

A NOTE FROM *Johnstone-Music*

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SPECIAL FEATURE on DELIUS CELLO CONCERTO

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After Delius had composed an interesting Cello Sonata for the English soloist Beatrice Harrison she wished - and requested him - to write a cello concerto for her. The composer began sketching the work in 1920, completing it in May 1921; I believe there were many small alterations and improvements made along the way. By that moment - post World War I - the wonderful soloist works of Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Schumann, Brahms (Double), Richard Strauss etc. had truly entered the repertoire of the important cellists of the day, so writing a new concerto was something to be taken seriously!

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Although it was indeed written for Harrison, Delius's publishers arranged a supposedly more 'prestigious' world premiere in January 1923 in Vienna featuring the Russian cellist Alexandre Barjansky, conducted by Ferdinand Löwe. I'm not so sure Beatrice would have been entirely happy at that, but she did give the British premiere soon after, on 23rd July 1923, in a concert at which she also played the Elgar concerto with the composer conducting - a colossal soloist commitment, because the Delius concerto is reckoned to be much harder technically than the Elgar! I remember Julian Lloyd Webber writing an article on this very subject. Harrison also gave the American premiere on 23rd November 1927, with Willem Mengelberg conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

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It is also a difficult work for the listener to 'get hold of' at first hearing, in much the same way as Bloch's Schelomo is - but the Delius is a work that grows on you and rewards you if you give it several hearings. Although it is 'late-romantic' there are moments where one feels the composer extending the boundaries of harmony. I think that unfortunately the critics were not ready for such a work yet; for example, after the British premiere The Observer described the concerto as "*beautiful but backboneless ... It is from beginning to end nothing but a sort of long one-movement rhapsody*". In The Manchester Guardian, Ernest Newman also wrote "*It is better in detail than as a whole. It abounds in momentary lovelinesses, but long before the end the absence of any sort of climax ... induces a sense of monotony*".

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I would disagree with those critical views for there are many places of great force, being it in decibels or in spiritual measurements. Perhaps the critics could not understand the form? The concerto plays without a break, but does have five distinct sections, which are:

Lento - Slow // Con moto - tranquillo - Becoming Slower // Lento - Very Quietly // Con moto tranquillo // Allegamente - With animation

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The work is SO personal that a performance could last literally anything between 20 and 25 minutes, depending on the individual interpretation.

Major exponents of this work include:

BEATRICE HARRISON

JACQUELINE DU PRÉ

ERLING BLONDAHL BENGTTSSON

JULIAN LLOYD WEBBER

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Orchestration:

Soloist: cello

Orchestra: 2 flutes, oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets (B ♭), 2 bassoons + 4 horns (F), 2 trumpets (C), 3 trombones, tuba + timpani + harp + strings

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Sheet music in the IMSLP :

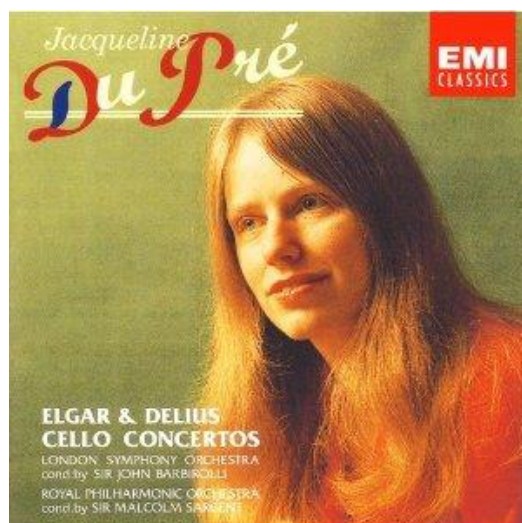
[https://imslp.org/wiki/Cello_Concerto%2C_RT_VII%2F7_\(Delius%2C_F_rederick\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Cello_Concerto%2C_RT_VII%2F7_(Delius%2C_F_rederick))

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PHOTO - the front cover to the Jacqueline Du Pré recordings of the Delius and Elgar Concertos on Vinyl disc. I have it, well worth acquiring if you don't have it!

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Example of the Cello Soloist part:

musical score for Cello Soloist part, measures 35-50. The score is written in bass clef and includes dynamics such as *pizz.*, *arco*, *(rit.) mf*, and *f*. Measure numbers 40 and 50 are indicated in boxes. The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note chord.

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VIOLONCELLO.

musical score for Violoncello part, measures 60-70. The score is written in treble clef and includes dynamics such as *mf*, *p*, and *mp*. Measure numbers 60 and 70 are indicated in boxes. The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note chord.

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‘documenting the cello’

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