



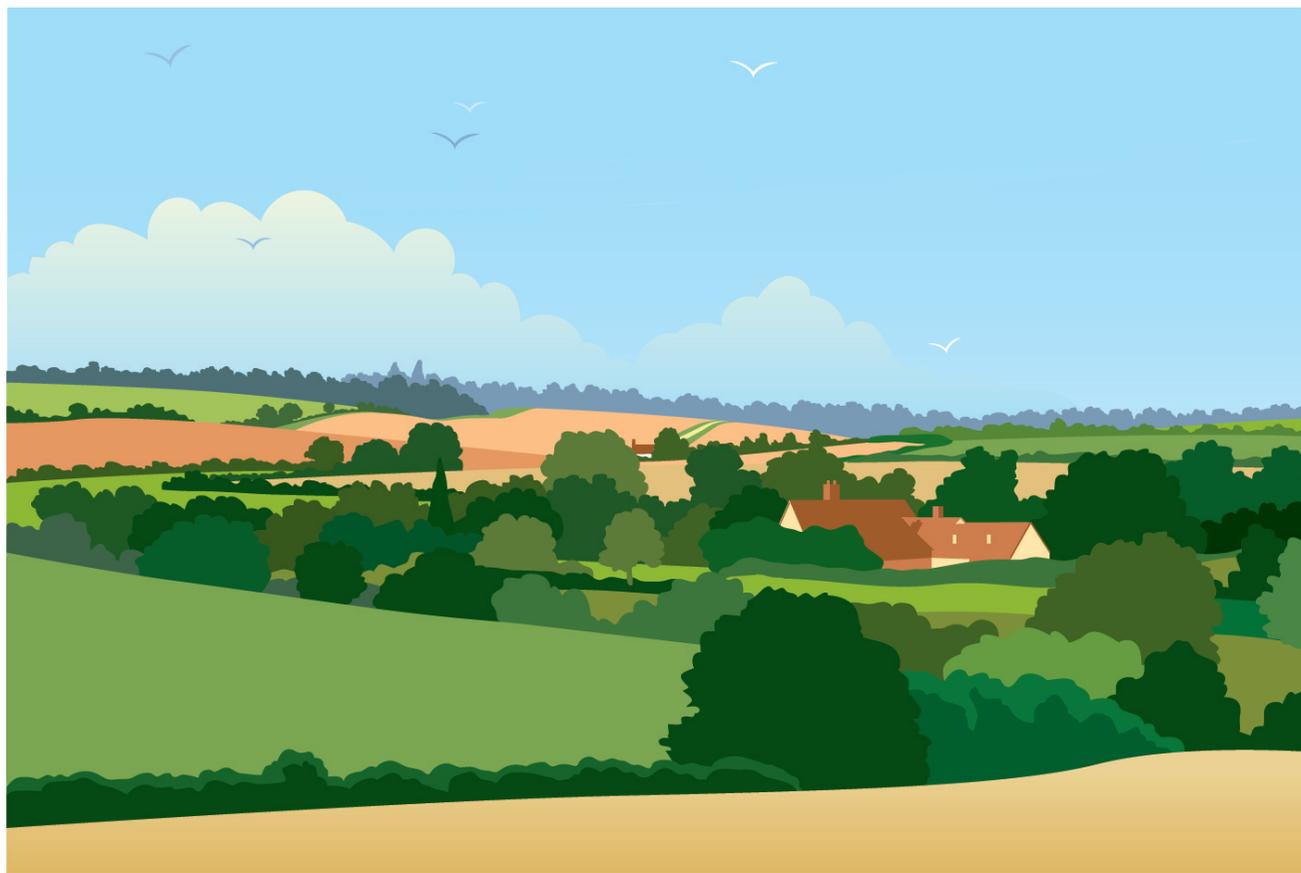
# BRITISH LIGHT MUSIC

Edward  
**GERMAN**

## Merrie England Suite

Nell Gwyn • Gipsy Suite • Romeo and Juliet

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra • Adrian Leaper



Edward  
**GERMAN**  
(1862–1936)

<b>Nell Gwyn – Overture and Three Dances</b> (1900)	<b>17:27</b>
1 Overture	7:48
2 Country Dance	3:34
3 Pastoral Dance	3:12
4 Merrymakers' Dance	2:43
<b>Gipsy Suite</b> (Four characteristic dances) (c. 1889–92)	<b>14:16</b>
5 No. 1. Valse Melancolique 'Lonely Life'	3:06
6 No. 2. Allegro di Bravura 'The Dance'	2:32
7 No. 3. Menuetto 'Love Duet'	4:26
8 No. 4. Tarantella 'The Revel'	4:06
<b>Three Dances from the music to Shakespeare's <i>Henry VIII</i></b> (1891)	<b>8:17</b>
9 No. 1. Morris Dance	2:21
10 No. 2. Shepherds' Dance	3:50
11 No. 3. Torch Dance	2:01
12 <b>The Tempter – Berceuse</b> (c. 1893)	<b>2:58</b>
<b>Romeo and Juliet</b> (incidental music) (1895)	<b>14:01</b>
13 Pavane	3:33
14 Nocturne	4:50
15 Pastorale	5:33
16 <b>Tom Jones – Act III: For Tonight 'Sophia's Waltz-Song'</b> (1906/07) (arr. Ernest Tomlinson, 1924–2015)	<b>3:02</b>
<b>Merrie England Suite</b> (1902, arr. 1908)	<b>6:58</b>
17 No. 1. Hornpipe	1:42
18 No. 2. Minuet	2:00
19 No. 3. Rustic Dance	1:53
20 No. 4. Jig	1:19

## Edward German (1862–1936)

### British Light Music • 10

‘There is only one man to follow me who has genius, and that is Edward German.’ Thus did Sir Arthur Sullivan, in the last years of his life, acknowledge the stature of the modest but highly talented composer German Edward Jones, born on 17 February 1862 in the family room at the front of the Corn Market Inn, now known as the Old Town Hall Vaults, on St Mary’s Street in the Shropshire market town of Whitchurch. The somewhat unusual first name may well have been a variation of the slightly more common Welsh nomenclature of Garmon, although it seems that the family always referred to the lad as Jim! His father, John David Jones, besides being owner of the Inn, was also honorary organist and choirmaster at the local Congregational church and his mother, Elizabeth (née Cox), while not a practising musician, had a great love of all things musical and undoubtedly took pains to foster the same feelings in her son. Edward was the second of five children, all of whom displayed musical ability, and he grew up in a calm, well-ordered household amidst pleasant, pastoral surroundings.

Although the church organ, at which he occasionally deputised for his father, and the domestic piano were the first instruments to attract the young boy’s artistic interest, it was, in fact, the local brass band that most appealed to him. He was not much more than five when he would slip out of the house to hear the stirring tunes and marching rhythms before returning home to attempt to repeat these musical experiences at the piano. He even formed a small band among his friends, consisting of toy instruments and primitive percussion.

His theatrical instincts, later to come to splendid maturity in works such as *Merrie England* and *Tom Jones*, also began to manifest themselves early on. A travelling theatre inspired him to build his own miniature stage, complete with puppets, costumes and scenery while, on another occasion, he was to be found imitating a well-known entertainer of the time, devising his own comic sketches and even writing songs, both words and music.

His competence as a keyboard player steadily improved, thanks in no small measure to the efforts of a local teacher but, increasingly, his sympathies moved more towards the violin. He eventually persuaded his parents to buy him one and immediately set about mastering it by himself. Before he was 15, he had progressed to the stage where he was able to form, and perform in, a small ensemble made up of friends and family which gave recitals in the local neighbourhood. His musical interests and talents were further enhanced while he was boarding at Bridge House School in Chester but his education, both musical and general, then suffered a severe set-back when he contracted a serious illness. The 16-year-old boy was forced to return home to recuperate and, for a while, his future looked uncertain. But this did not stop him studying in private and, day after day, he devoted himself to reading and copying scores as well as undertaking a little composition.

His parents, while fully aware of this considerable artistic talent, nonetheless deemed that a career in another sphere would be more beneficial. The boy had also shown engineering ability and so this was the area that was felt to be most promising. An opportunity to become an apprentice with Laird Shipbuilders at Birkenhead presented itself and German was sent there for an interview. But this got nowhere, the company deciding that the applicant, although barely past his mid-teens, was too old to begin an apprenticeship!

This unexpected turn of events was duly resolved by the conductor of the Whitchurch Choral Society, Walter Cecil Hay. Hay had known German for some time as the boy had sung in his choir, and he had been especially impressed by the youngster’s remarkable self-taught mastery of the violin. He offered to teach the budding composer and helped German to persuade his parents to accept the idea. As a result, German left home in the first days of 1880 to go to study with Hay in Shrewsbury with the intention of preparing himself for entry to the Royal Academy of Music in London. Hay duly worked his pupil hard for nine months but German willingly responded to the challenge and made excellent progress as an all-round musician. With what proved to be remarkable foresight, the older man on one occasion confided to his daughter that, in his opinion, his protégé ‘would make a second Sullivan’. Not surprisingly, the youngster passed the Academy’s entrance examinations with ease and, in September 1880, embarked on a course of study at that distinguished institution.

To begin with, his principal studies concentrated on the organ (under Charles Steggall), with the violin being placed second in importance, but it was not long before his exceptional promise on the latter instrument brought about a change of priorities, and he was placed in the care of Alfred Burnett. The end of his first year saw his winning a major prize as the best violin student and the

future looked bright although, from time to time, he seemed to suffer from depression and harboured doubts that he would be able to survive the pressures of the course. But survive it he did, winning certificates and prizes along the way and making steady progress as a violinist, both in a solo capacity and as a chamber music player, culminating in his appointment as sub-professor of the instrument in 1884.

His earliest original works from this period include some piano pieces, a few miniatures for violin and piano, ballads, partsongs, some hymn tunes and chants, and a pizzicato for strings entitled *The Guitar*, his official 'first opus', performed at an Academy concert in London's St James's Hall in June 1883. He was still writing and performing as German Edward Jones but around this time, he changed his nomenclature, initially to J.E. German before finally adopting the name by which we now know him. Why he made the alteration is not entirely clear but the existence of another student called Edward Jones may have had some bearing. 1883 also saw his first orchestral piece, a *Bolero* for violin which had begun life shortly before in a version with piano accompaniment. Notwithstanding that this first enterprise with larger instrumental forces was little more, therefore, than a scoring exercise, German was greatly encouraged by his achievement and it served to strengthen his determination to become a serious composer. One movement of a piano sonata led on to his first major attempt at a large-scale work, a setting of the *Te Deum* for soloists, chorus and organ which, to his delight, won him the coveted Charles Lucas Medal in 1885. This raised his confidence even higher and so it was that he commenced work on a symphony. It took him about a year to compose but, when it was finally performed at St James's Hall in 1887, he was rewarded with the most enthusiastic response from the audience.

The previous year had also seen the completion and performance of another large-scale undertaking – a two act operetta (or 'opera de salon', as German dubbed it) called *The Two Poets* (later completely re-drafted as *The Rival Poets*). Written for just six soloists and two-piano accompaniment, it took shape over a three-year period, most of the writing taking place during holiday times. Though hardly a masterpiece, it provided impressive evidence of the young composer's natural dramatic flair that was to yield such splendid results in later years.

Not until the summer of 1887 did German finally leave the Academy. By now, he had established a fine reputation as a violinist which, in addition to his duties as sub-professor, mentioned earlier, had also led to an appointment as professor at Wimbledon School. During his tenure at this educational establishment, he wrote a *March* and *Chorus* for a planned production by one of his teaching colleagues of Sophocles' *Antigone* but, in the event, the cast, along with most of the school's pupils, were laid low with a nasty outbreak of sickness, and the play was quietly shelved. He also played from time to time in London orchestras, and could occasionally be found in the pit at the Savoy Theatre performing Gilbert and Sullivan. As a composer, in addition to the pieces just mentioned, he was perfecting the art of songwriting and began to see a number of his ballads appear in print. As yet, there was no possibility of his earning a living solely by composition, but his hopes continued to remain on a high level. In 1888, an actress friend arranged a commission for him to set some words by W.S. Gilbert for her to sing in one of the great writer's plays being performed at the Savoy. The result pleased Gilbert – and Sir Arthur Sullivan, who happened to hear it.

But German's golden opportunity arose as the outcome of a simple, seemingly casual enquiry directed at him in passing one autumn afternoon later that year by one of the Academy's professors, Alberto Randegger. 'Can you conduct?' was the innocuous question and, on answering yes, German found himself, in no time at all, appointed musical director of the Globe Theatre in London, under the new management of the American actor, Richard Mansfield. Immediately, he set about raising artistic standards, moulding the 28-piece orchestra into a formidable musical unit and achieving quite extraordinary results in a remarkably short space of time. He entered the New Year with his first big commission from the theatre – to provide the music for a new production of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. There was limited time, and German was already bearing a heavy workload, but he completed the score quite quickly and, as the curtain fell on the first performance on 16 March 1889, it was clear to all that a major musical talent had emerged on the theatrical scene. At the age of 27, Edward German had, indeed, 'arrived'.

By the end of the seven-month run, so many people had seen – and heard – the play that German's reputation had spread far and wide. He declined to join Mansfield on an American tour of the play and turned his attention instead to making his name as an orchestral writer. He had some success, finding a champion in the renowned conductor Sir August Manns, who performed his works, including the *Richard III Overture*, the *First Symphony* and, later, the *Gipsy Suite* at the Crystal Palace. He still had to supplement his income with teaching while planning more compositions, such as another symphony which, he hoped, would make him more self-sufficient. It was, however, at the instigation of his sister Rachel that he eventually found himself back in the theatre. It was announced

that Henry Irving intended to mount a production of *Henry VIII* at the Lyceum Theatre and she suggested to her ever-modest brother that he should offer to provide the score. Hesitant at first, German nonetheless wrote to Irving and was openly surprised to receive an invitation to meet the great actor. He was even more astounded at the subsequent interview to learn that Irving knew and liked the composer's *Richard III* music and he quite specifically wanted him to compose the score for *Henry VIII*. Irving and his manager – Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula*, as it happened – proposed an exceptionally generous fee and the delighted German set to work immediately, determined to create something out of the ordinary which would clinch, once and for all, his reputation as a composer of the very highest order.

The first night was not scheduled for another year or so and, therefore, German was not obliged to work at the same pressure as he had done for *Richard III*. Even so, little more than an orchestral *Marche Solennelle* and an *Overture on German Airs*, plus a few songs occupied his attention throughout 1891 as he applied himself steadily to the task in hand, liaising closely with Irving and resisting the latter's request to incorporate some traditional and period music into the score. Every note, while designed to reflect the spirit of the play and its era, was to be wholly original. And when the production finally opened in 1892, German's handiwork was lavishly praised. It did not take long for a set of *Three Dances* to become a concert favourite in its own right and, entering the repertoires of a number of orchestras, helped to further enhance its composer's name.

Later that year, German conducted his *Richard III Overture* at the Leeds Festival and, as he took his bow, was publicly congratulated by Sir Arthur Sullivan who came on stage to shake his hand. 1893 saw the first performance, and enthusiastic reception, of his *Second Symphony*, named after the city for which it was written, Norwich. The same year also witnessed a request from another great thespian, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, for some music to accompany a production at London's Haymarket Theatre of *The Tempter* by Henry Arthur Jones, a commission that, once more, was accomplished with singular success.

The 1890s saw a steady stream of new compositions, both for the theatre and outside it. His dramatic talents produced music for three more Shakespearean plays between 1895 and 1898 (*Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*) and one non-Shakespearean production in 1900. In addition to the pieces already mentioned, the concert hall witnessed substantial new works in the forms of the *Leeds Suite* in 1895 (which won yet more public approval from Sullivan and whose second movement, the *Valse gracieuse*, became especially popular), *English Fantasia – In Commemoration* and the symphonic poem *Hamlet* in 1897, the idea for the latter having been implanted by an abortive commission to provide incidental music for a planned production of the play earlier that year, and the impressive symphonic suite *The Seasons* in 1899. And there was still the occasional song or two – more than a dozen actually.

In January 1896, German moved to a house in a quiet street in Maida Vale, north west London, and this was to be his home for the next quarter century or so. Life, however, was not unmitigated sweetness and success. His music for another Henry Arthur Jones play, *Michael and his Lost Angel*, was doomed to oblivion when the production faded after just a week. It is characteristic of the composer's pleasant and generous nature that he was prepared to share the promotor's losses by offering to return his fee for the commission. 1897 brought him ill health and news of the death of his father. But he overcame all these setbacks and ended the century with both his reputation and his hopes at an encouraging level.

His fortunes were, indeed, set to rise even higher with the turn of the century. The non-Shakespearean production mentioned earlier was Anthony Hope and Edward Rose's *English Nell*, starring Marie Tempest, and it was, in fact, at the famous actress' insistence that German was asked to provide the music. It was this score that contained the subsequently hugely popular *Nell Gwyn Dances*. And then, within just a few months of the premiere of *English Nell*, came the announcement that Sir Arthur Sullivan had died at the age of 58, leaving behind him an unfinished operetta, *The Emerald Isle*, that he had been working on with librettist Basil Hood. Richard D'Oyly Carte and the management of the Savoy Theatre pondered the dilemma. Was it possible for the work to be completed by another hand, notwithstanding that Sullivan's score had been left in the most rudimentary state, with only two numbers actually finished, 15 others existing as little more than melody lines and 11 not even sketched at all? Various names were suggested, including Ernest Ford, composer of *Jane Annie*, and François Cellier, musical director of the Savoy, who had known Sullivan well and worked with him over a number of years. But the predominant feeling was that there was really only one man capable of undertaking the task – the composer whom Sullivan himself had acknowledged as his musical heir, Edward German. An approach was duly made and the latter, greatly flattered as well as somewhat apprehensive, accepted the challenge. With only a comparatively short time allotted to him to prepare the score for its first production, he was obliged to withdraw from a recently signed contract to write a violin concerto in order that he could apply all his efforts to the new project.

How well he succeeded may be judged from the reviews that appeared after the premiere on 27 April 1901. 'Edward German... may be described as [Sullivan's] heir-at-music', ran one notice. 'A thousand times over has Edward German justified the choice which selected him to complete Sullivan's score', remarked another. 'Mr German's accomplishment of an amazingly difficult task is brilliant', enthused a third – and so on. Small wonder, then, that shortly afterwards, Hood and German put their respective talents together again to create a wholly original stage piece – *Merrie England*. Yet German did not find its composition a totally felicitous occupation. Deeply distressed at the death of his mother, and feeling himself constantly under the pressure of deadlines, occasional signs of depression and weariness made themselves evident in his letters. But he was a professional through and through, never giving anything less than his absolute best to the undertaking, and before the year was out, the score was finished.

His sterling efforts were once again rewarded with glowing critical reviews after the first night of *Merrie England* at the Savoy Theatre on 2 April 1902. Sensing that a new Gilbert and Sullivan-type partnership might be in the offing, the public called for more and German and Hood duly responded in under a year with *A Princess of Kensington*, a somewhat complicated but still effective piece of light drama. The premiere in January 1903 proved another personal triumph, but the composer now felt that, after more than two years of hard, deadline-dominated work, he was entitled to a rest from the theatre. He duly took a few weeks' holiday in his home town of Whitchurch before turning his attention to other areas of composition. A proposed cantata on the subject of the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin failed to materialise on account of the composer's distaste of the central character. He toyed with the idea of writing a series of cantatas based on Shakespeare, but this also came to naught. What did appear in 1903, however, was a collection of twelve songs for voice and piano, setting poems from Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. Published as the *Just So Song Book*, the work was enthusiastically praised for its artistry and its singular success in capturing exactly the varied, and at times elusive, moods of Kipling's characteristic texts.

1904 saw a return to orchestral music, this time in response to a commission from the Cardiff Musical Festival. German thought long and hard about what to write and he began and aborted many ideas. But finally, the concept of a specifically Welsh piece, based on traditional tunes, caught his imagination and, after months of painstaking work, he came up with the *Welsh Rhapsody* – in effect, a one-movement symphony in miniature.

1905 was taken up with providing music for a drama by the Duchess of Sutherland, *The Conqueror*, first performed at the brand new Scala Theatre in London. That was also the year in which he was approached by Robert Courtneidge with a proposal that he should write the score for an operetta based on the novel *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding, the 200th anniversary of whose birth was scheduled to fall in 1907. The idea appealed to him but the project was a time consuming one, involving several months of planning and discussion before composition proper could get under way. Meantime, he undertook an assortment of conducting engagements and continued to fulfil a seemingly endless demand from his publisher for piano arrangements of his most popular orchestral and theatre works.

The preparation of *Tom Jones* was an enjoyable but tiring affair, and by the time of the first performance in Manchester's Prince's Theatre on 30 March 1907, the weary German felt obliged to have a substitute conductor standing by in case he failed to get through the evening. But he was still on the rostrum as the curtain fell and was in excellent spirits as he joined the cast on stage afterwards to enjoy the ovation.

In October that year, German found himself on board a ship – the *Lusitania*, no less – destined for New York where *Tom Jones* was scheduled to be staged. His name was already well known in the States and his presence aroused considerable press interest. In addition to performances of the operetta, the composer had also been invited by Walter Damrosch to conduct the New York Symphony Orchestra, which he did at concerts in Washington, Philadelphia and the orchestra's home city. He was applauded wherever he went and, although his visit lasted less than six weeks, it enhanced his transatlantic reputation beyond all expectations.

1908 was comparatively uneventful and it was only in the closing days of that year that the stirrings of a major new project became evident. German received a letter from W.S. Gilbert, who had written no operatic libretti since *The Grand Duke* of 1896. The playwright revealed that he wanted to create a musical version of a play, *The Wicked World*, he had produced over three and a half decades earlier. He had, in fact, suggested this idea some years before to Sullivan who had rejected it on account of there being no requirement in the plot for a men's chorus. German, while recognising the limitations this imposed, felt undaunted, and in early 1909, both men began work in earnest on the project. Relations between the two of them were excellent (unlike those

between Gilbert and Sullivan) and each took great pains to accommodate the other's requirements. Later in the year, German privately expressed a nagging doubt about the emerging piece's character, fearing it might prove too whimsical for the public's taste, but this worry in no way interfered with his commitment to the task. In fact, the opera was more or less complete before either the venue or date of the first performance had been agreed upon. There was also the question of what to call it. *Moon Fairies* and *Dream Fairies* were proposed but it was as *Fallen Fairies* that it went on stage at the Savoy on 15 December 1909. While by no means a failure, receiving some glowing reviews in the press, the work did not prove a lasting popular success – as German and, indeed, Gilbert had suspected might be the case – and it was to be the last operatic venture for both men.

In truth, although he did not know it at the time, *Fallen Fairies* was to mark the end of Edward German's golden period of composing. The reason for the subsequent gradual silencing of his creative muse becomes evident in a series of letters. It is, quite simply, the advent of modernism in art generally, and music in particular. He felt himself completely out of step with contemporary stylistic trends. An offer from Herbert Beerbohm Tree in 1912 to collaborate once more with Basil Hood on an operatic venture based on the life of Sir Francis Drake was turned down, admittedly not without reluctance, nor could other proposed libretti succeed in interesting him. In addition to concern that his work might be considered outdated in the face of the mounting challenge from the new-style musical comedy, he also began to harbour an underlying fear that he might not be able to maintain the standard of his earlier pieces. A good proportion of his time, however, was spent in overseeing the publication of a number of his compositions, a task that gave him relatively little artistic satisfaction although he appreciated the opportunities it provided of further performances of his music. Apart from a few songs, his only substantial new work during this period was the *Coronation March and Hymn* (the second part being a setting of the *Veni Creator Spiritus*), written for and performed at the Coronation of King George V in Westminster Abbey on 22 June 1911, and based on two tunes from his score for *Henry VIII*.

Otherwise, he occupied himself with a fairly busy round of conducting engagements, including one in his home town of Whitchurch where he took charge of a concert performance of *Merrie England* on the occasion of his 50th birthday, an event celebrated with great enthusiasm. But not long afterwards, the first signs of the poor health that was to dog him in his later years began to reveal themselves. Nor were matters helped by his involvement in a taxi crash in 1913 in which he sustained cuts and bruises to the face. But personal concerns were brushed aside with the onset of war in 1914 although one or two of the less intelligent members of the populace felt it necessary to comment on what they perceived to be the inappropriateness of his name!

In 1915, German contributed a hymn tune, *Homage to Belgium, 1914*, to *King Albert's Book*, a volume compiled as part of a huge fundraising effort to provide relief for Belgian refugees. The melody caught the public's imagination and it was soon given words, in which form it became known as *Father Omnipotent*. 1916 saw another setting of words by Rudyard Kipling – a naval ballad entitled *Have you heard news of my boy Jack?* – written for and first performed with enormous success by Dame Clara Butt. A further Kipling military versification, *The Irish Guards*, received invigorating treatment by German in early 1918. Recurring bouts of ill health still laid him low occasionally, especially a rheumatic attack in 1917, but he still managed to make conducting appearances, in both the concert hall and the recording studio and, just before the end of the war, he played among the second violins at a charity concert in an orchestra made up of musical celebrities – including Sir Edward Elgar on cymbals and Benno Moiseiwitsch on triangle!

There had, however, been the seeds of a major new work in German's mind since 1910. That was the year he had been asked by the Royal Philharmonic Society to compose something for that venerable institution and, since then, he had considered a number of possible ideas and made several sketches. With the cessation of hostilities in 1918, he turned his full attention to the commission and managed to complete it within a few months. At first, he considered calling it *Diversions on an Original Theme* (on being asked, by an inquisitive acquaintance, if the theme was original, he bluntly replied 'Yes, very!') but it was as *Theme and Six Diversions* that it received its premiere in March 1919. And, once again, German was able to bask in a warm glow of universal admiration from press and public.

There was really just one more work to come from the composer's pen – the tone poem *The Willow Song* – which, in drawing its inspiration from *Othello*, meant that Edward German's principal creative career could be regarded as being enclosed within a Shakespearean frame (i.e. taking the starting point as *Richard III*). This final piece should have received its premiere at the Royal Academy of Music's Centenary Celebration Concert in the presence of the King and Queen but, due to an appalling error amongst the organisers, German was misinformed as to the time when his conducting presence was required and his consequent absence meant that *The Willow Song* had to be omitted. It was, however, heard the following day but without royalty in attendance.

If his compositional muse had now fallen silent, his conducting talents were still in demand. In 1924 and 1927, he travelled to his home town to conduct the Whitchurch Choral Society, both occasions generating enormous interest and enthusiasm among the local population. The media of gramophone and radio helped spread his music and reputation further than ever before and it was only a matter of time before the accolade of knighthood was bestowed on him. The announcement on New Year's Day, 1928 came as he was recovering from a long period of bed rest after the discovery of a serious eye condition which left him partially sighted. But he was in good spirits as he went to Buckingham Palace on the day before his 66th birthday to receive the honour.

Lauded by his fellow composers, including Sir Edward Elgar, and honoured in 1934 with the award of the hugely prestigious Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society (but not, incidentally, recognised by any university music faculty which might easily have awarded him an honorary doctorate), Sir Edward German lived out his final years in quiet retirement, indulging in such leisurely pastimes as photography, fishing and watching cricket – failing eyesight notwithstanding. His health gradually declined and in September 1936, hospital treatment was required. But, in truth, he was beyond medical help and he died in London on 11 November of that year, at the age of 74.

### **Nell Gwyn – Overture**

*English Nell*, by Anthony Hope, author of the best-selling *Rupert of Hentzau* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and Edward Rose, was first staged at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London on 21 August 1900, in a production by Frank Curzon. Based on Hope's novel *Simon Dale*, it was written specifically for Marie Tempest and, as mentioned earlier, it was the famous actress herself who insisted that the incidental music be written by Edward German.

The composer subsequently prepared two concert pieces from his score, an *Overture* and a set of *Three Dances*. The *Overture* is compiled from musical ideas used elsewhere in the production. It begins with a rustic-flavoured, unmistakably English main theme, containing certain melodic and harmonic traits which explain Elgar's sympathy with, and liking for, German's music. In due course, a more graceful bridge passage, whose two main components are shared between the horns and violins, leads to the lyrical second main idea, presented by strings with woodwind and harp support. Following a reprise of the first theme, there is a clarinet-led transition to the middle section whose familiar theme is foreshadowed in turn by the oboe, flute and bassoon. The tune is, of course, *Early one morning* and it finally takes shape in the caressing tones of the violas who pass it to the flute before it is adopted by the cellos and horns against a triplet figure supplied by the flutes and violins. This folk melody looks all set for a spell of extended development but its progress is suddenly impeded by hints of the opening idea which eventually lead to a modified restatement of the first part of the *Overture*. In the final stages, the composer introduces the *Merrymakers' Dance*, replete with tambourine, and manages to combine it here and there with *Early one morning*, after which a short but brisk flurry brings the *Overture* to a lively conclusion.

### **Nell Gwyn – Three Dances**

This cheerful terpsichorean trio ranks second in popularity only to the *Henry VIII Dances*. All three pieces proved an immediate success with audiences and were later described by the composer's lifelong friend William Herbert Scott as being 'thoroughly English conceived in the happiest vein, and charged with that fragrant essence of the greenwood'.

The *Country Dance* opens quite ebulliently but quickly settles into a gentle, lilting tune. Contrast is offered in the shape of the secondary theme which is earthier and more rustic in nature, the side drum setting a steady rhythm. And, as is often the case in German's dances, there is a sprightly finish in a quicker tempo.

The *Pastoral Dance* is an easy-paced affair, the first melody politely toying with offbeats, the subsidiary idea, introduced by the oboe, flowing in somewhat longer phrases and accompanied on its second appearance by rippling harp figurations. Finally, there is the *Merrymakers' Dance*, carrying a tempo marking of dotted crotchet = 178, which is astonishingly fast, especially as there is an instruction for the coda to be even quicker. The tambourine adds its distinctive colour at various points and the whole piece bears the unmistakable stylistic fingerprints of its composer – very much archetypal Edward German.

### **Gipsy Suite (Four characteristic dances)**

This suite of *Four Characteristic Dances* was first performed at the Crystal Palace in 1892, conducted by the dedicatee, August Manns, although the work may actually have been written three years earlier, not long after the first night of *Richard III*. German's

view of gipsy life is, in truth, somewhat romanticised as reflected in this music, but the basic concept of the suite was a good one in that it allowed the composer ample scope for contrast and variety.

The first movement opens with a brief introduction which leads to a bittersweet waltz, dominated by the violins although the last paragraph features the appropriately plaintive tones of the oboe. There follows a succession of string-led subsidiary ideas, most of them wreathed with charming counter figures from woodwind and harp, before the main theme returns, partnered by sighing chromatic phrases in the woodwind and second violins.

The lively second movement has the character of an anglicised Dvořák *Slavonic Dance* and even the orchestration at times seems to contain fleeting references to the Czech master's distinctive instrumentation. Towards the end, the tempo is gradually stepped up to bring matters to a whirlwind conclusion.

German's gipsies are obviously frightfully genteel and civilised in their courtship if the *Menuetto*, subtitled *Love Duet* is anything to go by. As with the first movement, the reprise of the main subject is adorned with some expressive counterpoint. At first, the composer intended to call this movement *The Pretty Gipsy*, but then changed it to *Love Scene* before finally adopting the present title.

It's probably inevitable that a 6/8 tarantella is going to sound like an Italian *Merrymakers' Dance*, and there is an undeniable tang of *Nell Gwyn* in this entertaining finale. Some people may also ponder the relevance of a tarantella within a work called the *Gipsy Suite*! But it is all written with a masterly hand and fully justifies the subtitle of *The Revel*.

### **Three Dances from the music to Shakespeare's *Henry VIII***

Really more than any other pieces, these three dances were responsible for spreading the name of Edward German far and wide. Universally regarded as representing the high spots of Sir Henry Irving's production of the Shakespeare play which opened at the Lyceum Theatre in London on 5 January 1892, they were soon to be heard in concert halls up and down the country as well as being published in a bewildering variety of arrangements. They became especially popular, by all accounts, in Italy of all places!

A *Morris Dance* gets proceedings under way, the home key of A minor, as well as the main theme itself, being well prepared in the introduction. The simple rhythm, laid down by the drum at the very outset, is never absent and provides a firm foundation, rather like a village tabor, for the charming, unhurried melodic discourse.

In *Act I, Scene 4*, the King, disguised as a shepherd, chooses his wife's maid of honour, Anne Boleyn, as a dancing partner. 'The fairest hand I ever touch'd! O beauty! Till now I never knew thee', he tells her and monarch, maiden and courtiers tread a dainty step to the strains of the *Shepherds' Dance*. This charming movement was a particular favourite of Sir Edward Elgar who revealed that he could never listen to it without a lump coming into his throat.

And, finally, there is the *Torch Dance*, performed by mummers, whose title was explained by the inimitable Rosa Newmarch as follows. 'It recalls', she wrote, 'that frenzied and tragic scene at the Court of France in 1393, when a flake of fire falling on one of the maskers, sent the dancers flying up and down the hall in the wildest saraband ever danced before a Queen, and scattered the remaining wits of poor Charles VI, himself the sixth mummer in that horrible masquerade and only saved thanks to the courage of the Duchesse du Berri, who wrapped him in her mantle.' German himself confined his remarks to observing that he had simply tried to portray the flickering of flames in the music.

### **The Tempter – Berceuse**

*The Tempter* was 'a Tragedy in Verse in Four Acts' by Henry Arthur Jones, which opened at London's Haymarket Theatre on 20 September 1893. It seems to have been quite an occasion, and a contemporary account tells us that: 'Curiosity to see Henry Arthur Jones's first adventure on the exacting lofty plane of blank verse drew quite an exceptional house to the first night of *The Tempter* at the Haymarket. Hardly the height of the season could have got more Parliamentary and social notabilities together.'

The production duly ran for a total of 73 nights. The composer subsequently compiled a three-movement *Suite* and conducted the first performance in 1897 with the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra. The *Berceuse*, which preceded *Act III* of the drama, opens with a gently rocking four-bar introduction following which the strings usher in a quietly amiable little tune which unfolds at leisurely length. It all represents German at his most charming.

### **Romeo and Juliet** (incidental music)

It was Johnston Forbes-Robertson who commissioned German to write a score to accompany his production of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which opened at London's Lyceum Theatre on 21 September 1895 – ten years before the famous actor-manager was to request incidental music for *The Conqueror*. Having played the role of the Duke of Buckingham in Irving's production of *Henry VIII* over three years earlier, he well knew what the composer was capable of and understandably had high hopes for the new project. German was a little wary at first – after all, of all Shakespearean subjects, this was the one that had inspired earlier composers to the greatest heights, viz. Berlioz, Gounod and Tchaikovsky, to name but three. Indeed, it may well have been the Russian master's use of the nomenclature *Fantasy Overture* for his incomparable orchestral portrayal of the star-crossed lovers that led German to employ the term *Prelude* rather than the customary *Overture*.

The *Pavane*, *Nocturne* and *Pastorale* preceded the fourth, third and second acts respectively. The *Pavane* is charm itself, with the occasional slight French touch about it as if the ghost of Delibes were trying to get a look in. Occasional splashes of cymbal occasionally lend an incongruously martial tinge to proceedings, and the momentary dip into the major at one point has a curiously unsettling effect, but the minor mode is quickly re-established and prevails at the end. The *Nocturne* begins in a relatively peaceful and serene mood, although 'nocturnal' is not the most obvious description one might apply to the music; in fact, the main theme has quite a sunny disposition! Later on, uneasy shadows – at times, vaguely Tchaikovskyan – start to drift across the scene, but the upheaval is not too drastic, and calm is restored by the conclusion. The *Pastorale* is a fairly extended piece, moving along in a steady 6/8, with two distinct sections, the first featuring the oboe in a prominent role. Both are played twice, albeit with modifications on the re-run, the second building each time to a powerful climax.

### **Tom Jones – Act III: For Tonight 'Sophia's Waltz-Song'**

(arr. Ernest Tomlinson, 1924–2015)

The undoubted highlight of *Tom Jones*, produced by Robert Courtneidge at the Prince's Theatre, Manchester at the end of March 1907 before transferring to London's Apollo Theatre two and a half weeks later, was Sophia's third act waltz song, *For Tonight*. At this point in the story, the heroine, thinking her beloved, Tom Jones himself, has been unfaithful, has gone to London to stay with her cousin, Lady Bellaston. She has become a great social success, and at a gathering in Ranelagh Gardens, she is able to forget all her cares and worries in a dazzling virtuoso aria. In this orchestral arrangement by Ernest Tomlinson, German's original scoring is closely adhered to, although the celebrated vocal cadenza has, of necessity, had to be adapted. Attentive listeners might also spot the interpolation of the *à la valse* theme from the *Act I: Trio, Festina Lente*.

### **Merrie England Suite**

Edward German, on being asked whether he preferred *Tom Jones* or *Merrie England*, came up with the splendidly non-committal response: '*Merrie England* is older, but I was younger. *Tom Jones* is younger, but I was older.' Far more forthright and, in the opinion of many, far more exact, is the reaction of that splendid English composer, Dame Ethel Smyth: '[*Merrie England*] is an immortal masterpiece. Anybody and everybody today would, I should say, give the rest of their lives to have written it.'

The composer himself arranged this concert suite of four items from the operetta. The *Hornpipe* appears in *Act I* and follows the rousing patter song, *I Do Counsel That Your Playtime*, sung by a strolling actor Walter Wilkins, in which he advocates the inclusion of a merry song and dance in every play, no matter how tragic. The *Minuet* is an instrumental rendition of Queen Elizabeth's noble song, *O peaceful England*, sung by the monarch in *Act I* after her majestic entrance. The *Rustic Dance* and *Jig* are played as part of the revelries in *Act II*. The former is an amiable, easy-paced affair, the latter is more energetic and bears a distinct family resemblance to the *Merrymakers' Dance* from *Nell Gwyn*.

**Tim McDonald**

## Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra



The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra was established in 1929 as the first professional symphony orchestra in Slovakia. The orchestra is currently led by conductor Mario Košík. It has made a large number of recordings for labels including Opus, Supraphon, Naxos and Marco Polo. In addition to regular season concerts, which feature works by Slovak composers, many of them as premieres, the orchestra has performed abroad, visiting Austria and Hungary, and touring in Europe, Japan and Korea. The orchestra has collaborated with renowned conductors such as Ludovít Rajter, Ondrej Lenárd, Róbert Stankovský, Juraj Valčuha, Andrew Mogrelia, David Porcelijn, Vladimír Spivakov, Yordan Kamdzharov and also with distinguished soloists.

[sosr.rtv.s.sk](http://sosr.rtv.s.sk)

## Adrian Leaper



Adrian Leaper's career began with a five-year tenure as assistant conductor of the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester. He was later principal conductor of the Gran Canaria Philharmonic for eight years and principal conductor and artistic director of the RTVE Symphony Orchestra in Madrid for nine years. He has conducted orchestras all over the world and has recorded a series of Spanish music of the 20th century for ASV.

[www.adrianleaper.com](http://www.adrianleaper.com)

Acknowledged by Sir Arthur Sullivan as his musical heir, Edward German enjoyed huge acclaim during his lifetime. His dances are ‘charged with the fragrant essence of the greenwood’ and the Overture to *Nell Gwyn*, with its richly English themes, explains Elgar’s liking for German’s music. The gloriously romanticised *Gipsy Suite* pays subtle homage to Dvořák; the dances from *Henry VIII* were responsible for his early celebrity; and *Tom Jones* (on 8.660270-71) and *Merrie England* were two of his greatest stage successes.

Edward  
**GERMAN**  
(1862–1936)

- |              |   |              |
|--------------|---|--------------|
| <b>1–4</b>   | <b>Nell Gwyn – Overture and Three Dances</b> (1900)   | <b>17:27</b> |
| <b>5–8</b>   | <b>Gipsy Suite</b> (Four characteristic dances) (c. 1889–92)  | <b>14:16</b> |
| <b>9–11</b>  | <b>Three Dances from the music to Shakespeare’s <i>Henry VIII</i></b> (1891)                                  | <b>8:17</b>  |
| <b>12</b>    | <b>The Tempter – Berceuse</b> (c. 1893)   | <b>2:58</b>  |
| <b>13–15</b> | <b>Romeo and Juliet</b> (incidental music) (1895)   | <b>14:01</b> |
| <b>16</b>    | <b>Tom Jones – Act III: For Tonight ‘Sophia’s Waltz-Song’</b> (1906/07)<br>(arr. Ernest Tomlinson, 1924–2015) | <b>3:02</b>  |
| <b>17–20</b> | <b>Merrie England Suite</b> (1902, arr. 1908)   | <b>6:58</b>  |

**Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra • Adrian Leaper**

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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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