



# ACCENT



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## Romantic Virtuosity

Three classical music “warhorses” make up tonight’s WSO season opener. Dvorak’s festive Carnival Overture and the virtuosic Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto will exhilarate you, while Elgar’s Enigma Variations are intimate musical vignettes which paint a portrait of the composer’s friendships and elegant artistry.



### **Antonin Leopold Dvorak**

( 8 September, 1841 – 1 May, 1904 )

*Carnival Overture Op. 92*

Scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons and trumpets, English horn, piccolo, three trombones, four horns, harp, percussion and strings

The music of Antonin Dvorak is so often redolent of his native Bohemia, immediately recognizable by its delightful Moravian rhythms and motifs. Dvorak composed the *Carnival Overture* as part of his 1892 triptych, *Nature, Life and Love*. It is the middle section (“*Life*”) of three overtures, bookended by *In Nature’s Realm* (“*Nature*”) and *Othello* (“*Love*”). The music served as Dvorak’s artistic farewell to Prague, as he embarked on a productive three-year sojourn as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Dvorak reprised these overtures as a musical “greeting card” to America at Carnegie Hall on October 21, 1892. The *Carnival Overture* is an example of “programmatic” music, as the composer himself offered this context: “*A lonely traveler reaches town in the evening, where a carnival is already underway. He is delighted by the music, and the boundless joy of the crowd who participate with song and dance.*” The Overture is in A-B-A form, with

two sparkling outer sections, representing the carnival, framing a plaintive English horn interlude, which conjures the lonely traveler.

### **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

( 7 May, 1840 – 6 November, 1893)

*Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D, Op. 35*

*Allegro moderato Canzonetta: Andante*

*Finale: Allegro vivacissimo*

Scored for solo violin and pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, two trumpets, four horns, tympani and strings

Much of Tchaikovsky’s life reads like a Victorian novel, with episodes of high emotion and artistic success, punctuated by bouts of profound sadness. In July 1877, Tchaikovsky entered into an ill-fated marriage with a former piano pupil, Antonina Milukova, which ended in separation barely ten weeks later. Strict regulations regarding divorce in imperial Russia forced them to remain married until Tchaikovsky’s death. Tchaikovsky went into a severe depression and attempted suicide. He had earlier befriended a wealthy Muscovite aristocrat, Nadezhda von Meck (who became his patroness for fourteen years, despite her stipulation that they never meet). To recover from his marital woes, Tchaikovsky traveled around Europe and eventually to von Meck’s estate in Clarens, Switzerland, on the shores of Lake Geneva. There he met with his composition student, Yosif Iotek, who was also a star pupil of the great violinist Joseph Joachim. It was Kotek who gave Tchaikovsky the idea of composing a violin concerto; throughout its creation, Kotek offered the composer technical advice on the instrumental passages. Tchaikovsky wanted Kotek to premiere the work, but the young violinist demurred. Tchaikovsky turned to the eminent violin pedagogue, Leopold Auer, asking him to do the honors, but Auer also refused, dismissing the Concerto as “*too difficult and not suited to the character of the violin.*” A planned



March 1879 concert was canceled, and Tchaikovsky was humiliated.

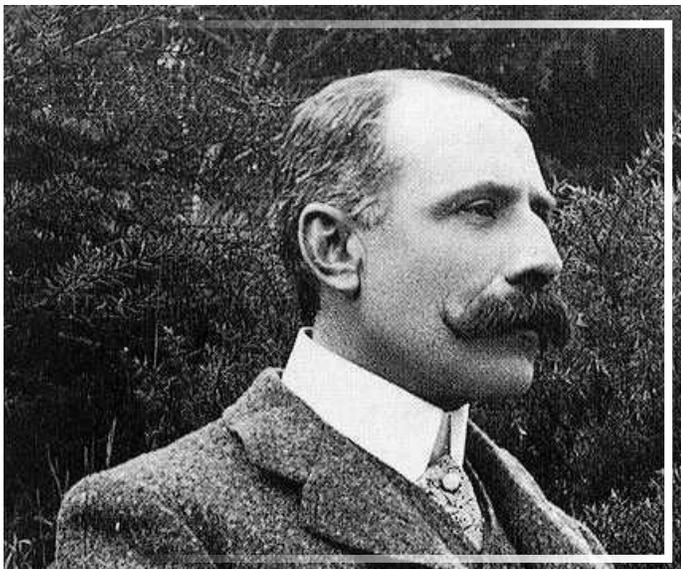
The Concerto finally premiered three years later, on December 4, 1881, in Vienna, with the violinist Adolph Brodsky under the baton of Hans Richter. The acidly opinionated music critic, Eduard Hanslick, gave it a scathing review (Hanslick gave many a new composition a scathing review), calling it “*long and pretentious*.” Auer finally came around to championing the work, performing it throughout Europe, and more importantly, teaching it to his famous pupils, Nathan Milstein, Mischa Elman and Jascha Heifetz, who subsequently made it famous. The Concerto is a brilliant *tour de force*, one of the most difficult ever written for the violin, demanding exceptional technical mastery - double stops, triple stops, wide interval leaps, and rapid pizzicati. It begins in the bright and heroic tonic of D major (two sharps), symphonic in character, with virtuosic violin writing. A lyrical and lushly romantic *Andante* in G major (one sharp) is followed without interruption by a breathtaking, lightning-fast *Finale*, with a Russian folk motif, back in the tonic of D major.

### Sir, Edward William Elgar

(2 June, 1857 - 23 February, 1934)

*Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma Variations) Op. 36*

Scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, contrabassoon, three trumpets, three trombones, four horns, tuba, percussion and strings



Two centuries would pass, after the death of Henry Purcell in 1695, before England would again have a composer of international stature. Edward Elgar was that composer, a musical bridge between the continental European

Romanticism of Brahms and Wagner, and the new schools of Modernism. Elgar is known today principally for his Pomp and Circumstance Marches, a violin concerto, a cello concerto, and these fourteen Variations on an Original Theme, nicknamed the “Enigma” Variations. The composer himself related the story of their genesis, that on the evening of 21 October, 1898, after a long day teaching, he was home at his piano doodling on a melody he had just conjured. His wife liked it immensely. Elgar demonstrated to her how several of their friends might have composed it, crafting fourteen variations. The composer wrote that “*I have sketched a set of Variations on an original theme. The Variations have amused me and I have labeled them with the nicknames of my particular friends.... each variation represents the mood of the person... and I have written what I think they would have written.... if they were foolish enough to compose.*” Premiered in London in 1899 with the conductor Hans Richter, the Enigma Variations soon propelled Elgar to global fame.

What is the “enigma” within the Enigma Variations? Actually, there are two enigmas: the readily decipherable names of the individuals whose acronyms are used in the titles of each variation, and a hidden melody (never explicitly played), whose counterpoint, Elgar wrote, is a “well-known theme repeated throughout the work.” The debate on what this melody might be carries on today, as Elgar took the secret with him to the grave. Two prominent theories are that it derives either from a motif in the *Andante* of Mozart’s *Prague Symphony*, or that it stems from Martin Luther’s *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott* (“A Mighty Fortress is our God”) in Mendelssohn’s *Reformation Symphony*. The most popular of the Variations is “IX: Adagio Nimrod;” its title provides insight into the cleverness of Elgar’s allusions (he was a master cryptologist). Elgar wrote this variation to honor his friend, Augustus Jaeger, a music editor and a major supporter of Elgar’s early forays into music (it was Jaeger who nicknamed the work “Enigma”). The Variation IX motif refers to their discussions of Beethoven’s piano sonatas (you can hear a wisp of the *Pathétique* sonata in this Variation). The reference to Nimrod derives from the eponymous Old Testament figure, “*a mighty hunter before the Lord*” (the German word for “hunter” is “*Jäger*”). The Nimrod Variation is often performed as a stand-alone on ceremonial occasions.

Vincent P. de Luise M.D., Cultural Ambassador, WSO;  
Assistant Professor, Yale University School of Medicine