

Today we are going to talk about three great composers. In my very first email to you (April 6), I mentioned the great Russian composer PETER TCHAIKOWSKY (pronounced 'Chi - cough - ski'), who wrote the 1812 OVERTURE, and on April 15, I told you about MOZART and BEETHOVEN - but that was ages ago, and so it's more than past due time that I tell you about some more composers. So here are three more for you to try out and explore:

ANTON BRUCKNER

This first one is a bit unfair because Bruckner (pronounced 'Brook - ner') isn't a composer that children (even ones as clever as you) can be expected to like - you really have to be very grown up to appreciate (pronounced 'a - pree - she - ate', and meaning 'get something out of in a positive way') his music. But if I don't tell you about him now you may never hear of him, and that would be a real shame because Bruckner is an amazing composer. He is definitely my favourite composer to listen to, and the composer I listen to the most even though he wrote way less music than all the other great composers, and is mainly famous for his NINE SYMPHONIES, where a 'symphony' (pronounced 'sim - fone - ee') is an extended (usually between 30 minutes and an hour) work for the entire orchestra, consisting of four MOVEMENTS - normally, a fast ('ALLEGRO') first movement, a slow ('ADAGIO' - pronounced 'Ad - ah - jeeo') second movement, a dancy ('SCHERZO' - pronounced 'skirt - zo') third movement, and then a fast ('ALLEGRO') concluding movement.



Bruckner wrote some of the greatest symphonies ever written - and his Fifth and Eighth Symphonies are strong contenders for the title of 'greatest symphony ever written'. What makes Bruckner's symphonies so special is that they seem to give us a glimpse of what Heaven is like. But not in the way that Mozart's music does - enabling us to understand what God's love and forgiveness is like, such as in the climax to the MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, where the Count asks his wife the Countess for forgiveness for not being very nice to her: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2yrDWEoCpc>

Instead, Bruckner's symphonies allow us to experience (in a very small amount) God's sheer, overwhelming power - the feeling that me, you, everyone and everything is held in His Hands, and everything will be made right in those Hands. The point is made by a couple of excellent and very funny violinists on YouTube who go under the name TwoSetViolin, and in this video say what it's like to play various composers' works, including Bruckner: <https://youtu.be/LUS-YreXpZk?t=48>

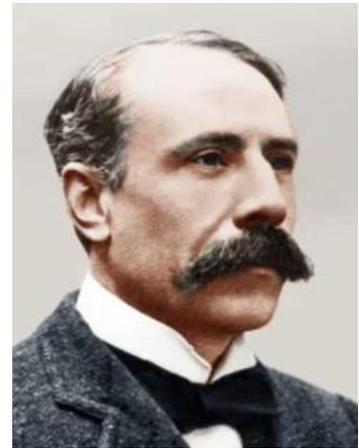
(You can stop it playing at 1.08, unless you want to see what it's like to play other composers' music.) TwoSet Violin say when you play Bruckner, you feel like your house is falling down around your ears. You can experience that for yourself (not the house falling down! - but feeling completely swept away by overwhelming power) by listening to the climax of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, which starts off very quiet and builds, and builds, and builds to make you think that some huge thing is coming out of the Earth and is taking you up to Heaven: <https://youtu.be/1YVdTI21rZQ?t=75>

And even more powerfully, at the end of Bruckner's Fifth Symphony, when a very simple and kind of jerky phrase keeps on being repeated and gradually straightened out until it turns into something really powerful, and then the brass instruments respond to that by blasting out a

hymn of praise to God, while the violins go nuts, and even the conductor can't stop himself from shouting and joining in: <https://youtu.be/CgXBp-oEIR0?t=5107>
(The conductor is the Romanian conductor SERGIU CELIBIDACHE - definitely the best ever conductor of Bruckner, and maybe the best ever conductor of all time. Accept no substitutes!)

EDWARD ELGAR

Bruckner (who died in 1896) was Austrian, just like Mozart - and almost all of the great composers came from Austria or Germany. England, on the other hand, was known in Austria and Germany as being 'DAS LAND OHNE MUSIK' - 'The country (Das Land) without (ohne) music (Musik). No great composers came from England - or if they had, they lived and died hundreds of years ago. But then along came Edward Elgar, who was born in 1857 and died in 1934, at the age of 77.



Elgar was unquestionably a great composer. Three pieces of music that he wrote stand out in particular as pieces of music that even children could appreciate. The first is his POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE MARCHES - some very patriotic music that he wrote in the years after QUEEN VICTORIA died (in 1901), and when the BRITISH EMPIRE seemed to be at its greatest strength and power. This is where we get the tune for 'LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY' from, which is always played on the last night of the annual festival of classical music (called 'THE PROMS' (because people could walk about, or promenade, while the music was playing)) held at the ROYAL ALBERT HALL. Some people are very uncomfortable about all the flag waving and 'Britain is best' feelings that this sort of music induces (personally I object much more to the people bending their knees in time with the music, which makes them look ridiculous), but that just goes to show how brilliantly powerful it is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2-43p3GVTQ>

Then there are Elgar's ENIGMA VARIATIONS, which were written in 1899. Now - an 'enigma' is a mystery, and the mystery around the Enigma Variations is this. It's pretty standard for composers to write music that amounts to a set of variations on some initial theme or tune. So famous pieces of music that do this are the GOLDBERG VARIATIONS, by JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH, which are 30 variations on this initial tune:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_TSmgxIXno

and RACHMANINOV's RHAPSODY (pronounced 'Rack - man - in - off's rap - sod - ee') ON A THEME BY PAGANINI, which consists in 24 variations on this very famous tune by the violinist Paganini: https://youtu.be/gpnIrE7_1YA?t=8

(You can switch it off at 0.19 - incidentally, you see the violinist HILARY HAHN, who is probably the greatest violinist in the world today? BIG fan of TwoSetViolin and has appeared on their channel and in concert with them!)

The Enigma Variations are 14 variations on the theme played at the start - and each variation is a kind of musical picture of one of Elgar's friends. But the mystery isn't figuring out which friend goes with which piece of music and why, but because Elgar said that the 14 variations were ALSO variations on ANOTHER tune, which is a tune everyone would know but is buried so deep within the music of the Enigma Variations that no one will be able to guess what the tune is. How clever do you have to be to do something like that? But anyway, the

Enigma Variations give us this piece of music called 'NIMROD'. The piece is called 'Nimrod' because Nimrod was a king in the Bible who was a hunter, and Elgar had a German friend called Jaeger in German 'Jaeger' means 'hunter'. Although this piece of music is a portrait of a German friend of Elgar's, it is actually one of the loveliest and most English-sounding pieces of music in history:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUgoBb8m1eE>

Finally, there is Elgar's CELLO CONCERTO, which was written after the end of WORLD WAR I, in 1919. The first movement of the Cello Concerto in particular seems to reflect horror and sadness at how Britain had been ripped apart and deprived of so many of its sons by the world war. The music became very famous in the 1960s when a brilliant cellist (pronounced 'chell - ist') called JACQUELINE DU PRE (pronounced 'Pray') started performing it. She ended up getting married to DANIEL BARENBOIM - the man who, in the above clips from YouTube, played the initial theme for the Goldberg Variations, and conducted Nimrod. Sadly Jacqueline du Pre fell ill while she was still very young and died. But she is still regarded as the greatest ever player of the Elgar Cello Concerto, and you should definitely check out this clip of the first couple of minutes of Jacqueline du Pre playing Elgar's Cello Concerto and being conducted by her husband:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OH0jUQTCCQI>

If you like what you hear, you can easily find the full version on YouTube.

ARVO PÄRT

Both Bruckner and Elgar are long dead, but our third and final great composer, Arvo Pärt (pronounced 'Peart') is still with us. He was born in ESTONIA in 1935, and grew up while that country went through some really tough times, being absorbed into the SOVIET UNION at the end of WORLD WAR II, and only getting its freedom back in 1989, when the Soviet Union collapsed. Perhaps because of those terrible times, Arvo Pärt's music has a very strong, spiritual quality - it is made up of very simple lines of music, which combine together into something really hypnotic. And while we should probably never call anyone 'great' until they are dead, and enough time has elapsed for people to properly judge someone's music, it seems very likely that if anyone who is writing music today is going to end up being called 'great' and join people like Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikowsky, Bruckner, and Elgar and a few dozen others who deserve the title 'great', it's going to be Arvo Pärt. For a sample of his music, try his 1977 'CANTUS IN MEMORIAM BENJAMIN BRITTEN', which means 'Song in memory of Benjamin Britten':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sp2oxWdRMuk>

(Benjamin Britten was another great composer, who was also English like Elgar. If you want to hear something he wrote, check out the end of his 'The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra': <https://youtu.be/4vvhU22uAM?t=930>)

You might also like to listen to Arvo Pärt's 'Summa for Strings', also written in 1977:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzSImWQuHFw&t=125s>

