London and Chicago Symphony Orchestras. Following his acclaimed debut for The Royal Danish Opera (Poul Ruders' *Kafka's Trial*), he has since returned regularly to conduct a broad range of repertoire. In January 2022, Søndergård was decorated with a Royal Order of Chivalry – the Order of Dannebrog ('Ridder af Dannebrogordenen') by Her Majesty Margrethe II, the Queen of Denmark. In January 2023 he received the Carl Nielsen Foundation Honorary Award.

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Edward Elgar's *Cello Concerto in E minor* is a cornerstone of the cello repertoire, a product of the composer's summer seclusion in the English countryside in 1919. A masterpiece of moods, it encompasses the world-weary and poignant but also the quicksilver and passionate. Two other cello works written at around the same time proved pivotal in their composers' careers. John Ireland's *Cello Sonata in G minor* fuses brooding, terse muscularity with lyricism and bravura, while Frank Bridge's two-movement *Cello Sonata in D minor* reflects pre-War Romanticism coupled with wartime melancholy and defiance.

ENGLISH CELLO WORKS

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

**Cello Concerto in E minor,
Op. 85 (1919)**

27:59

- 1** I. Adagio – Moderato **7:42**
- 2** II. Lento – Allegro molto **4:36**
- 3** III. Adagio **4:24**
- 4** IV. Allegro – Moderato – Allegro, ma non troppo – Poco più lento – Adagio **11:17**

John Ireland (1879–1962)

Cello Sonata in G minor (1923)

20:15

- 5** I. Moderato e sostenuto **9:05**
- 6** II. Poco largamente – Quasi recitativo – **6:07**
- 7** III. Con moto e marcato **5:03**

Frank Bridge (1879–1941)

**Cello Sonata in D minor,
H125 (1913–17)**

23:04

- 8** I. Allegro ben moderato **10:34**
- 9** II. Adagio ma non troppo – Molto allegro e agitato – Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro moderato **12:30**

Sir Edward Elgar

10 Salut d'amour, Op. 12 (1888)

2:44

Andreas Brantelid, Cello • Bengt Forsberg, Piano **5–10**

The Royal Danish Orchestra • Thomas Søndergård **1–4**

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