

**ELGAR • STANFORD
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**

Songs of Travel

Trombone Travels • 2

**Matthew Gee, Trombone
Christopher Glynn, Piano**

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Sir Edward Elgar • Sir Charles Villiers Stanford • Ralph Vaughan Williams

All works arr. Matthew Gee (b. 1982)

Sir Edward ELGAR (1857–1934)			
Sea Pictures, Op. 37 (1899)	19:51		
1 No. 1. Sea Slumber Song	4:13	12 No. 4. Youth and Love	3:07
2 No. 2. In Haven (Capri)	1:46	13 No. 5. In dreams	2:18
3 No. 3. Sabbath Morning at Sea	4:52	14 No. 6. The infinite shining heavens	2:18
4 No. 4. Where Corals Lie	3:31	15 No. 7. Whither Must I Wander?	3:41
5 No. 5. The Swimmer	5:22	16 No. 8. Bright is the ring of words	1:47
6 A Song of Flight, Op. 31, No. 2 (1895)	2:33	17 No. 9. I have trod the upward and the downward slope	2:14
7 Arabian Serenade (1914)	2:13	Sir Charles Villiers STANFORD (1852–1924)	
8 In Smyrna (1905)	4:10	Songs of the Sea, Op. 91 (1904)	15:38
Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958)		18 No. 1. Drake's Drum	2:49
Songs of Travel (1901–04)	22:56	19 No. 2. Outward Bound	2:49
9 No. 1. The Vagabond	3:10	20 No. 3. Devon, O Devon, in Wind and Rain	1:38
10 No. 2. Let Beauty awake	1:45	21 No. 4. Homeward Bound	5:13
11 No. 3. The Roadside Fire	2:17	22 No. 5. The Old Superb	3:05

Trombone Travels continues its journey, exploring English song at the start of the 20th century and the great song cycles of Sir Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. The trombone's propensity to mimic vocal techniques – for example, vibrato, portamento, and microtonal inflections – combined with its ability to sustain and manipulate its sound orally, allows a vast spectrum of colours to be achieved. Tone can be adjusted further by inserting a mute into the instrument, giving rise to a whole host of colours not available to the singer.

The initial problem is that of removing the words. Vocal emotion and expression is largely conveyed via the shape and colour of the text, and understanding and interpreting the vocal accents and resulting shape of the English language was the first consideration of the arranging process. Working in English presented a very different challenge to the German of Schubert's *Winter Journey* (*Trombone Travels, Volume 1*, 8.574093); the language is far softer and to match the expressive articulation of a singer required a careful re-evaluation of technique.

Elgar's *Sea Pictures* is more widely known as an

orchestral work, but it was originally written for voice and piano; not simply a reduction of the score, but conceived at the piano. Elgar conducted the orchestral premiere in 1899 with the contralto Clara Butt, wearing a dress displaying '... the scales of a mermaid's sinuous form.'¹ Two weeks later they performed the work again, but this time with Elgar at the piano. The poetry is collected from five separate writers and thanks to Elgar's ability to set text to lavish melody, this song cycle is amongst his best and most loved works. The cycle opens with *Sea Slumber Song*, a lullaby in which the Sea's 'Mother mild' gently rocks her child to sleep. An arpeggiated figure in the piano depicts the surging of the sea, before a hushed, whispering, muted trombone perfectly encapsulates the soft slumber of this lullaby. The shortest song of the cycle, *In Haven (Capri)*, takes a poem written by Elgar's wife. This strophic song presents a huge challenge for the instrumentalist; by removing the text strophic songs are in danger of becoming repetitive. The phrasing of the text offers subtle differences between each verse, but colour changes are a more powerful tool, for example by spinning the line 'Love alone will last' with a more passionate, intense

sound. The central song of the cycle, *Sabbath Morning at Sea* contrasts the impassive sky with the turbulent waters before describing a glorious sunrise and the parishioners she left behind – God's spirit gives her comfort on this endless Sabbath Morning. The singer is then lured away beneath the waves to the exotic land *Where Corals Lie*. Even when her love presses her eyelids closed she pleads to be let go. The tight, slightly nasal sound of the solo tone mute aligns perfectly with the peculiar, underwater soundworld of the song. This mute is rarely used in classical music (more often in jazz), and adds a wonderfully exotic feel to Elgar's already colourful writing. The cycle is brought to a close with the largest song of the cycle, *The Swimmer*. This takes us on an exhausting journey through turbulent seas in an attempt to find land and rest. Recollections of past, happier times interject thunderstorms, before she rallies and gathers all her strength in a final push to a place 'Where no light wearies and no love wanes'.

Elgar was not known for his song writing, but the next three songs deserve inclusion for they are particularly well suited to the trombone. Written in 1895, just a few years before *Sea Pictures*, *A Song of Flight* describes the excitement of daybreak and the wild freedom of the wind; for the traveller 'home lies beyond the stars and the sea'. *Arabian Serenade* was composed later in 1914. He uses the Phrygian mode to transport the listener to the Arabian Peninsula. Here the trombone really comes into its own, exploring microtones within the melody – an important characteristic of Arabian music – and once again utilising the solo tone mute for its exotic flavour. Originally for solo piano, you could argue that *In Smyrna* is really a song without words. In 1905 Elgar was traveling around the Mediterranean and stopped off in Smyrna (what is now İzmir in Turkey). In his diary he notes the 'extraordinary colour & movement' and the intoxicating 'light & shade' of the city – a perfect description of this piece. Elgar subtitled his sketches *In the Mosque* and it is clear that the Islamic call to prayer made quite an impression on him, an idea reflected in this arrangement.

For his first serious venture into large-scale song writing, Vaughan Williams chose as Schubert had before him, and recounted the journey of a lonely traveller.

Although Vaughan Williams' vagabond had an easier time of it than Schubert's wanderer in *Winterreise*, there are clear similarities. Robert Louis Stevenson's poem explore themes of lost love, growing old and fate, much like Wilhelm Müller's text for *Winterreise*. Vaughan Williams composed *Songs of Travel* between 1901 and 1904 and managed to capture the zeitgeist of the early 20th century, juxtaposing optimistic bravado with loss and the determination to carry on regardless. *The Vagabond* starts out in similar fashion to *Winterreise*, but the footsteps in the piano are march-like and full of energy. Powerful declamations describing the joys of being on the road, with no concern for money or love, pervade this song and reappear throughout the cycle. The influence of Ravel is undeniable in the next song *Let Beauty awake*, with flowing arabesques underpinning a long melodic line. The song moves from sunrise to sunset, opening full of passion and gradually becoming more tranquil as dusk descends – the beauty of nature personified as a young woman. A companion appears in *The Roadside Fire*, describing a life of happiness they plan to share together. But these are just brief glimpses: the traveller decides to carry on his journey alone. *Youth and Love* probes this conflict further, the fragility of his decision encapsulated with the sound of a metal straight mute. Fragments from the opening movement return, reiterating his youthful desire to journey alone, while themes from *The Roadside Fire* fuel his longing for companionship. Reflecting his difficult decision to continue, *In dreams* presents the darkest piece in the cycle. He laments his decision to leave, imagining that she 'wept awhile and then forgot' him. But despite having left 'with a smile' the vagabond cannot forget her. Chromatic descents riddled with anguish and an offbeat figure in the piano unsettle the listener, establishing feelings of unease, sorrow and remorse. From this dark place the traveller finds hope in *The infinite shining heavens*. Travelling under the stars, his constant companions on this journey sustain him more than food can. Slowly his heart begins to heal as he matures and reflects on the sacrifices he has made along the way, finding peace in the vastness of the night sky. Clearly now an older and wiser man, the traveller shares his experiences in *Whither must I wander?* Tales from his

youth, reminiscing about 'Dear days of old' around the fire, but now the house stands empty, the 'chimney-stone cold' – he is finally resigned to nomadic life. Another strophic song sees the nostalgic second verse up the octave and the hushed final verse played in a cup mute; 'I go for ever and come again no more'. *Bright is the ring of words* starts with the same wilful optimism heard in *The Vagabond*. Now older the traveller worries about being forgotten by those he has met on his travels. The 'sunset embers' are clearly a metaphor for death, as he fondly recalls his loved one, hoping that she remembers him. *I have trod the upward and the downward slope* was added to the cycle posthumously in 1960 by his wife and based on sketches found in his notebook. Musical themes gather from the cycle, as the traveller, worn down by his journey, prepares for death. The final line proffers a powerful conclusion – 'And I have lived and loved, and closed the door'.

Unlike *Sea Pictures*, Sir Charles Stanford's *Songs of the Sea* was originally composed for baritone and orchestra. The order in which the work was conceived is open to debate, but it is clear that its dedicatee and soloist, Harry Plunket Greene, was so enchanted by Stanford's early sketches he requested more poems from Henry Newbolt. Stanford decided to add a male voice choir and make a piano reduction in the hope to profit from amateur choral societies. It was premiered at the Leeds Festival on 7 October 1904, and described as 'delightful examples of the Irish composers genius'.² For this recording the male voice choir has been replaced by a trombone section – their ability to blend and balance with perfect intonation makes them choral in every way but for the text. The cycle starts with its most popular song, depicting the legend of Drake's Drum. Sir Francis Drake, 'in the port o' and Heaven' and dreaming all the time of Plymouth, asks that his drum be taken back to England. If struck in the time of England's gravest need, he will take his fleet to assist in battle. A stirring march broadens out the final verse, while the choir bounce short motifs back and forth with the soloist, before all parts declare that 'They shall find him ware and walking, as they found him long ago!' *Outward Bound* reflects the sorrow felt before going to sea – 'O Mother, must we bid farewell to thee?' The arriving of the 'last dawn' gives a

solemn feel to this song while the numinous quality of the trombone and its ability to play with a dark, sombre sound make this a very moving moment in the cycle. *Devon, O Devon, in Wind and Rain* abruptly changes the mood, with an exhilarating broken quaver figuration in the piano's left hand as we hear about Drake's defeat of the Spanish and his death off the coast of Nombre. The narrative turns to the courage and bravery of the people of Devon, as they do battle to protect the 'Pride of the West!' in a raging storm. Their defiance is assisted by the trombone choir in the refrain 'Devon, O Devon, in Wind and Rain'. A quote from Brahms' *First Piano Concerto* opens *Homeward Bound*, which continues in similarly Romantic mood and style, shifting to some unexpected tonal areas and giving a very contemplative account of the homeward journey from sea. The final, wonderful line of the poem – 'There lies the home of all our mortal dream' – is tenderly set by Stanford, leaving the trombone all alone before rich, slow moving harmonies round off the song. The final song of the cycle, *The Old Superb* was hugely popular in its day. The rapid text tells the story of an 'old and foul and slow' ship in the English navy, sailing throughout night and day to take on Nelson and the French at Trafalgar. We feel the full force of the trombones in the final rendition of the chorus, with the rousing *presto* expanded to include all four trombones and piano. As true now as it was at the premiere, '*The Old Superb* taken at break-neck pace whirled the audience off their feet'.³

Matthew Gee

¹ Anderson, Robert: *Elgar*, p.43 (Schirmer Books, 1993)

² 'Leeds Music Festival', *The Musical Times*, 45, No. 741 (1 November 1904), as quoted in Stanford, Charles Villiers, ed. by Kuykendall, James Brooks and Kang, Edison J.: *Orchestral Song Cycles: Songs of the Sea, Op. 91, and Songs of the Fleet, Op. 117*, p.ix (A-R Editions, Inc., 2019)

³ Quote by Plunket Greene, taken from Norris, Gerald: *Stanford, the Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky*, p.134 (David and Charles, 1980)



Photo © Micha Theiner

Matthew Gee

Matthew Gee has been principal trombone with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra since 2010, and also holds principal positions with the Aurora Orchestra and Septura. He is on the teaching faculty at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and is an active soloist. His passion for the trombone has driven him to release two solo albums – *Paradiso e inferno* and *Matthew Gee's Amazing Sliding Circus* – and Schubert's entire *Winter Journey* on Naxos (8.574093). Gee has performed with orchestras and ensembles all over the world and has recorded many film and television scores. After studies at King's College London and the Royal College of Music, Gee joined the Orchestra of Scottish Opera as section principal trombone, followed by time with the Orquesta Filarmónica de Santiago and the Orchestra of Opera North. Further study saw Gee attend the Hochschule der Künste Bern, where he was awarded the Eduard Tschumi award. As a soloist Gee has performed internationally and has had a number of works written for him. He has performed and taken masterclasses at many festivals. Gee is president of the British Trombone Society and takes an active part in promoting the trombone and developing its repertoire. He is a Getzen artist. www.matthewgee.info

Christopher Glynn

Christopher Glynn is a GRAMMY Award-winning pianist and accompanist, working with leading singers, instrumentalists and ensembles in concerts, broadcasts and recordings throughout the world. He is also artistic director of the Ryedale Festival, programming around 60 events each year in the many beautiful and historic venues of Ryedale, North Yorkshire. He has performed with singers such as Sir Thomas Allen, John Mark Ainsley, Sophie Bevan, Claire Booth, Ian Bostridge, Allan Clayton, Dame Sarah Connolly, Jonas Kaufmann, Dame Felicity Lott, Christopher Maltman, Mark Padmore, Joan Rodgers, Kate Royal, Kathryn Rudge, Bryn Terfel, Mark Padmore, Rowan Pierce, Sir John Tomlinson, Robin Tritschler and Roderick Williams among many others. He also appears with many chamber ensembles, choirs including The Sixteen, and instrumentalists such as Rachel Podger, Adrian Brendel, Julian Bliss and Matthew Gee. Glynn read music at New College, Oxford and studied piano with John Streets in France and Malcolm Martineau at the Royal Academy of Music, where he now teaches. His many awards include the accompaniment prize in The Kathleen Ferrier Awards (2001) and the Gerald Moore Award (2003). He has made many recordings and is regularly heard on BBC Radio 3. www.cglynn.com



Photo © Joanna Bergin

This second volume of *Trombone Travels* (Volume 1 is on 8.574093) continues with Matthew Gee's exploration of three great cycles of early 20th-century British song. Elgar's *Sea Pictures* evoke lullaby and turbulence alike, Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel* chart a wanderer's lonely journey through the landscape, and in *Songs of the Sea* Stanford's music embraces both the sombre and the exhilarating, with Gee joined by a trombone chorus to emulate the male voice choir. Throughout the recital Gee lavishes colouristic effects, the use of mutes, and subtle inflections that reinforce the trombone's unique ability to mimic vocal techniques.

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Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958)

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| 9–17 | Songs of Travel (1901–04) | 22:56 |
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Sir Charles Villiers STANFORD (1852–1924)

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| 18–22 | Songs of the Sea, Op. 91 (1904) | 15:38 |
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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

All works arr. Matthew Gee (b. 1982)

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Matthew Gee, Trombone
Christopher Glynn, Piano

Trombones of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra 18–22

Matthew Knight, Tenor trombone I • Rupert Whitehead, Tenor trombone II
Josh Certina, Bass trombone

Recorded: 3–5 January 2020 at Turner Sims, Southampton, UK

Producer, engineer and editor: Jim Unwin • Booklet notes: Matthew Gee

Publishers: Resonata Music **1–8** **18–22**, Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd **9–17**

Cover image: Trombone bell © Fabio Pagani; background © ilbusca / both Dreamstime.com



8.579080

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Playing Time
67:35



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Booklet notes in English